

CGCEC students take "trip of a lifetime" to Toronto set of TV show Coroner



The students from CGCEC enjoyed the costume department on the set of the CBC TV show Coroner.

Seven students from the Chief Gabriel Cote Education Complex (CGCEC), along with their teacher and chaperones, recently had the opportunity to go on the "trip of a lifetime" to Toronto.

Janet Love Morrison, teacher, along with Sara-Ann Keshane and Cory Cadotte, chaperones, accompanied Isabelle Tourangeau, Zander Montana, Veronica Tourangeau, Ambrose Musqua, Vanderlae Papequash, Reagan Papequash and Tian Papequash, Grades 8 to 10 students, on the five-day trip.

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A friendship between Morrison, and Serinda Swan, star of the CBC TV show *Coroner*, forged from the passion for doing humanitarian work, resulted in the formation of the idea for the trip.

“Serinda and I are both ‘goodwill ambassadors’ for the organization Friends to Mankind,” Morrison said. “We met in 2009 through the work we do with that organization, and we became enduring good friends. She is a very special person who always has consideration for others.

“Through conversation, Serinda found out I was teaching classes at the Cote First Nation School, and inquired about the students. Originally, she and two of her cast-mates did a Skype call with the students in class to discuss the film industry and give them an overview of what happens on the set of a TV show.

“The students were Grades 8 and 9 at the time of the Skype call, last May. For the project, the students did their homework.

As a class, we watched the series, studied the plot, the theme, the setting, the character development and such, and the students then held group brainstorming sessions in which they created a list of questions which they were to ask the actors during the Skype call."

The other actors, Roger Cross and Tamara Podemski, along with Swan made the Skype call, and from there, the idea to fundraise and have the students make a trip to Toronto to visit the set of *Coroner* was born.

"The logistics of making this trip happen were somewhat intense, as fundraising was an important aspect, and there were so many details to be taken into consideration, in order to make it happen," said Morrison.

"One of the biggest obstacles was scheduling, because the cast and crew wanted us

to visit the set when all three actors were appearing on the shoot at the same time. In theory that may sound relatively easy, but in fact it was a much larger issue. The way a TV show is filmed, not all actors are on the same set at any given time.

"Also, we needed chaperones, had to co-ordinate travel plans, and stick within our budget," she said.

Indicating that Jonas Cote, principal of CGCEC, was an

amazing supporter of the trip, Morrison also said that Keshane did a phenomenal job of fundraising, helping to raise the \$10,000 plus required for the trip.

“Sara-Anne applied to the Painted Hand Casino for a grant, and we received \$4,200. She organized a Bingo night which raised \$2,400 and organized the kids to sell tacos for lunch specials at school. We are so grateful for everything she did, because without her fundraising skills, we could never have gone on the trip.”

The biggest and most unexpected surprise of all, for which Morrison and her students were most grateful for, was when the cast and crew of *Coroner* held a 50/50 draw, putting the names of the students on all tickets sold, and sending the resulting amount of \$5,200 to the students to cap off their fundraising effort and secure funding for the trip.

“As a group, we just owe them all the biggest “thank you” for their generosity,” Morrison said.

On November 2, a “windy and cold day,” the group of seven students and two chaperones drove from Kamsack to Winnipeg where they boarded a plane for Toronto.

There they met up with Morrison, who had been on a trip to Netherlands to participate in the 75th anniversary liberation celebration, and was returning to Canada via Toronto.

At the hotel, the students and chaperones found they were in close proximity to the set of *Coroner*.

"The hotel location had been recommended to us. It was excellent and close to everything. We had a chance to do some sightseeing, including a visit to Niagara Falls, go-karting and shopping. And the studio was only 20 minutes away.

"We were given 'the five star treatment' on the set," Morrison continued. "We got to tour the facility, engage with all three actors, Serinda, Tamara and Roger, with whom the class had made a Skype call, and the students had the opportunity to work behind the cameras, visit the costume department, and have lunch with the cast and crew.

"Tamara has won Canadian Aboriginal music awards, and she writes and sings in Anishinaabe, which is the language the Cote First Nation students study at school," Morrison said.

"It was a full day, and everyone was so generous and kind. The students left with wonderful souvenirs of expensive scarves, water bottles and toques, but more importantly, they left with incredible memories of life on a hit TV show."

When asked what he had learned about the show, student Ambrose said, "Acting is a hard and patient job," for he had witnessed firsthand how many "takes" are required just to shoot one scene.

Another landmark day for the CGCEC students was a visit to the University of Toronto, where they spent an entire day.

"The University was very big and impressive," Morrison said. "Our tour was such an eye-opener. And we met Verne Ross who is attending the University who has ties to Cote First Nation."

The group was met at the university by John Croutch, the Dean of Native Studies, who had heard they were going to be nearby at the TV studio. He had reached out to Morrison, extending an invitation to the group to come and tour the campus.

"The Dean was super supportive, and we had such a wonderful time at the university. They also put forth a huge effort to give us a tour," she said. "They gifted us with hoodies and fed us very well."

One student, Tian, remarked "I'm going to go to university," after the tour.

