



# Wingham Advance Times

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## Community responds to revelations of abuse by step-father from Alice Munro's daughter

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TORONTO - Last week, Andrea Robin Skinner, youngest daughter of Canadian literary icon Alice Munro, shared with the world through an essay published in the *Toronto Star* that her step-father, Munro's second husband Gerald Fremlin, sexually abused her beginning when she was nine years old, and her mother chose to protect him.

The essay, titled "My stepfather sexually abused me when I was a child. My mother, Alice Munro, chose to stay with him," outlined a timeline of horrific, predatory violence and lack of action from her Wingham-born, Nobel Prize-winning mother.

The abuse started during Skinner's summer visit to Munro and Fremlin's home in Clinton, Ontario in 1976, Skinner's essay writes.

Munro died in May of this year. Fremlin died in 2013.

In 2005, Skinner reported the abuse to police and Fremlin pleaded guilty to one count of indecent assault and was sentenced to two years probation.

Skinner's essay details the fear of sharing her abuse with her mother, and ultimately, Skinner's fears being realized once she did confront her mother in 1992 at the age of 25.

She writes that Munro left Fremlin initially but returned, defending her behaviour because she had been told of the abuse "too late", and "that our misogynistic culture was to blame if [Skinner] expected her to deny her own needs, sacrifice for her children, and make up for the failings of men ... it had nothing to do with her."

It has been widely reported that the abuse then became an "open secret", with journalists and a biographer of Munro aware of the abuse but choosing not to share the story, both *Toronto Star* and *Washington Post* articles report.

Skinner's essay continues that "What I wanted was some record of the truth, some public proof

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Contributed photo

In response to the recent request from the Wingham Hospital for comfort bears for WDH kids, the Auxiliary to the Wingham & District Hospital donated several stuffies to help alleviate anxiety of kids attending the ER for treatment. Pictured from left are auxiliary members, Brenda Deyell, Linda Wall and Joan Arbuckle.

## North Huron walks back K of C invoice stance

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NORTH HURON - A lengthy debate ensued at the North Huron regular council meeting on July 16 after Reeve Paul Heffer put forward a Notice of Motion to reconsider their original decision to deny payment of an invoice from the Knights of Columbus for work they considered unauthorized.

Heffer said that due to new information he received, he would like to rescind the previous decision not to pay, allow the Knights to put the funds into their reserves, have North Huron pay the bill, and then reduce the amount from their pledge.

In 2001, the Knights of Columbus in Wingham agreed to contribute \$550,000 towards building the Westcast Community

Complex and pay \$12,500 annually. The purchase of the original kitchen equipment was deducted from the original pledge in the amount of \$99,947.93.

According to the Director of Finance, Chris Townes, "the un-audited year-end balance of the Wingham Columbus Centre Reserve is \$127,070 (2023). The pledge amount owing at Jan 1, 2024 was \$135,552. This direction will reduce the pledge payments by about 5.5 years."

Coun. Anita Van Hittersum asked for clarity, wondering why the Knights couldn't pay the bill. "Why do we have to go through a process from putting it here, putting it there, and then, ...when it's just about paying a bill?"

Coun. Chris Palmer reminded councillors that the agreement between the Knights and North Huron included reducing

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## North Huron joins Southwestern Ontario Isotope Coalition

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NORTH HURON - The Township of North Huron has joined the Southwestern Ontario Isotope Coalition (SOIC), becoming the newest partner in the growing and dynamic sector dedicated to promoting and supporting the research, investment opportunities, development, and production of isotopes. SOIC was formed in June 2023 and is a partnership between regional leaders and the Nuclear Innovation Institute (NII) in collaboration with the Canadian Nuclear Isotope Council (CNIC).

A report penned by Economic Development Officer Ritu Bhardwaj said that "partnering with SOIC presents a unique opportunity for the Township of North Huron to not only grow economically but also to establish itself as a key player in the regional isotope industry."

Bhardwaj said, "By becoming a member of the coalition, North Huron will expand its network significantly. This affiliation will enable us to implement targeted actions aimed at attracting and developing the local isotope sector. This is particularly advantageous given that North Huron has the Wingham Hospital, proximity to NWMO's potential Deep Geological Repository (DGR) location, and Bruce Power, which enhances our capacity to engage in medical isotope activities.

"Within southwestern Ontario, a diverse network of companies contributes to the production of goods that fuel the rapidly developing isotope sector. This strategic alliance aims to leverage the SOIC's strength while also encouraging innovation and integration across the isotope value chain in the Township of North Huron."

In addition to the report from Bhardwaj, councillors also heard from the

mayor of Owen Sound, Ian Boddy, who explained who SOIC is and what they do, providing an in-depth background and reasons why the township should consider joining.

Boddy, who is also a co-chair of SOIC, explained what an isotope is, what it is used for, and how the coalition will help "break down the barriers between municipalities, push this region as a world leader, and take advantage of the opportunities that are here."

