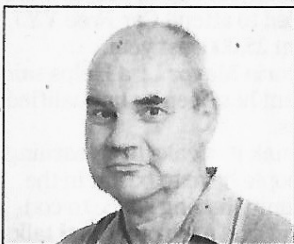


# Movie Monday initiative marks 25th. Good show!



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**T**hey showed *Cannery Row* last night, the same film that kicked off Movie Monday 25 years ago.

That was back when Eric Martin Pavilion still housed the psychiatric hospital on the Royal Jubilee grounds. Bruce Saunders came up with idea of screening films there when, as a patient, he found the building contained a 100-seat auditorium with a video projector.

A quarter century and well over a thousand Movie Mondays later, Saunders is still at it, the driving force behind what has become a Victoria institution.

Movie Monday is hard to pigeon-hole. On one hand it's a

community arts program. On another it's a way to break down barriers.

Basically, Saunders chooses a movie and invites the public to come watch and, often, to then discuss what they have just seen. "It's like inviting people into my living room to share films and talk about them," he says.

Some of in the audience have mental illness, some don't. Mostly, everybody's just there to watch a movie and engage in stimulating conversation. "It softens the lines between the mentally ill and the rest of the population," he says.

It's a point of pride that the regulars trust Saunders to curate the content. He admits to being a bit territorial about that process. When you drive the bus for 25 years, you get to choose the route.

"I'm not that keen on shoot-em-ups or fantasies," he says.

"A lot of the films we show are about people who have challenges in their lives." It's not just a bunch of watch-this-because-it's-good-for-you movies, though. Nor is it a succession of films about and for people with mental illness. They

have shown popular movies that revolve around mental health — *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Benny and Joon*, *Shine*, *Girl Interrupted* — but on any given week you might see *I, Tonya* or a documentary that has had a hard time finding an audience.

Sometimes, the shows are just for fun — the *Paddington* movies were a recent hit. Last week, when Saunders turned 68, it was 1979's *All That Jazz*. At 6:30 p.m. this Saturday (one of the occasional non-Monday events) you can see *Sponsorland*, a documentary about a family of Syrian refugees "dropped in Picton, Ont., a very nice and very white rural town of about 4,702 that's known for its clean air and fine wine, but not for its falafel." (For more info, go to [moviemonday.ca](http://moviemonday.ca).)

There's usually a value-added element. In 1994, he brought in Dean Brooks, the psychiatrist who allowed director Milos Forman to shoot *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at Oregon State Hospital. Stewart Stern, who wrote the screenplay for *Sybil*, also appeared, giving a passionate

commentary. Ten years ago, on the 15th anniversary of Movie Monday, *Cannery Row's* director, David S. Ward, phoned in from Santa Monica to answer the audience's questions (Really, why was Raquel Welch dumped in favour of Debra Winger?)

The program costs about \$35,000 each year. A Canada Council grant and a couple of sponsors help with that. Island Health donates the theatre, which typically ends up two-thirds full. Filmgoers pay by donation. If you don't have money, you don't have to pay. That was one of the lessons Saunders learned from his time in Eric Martin, where he had landed after a suicide attempt. Not everybody has enough money to go to the movies.

Saunders' own story is a lesson for those whose perception of mental illness comes from "news that bleeds." He is bipolar. He also just retired after running his own gardening business for 38 years. He has a home and a loving family. When reached late Monday afternoon, he was whipping up the icing for a Movie Monday anniversary cake, while his wife of 44 years

popped the popcorn for the concession (at \$1.25 with butter for a small bag, the best deal in town). He is living proof that a guy like him can manage just fine and, in fact, can be relied upon to put together an event like Movie Monday every single night for 25 years.

That wasn't his intent when he began. Back then, the idea was just to give patients something to watch other than the trashy daytime TV and cop shows aired on the TV in the ward.

When attendance didn't take off, he began fishing for a larger audience in the city's hostels and drop-in centres. Then he threw the doors open to everyone. Bruce Wallace, an assistant professor at UVic's school of social work and a part of the Movie Monday team for 20 years, said that helped blur the walls between the psychiatric hospital and the rest of the city, the inside and the outside. There's still a long way to go, but they have come pretty far, too.

"It's one of those good-news stories about someone with mental illness," Saunders said on Monday, making the icing for the cake.