"It was great for our group of students to see for themselves the possibilities that exist out there, and how attainable a higher education really is. We left with lots of information and brochures."

Some of the students agreed that the Varsity pool at the U of T was the most impressive part of the campus. The Olympic-

sized, 50 metre Varsity pool has eight lanes with a moveable bulkhead and is between 2.3 metres and 4.2 metres deep, according to information found on the Internet.

The five-day trip ended far too quickly, but the memories will last a lifetime. The students were so impressed with the "attention to detail" on the set of the TV show. "There were lots of dead bodies, made out of silicone, but they looked very lifelike," they remarked.

Some comments were: "The Eaton Centre Mall was an incredible place to go shopping;" "It was fun to go go-karting;" "Seeing Niagara Falls was so cool," and "Meeting the famous TV actors was awsum."

Some students mentioned the challenges. Veronica said, "It was a real challenge to meet so many strangers and be able to talk with them and not be nervous;" while Reagan said, "Being on a plane for the first time was a big challenge for me."

"This group was an easy bunch to chaperone," said Morrison. "Thanks to Cory and Sara-Ann for all they did. They had to deal with driving in Toronto traffic! It was all worth it."

An overview of the CBC TV series *Coroner*, (<https://www.cbc.ca/coroner/>), and the three actors:

Serinda Swan is the star of the *Coroner*, and she plays Dr. Jenny Cooper, a recently-widowed Toronto coroner who

investigates suspicious deaths.

Jenny is a woman of action. She's recently widowed and driven by an intense search for the truth, others and her own.

Jenny speaks for the dead, those with no voice. Vulnerable yet strong, impulsive and self-righteous, controlled yet desiring complete abandon, Jenny is a complex woman who struggles to balance work, single motherhood and love, all the while dealing with anxiety seemingly caused by her husband's untimely death. This new job as coroner brings her closer to her fascination with death, and promises to uncover her own truths.

The series premiered on CBC in January of this year and attracted 1 million viewers per episode throughout the first season.

On her website, it says that Swan was introduced to the world in popular shows like *Supernatural*, *Psych*, *Reaper* and *Hawaii Five-O*. In 2009 Swan was cast as the iconic 'Zatanna' in the hugely popular show *Smallville*.

She was born in West Vancouver, B.C., to a family of artists, including her mother, an actress, and her father, a theatre director with a well-established acting school. Swan actually gravitated to the arts and at three she starred in her first motion picture, *Cousins* with Ted Danson and Isabella

Rossellini.

Outside of acting, Swan's true passion is activism. She is an official ambassador of Friends to Mankind, an organization that partners with non-profits to raise awareness and funds through educational campaigns.

She has cycled across Cambodia, installed nets in Africa, and skydived from 18,000 ft., the highest jump in North America, in hopes of encouraging others to take a stand and make a difference. She has helped raise over \$1 million dollars to date for various charities and causes close to her heart.

Swan is the CEO and co-founder of the education technology company, Deedly. Her belief is that education should be free, and through their specific month long curriculum they educate students about world issues and the charities that strive to fix them. Deedly will be in more 1,000 schools by the end of the year. Swan currently resides in Los Angeles.

Tamara Podemski plays the role of Alison Trent. Alison is the Coroner's officer and keeps the office running. Down-to-earth, wry and with a slight obsession with pandas, Alison sees everything, knows everything and if she doesn't, she knows exactly how to find out.

Podemski is an Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi multi-disciplinary artist born and raised in Toronto, said information on her

website. She is a graduate of the Claude Watson School for the Performing Arts where she studied dance, theatre and music throughout its 10-year program

For over 25 years, her work has spanned across all mediums with such credits as *Dance me Outside*, *The Rez*, *Ready or Not*, *North of 60*, *Rabbit Fall*, *Heartland*, *Cracked*, numerous theatre productions, most notably as a member of the original Canadian cast of *Rent*, as well as playing Maureen in the Broadway Company of *Rent*.

As a community worker, Podemski has travelled to three different continents sharing her cultural and creative experiences through hands-on workshops, keynote addresses and panel discussions. She is a passionate teacher and advocate for the arts, developing programs to empower the voices of youth and women through songwriting, dancing and storytelling.

Having grandparents who are both Holocaust survivors and Residential School survivors, she speaks openly about issues of intergenerational trauma, reconciliation, inherited legacies and the importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue, education and collaboration.

Roger Cross plays detective Donovan "Mac" McAvoy on *Coroner*. 'Mac' has been around the block. A twenty-five-year veteran of the police force, he can see through anyone's bull.

He approaches each case with a healthy dose of skepticism and realism, while his journey with Jenny brings him closer to the idealism he has lost sight of over the years.

Cross was born and raised in Jamaica and, with his family, moved to Vancouver at the age of 11. His many film roles include *Mad Money*, starring Diane Keaton, Katie Holmes and Queen Latifah; *War: The Planet of the Apes*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and the animated *Noah's Ark*.

Cross captivated audiences as Jack Bauer's fellow agent, Curtis Manning, on *24*, and starred in the sci-fi series *First Wave* and CBC's *The Guard*.

Coroner season two is scheduled to debut on CBC and the free CBC Gem streaming service in winter 2020.