Boddy said, "Cobalt 60 has been produced for over 40 years at Bruce Power. It's used to sterilize about 40 per cent of what needs to be sterilized in the world. You think about through COVID, all those things that had to be sterilized from medical equipment to PPE, etc., was all done with Cobalt 60 from here at Bruce Power, there's also a cobalt produced at Bruce Power that's used for treating brain tumors, etc., that's very specific."

He explained that recently, Bruce Power has "gotten into" Lutetium-177, an isotope designed to target advanced metastatic prostate cancer. After it is produced in the Canadian Candu Reactor, it is shipped to Germany to be processed and distributed worldwide. "So back in about March of 2023, the Canadian Nuclear Isotope Council put out a program or a booklet called *Isotopes for Hope*, and talked about the ability of Canada to produce a lot of these, especially with here in Ontario," said Boddy. "It makes no sense right now to have these treatments being sent to Germany, to be processed, sent out to the world when we're here."

Added Boddy, "With a coalition, we can start to have more clout with the Ontario government, with the federal government, with municipalities, with hospitals, things like Gateway (Centre of Excellence in Rural Health) over in Goderich, they're

doing great rural medical research, etc. We can have a much bigger effect working together and start to do more things."

According to the SOIC website, "Through its activities, the coalition aims to unite southwestern Ontario's isotope community and foster future opportunities to leverage the region's many strengths. To achieve this, the coalition will develop a strategic plan to support expansion in the region, increase local awareness of southwestern Ontario's role in Canada's isotope ecosystem, facilitate future public and private investment, and explore ways to grow the region's role in the global supply. Southwestern Ontario is an important piece of Canada's broader isotope ecosystem. Canada has been a leader in the global supply of isotopes for several decades. A significant portion of Canada's isotope supply comes from the province of Ontario."

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## North Huron removes public comments from meeting agendas

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NORTH HURON—On June 17, Council members voted on a Notice of Motion by Reeve Paul Heffer asking staff to investigate how other municipalities receive public comments during meetings.

Clerk Carson Lamb prepared an in-depth report, which he presented to council on July 15. Lamb said that staff researched regular council meeting agendas of 66 comparator municipalities.

"Fifty out of the 66 municipalities (75.75%) do not include any sort of "Public Comment Section" on their regular Council meeting agendas. Out of the 16 municipalities that do include a "Public Comment Section" on their agendas, it is interesting to note that exactly half (8 out of 16) of those municipalities are in Grey County. Beyond Grey County, zero (0) municipalities in Bruce and Middlesex Counties include a "Public Comment Section." At the same time, there is one municipality in Lambton County, two municipalities in each of Perth and Wellington Counties, and three other municipalities in Huron County, respectively." Lamb's report discovered that most municipalities predominantly receive public input "through a combination of their delegation request process and the submission of correspondence/letters to council."

Lamb provided the council with two options: one, to remain "status quo," continue to include the public comment agenda item, and two, "Direct staff to prepare an amendment to the Procedure By-law to remove the "Public Comment Section" as a standing agenda item for regular council meetings. Members of the public desirous of providing comment would be directed to one of the township's other public input mechanisms such as: appearing as a delegation,

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# Community responds to revelations in published essay by Alice Munro's daughter

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that I hadn't deserved what had happened to me."

## Local responses

In the face of these revelations, local responses have come alongside those of the wider world.

The Alice Munro Festival of the Short Story provided a public statement on July 8, stating that the festival "wishes to express our unequivocal support for Ms. Skinner" and they are "shocked and saddened by what has come to light."

The statement continues by saying that "The Festival needs to consider the impact this has on its future programming," and "as Ms. Skinner continues her deeply personal and challenging journey of healing, this is her story to tell. As such, the Festival will have no further comment."

The *Advance Times* reached out for further comment, at which point Karen Stewart, cultural development officer for the County of Huron, specified through email that "members of the festival's steering committee will be meeting later in the summer to discuss how to navigate future Festival programming as right now the information is being absorbed as it was quite a shock to us all."

The Township of North Huron released a public statement July 10 saying they "unequivocally support Andrea Skinner as she publicly shares her story of her sexual abuse as a child. Everyone deserves to be safe and free from violence and North Huron recognizes and appreciates the courage it has taken for Andrea to share her story and her journey of healing."

"Along with so many others, we will need time to absorb this news and the impact it may have on the legacy of Alice Munro, whose work and ties to the township we have previously celebrated. Alice's actions, or lack thereof, are not explained and nor are they excused by her accomplishments. In the near future, the Town-



Patrick Raftis photo

Verna Steffler, who organized and dedicated Wingham's Alice Munro Literary Garden, feels no changes should be made to the garden as a result of recent controversy over the author's legacy.

ship of North Huron will be considering this information and discussing recognition of her accomplishments."

In a request for comment from the *Advance Times*, the Huron County Library - Alice Munro Branch wrote in an email that "we are shocked to learn this news and we're still processing the information. No decisions are being made at this time, but any potential changes that would impact the Alice Munro branch of the Huron County Library would need to be made in consultation with: the local community, the County of Huron, the Huron County Library Board, and the Municipality of North Huron," and they "will continue to

operate our library system with full transparency," and if any changes are made, they will be communicated with the public.

George Webster, an alumni of F.E. Madill Secondary School who recently donated a \$100,000 scholarship to the school's graduating students in memory of Alice Munro, told the *Advance Times* that "I have found the revelations about Alice Munro's handling of the abuse of her daughter disturbing. Over the next several weeks I plan to discuss my concerns with the school board and the school officials and, after that, some decision will need to be made concerning the ongoing status of the Alice Munro Memorial Scholarship."

"The 10-year scholarship fund amounts to a significant amount of money. I remain committed to honouring that commitment to the school and its students."

Local representatives are considering altering memorials and current ways of celebrating the late author.

Mayor of Central Huron, Jim Ginn, said the monument honouring Munro outside the library in Clinton should be left unchanged - an affirmation that for Clinton, the Nobel laureate will always be considered a cherished member of the community, a *Toronto Star* article reports; but "conceded that he would consider amending the installation if public outcry mounted."

Acting Dean Ileana Paul of Munro's alma mater, Western University, said in a *Global News* article July 10 that "the [arts and humanities] faculty is now considering how the revelations from Skinner will affect the way the London, Ont., school celebrates the author's legacy."

Verna Steffler, a long-time champion and friend of Munro, who organized and dedicated Wingham's Alice Munro Literary Garden, spoke to the *Advance Times* about her opinion of not changing memorials of Munro.

"It's two separate issues," Steffler says.

"One is an internal family affair and has nothing to do with Alice's writing."

"We did a garden to celebrate Alice's unique accomplishments in writing short stories. We didn't do it in regards to being a mother."

Steffler, who also expressed her hope that Skinner gets the support she needs from her family in the wake of this news, says that the question of changing monuments to Munro is a "very stupid" one, and she doesn't think Wingham should make any changes "whatsoever."

To Steffler, the media is only jumping on this story because Munro is famous, saying "if this happened to your neighbour next door...it wouldn't be in the media hardly at all. It wouldn't be an issue. It's an issue because of Alice's fame."

Taylor Marie Graham, whose critically acclaimed play *Post Alice* ran as part of last month's Alice Munro Festival of the Short Story on the Blyth Festival's Harvest Stage, told the *Advance Times* that she is "never going to be able to see Munro the same way," and can never forgive her for not supporting her daughter.

Graham, who spoke with the *Advance Times* about the play last month, explained then that the play's characters are inspired by characters in Munro's stories.

At the moment, she's not talking about her play, which was recently published in her collection of plays *Cottage Radio*.

Instead, she's making room for Skinner's story to be spoken about, and taking time to unpack these revelations, stressing the importance of talking about these stories.

"I'm so glad Andrea told this story, so we can talk about it...there's so much violence that exists in silence."

Graham explains that when she was writing *Post Alice*, the play asked questions surrounding colonialism, child assault, and rural Canada. What is Huron County like post-Alice Munro? Now, Graham says, that question is being answered.

# Two of three convictions overturned in Stephen Hill appeal

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**HURON COUNTY** - Huron County Justice Timothy G. Macdonald dismissed two of three convictions against Wingham restaurant owner Stephen Hill (Buck and Jo's Restaurant) in a July 11 decision on appeal of the sentencing and fines in the case.

Hill was convicted on three charges in Feb. 2023: one count of failure to comply with the Health Protection Act, one count of Failure to Produce a Safety Act and one count of Failure to Comply with Getting Proof of

Vaccination from Patrons.

The restaurant owner was ordered to pay \$5,500 to \$1,500 each for not providing a safety plan and not checking for proof of vaccination against COVID-19 and \$2,500 for failure to cooperate with Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) enforcement.

In his ruling, Macdonald explained that he felt that Medical Officer of Health Miriam Klassen erred in her writing of an order requiring Hill to comply with the Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) requirements to check patrons' proof of vaccination against COVID-19 and to produce and display a safety plan.

Macdonald dismissed convictions of one count of Failure to Produce a Safety Act and one count of Failure to Comply with Getting Proof of Vaccination from Patrons after finding that Klassen did not specify an actual date and time for Hill to comply, only writing that he must comply within one week or be closed.

Macdonald said the lack of a specific time and date left the order open to dispute and misinterpretation. "This is an order by the Health Department restricting a person's liberties; it's got to be specific; you can't just say well, we think it must have run out by this time; it's got to be specific."

The Justice also disputed the vaccine program in general, saying that since Hill's conviction, it has been proven that the vaccination did not prevent people from getting infected or transmitting the highly contagious disease. Additionally, the Justice disputed the social distancing regulation, saying he couldn't figure out where or why that rule had been implemented.

Macdonald did uphold one conviction against Hill, failing to comply with the Health Protection Act, saying he couldn't find "grounds to interfere" in the original Justice's decision.

Macdonald repeated the original

Justice of the Peace's reasoning for the conviction and subsequent fine, saying, "The seriousness of the pandemic, however, is an aggravating factor they have to consider, and that we were all advised to follow the safety measures regardless of whether we agree with them or not. And so the deterrence factor is not just specifically for you, but also for the general population."

Because Hill has no previous record and had to close his business for several months, Macdonald found the \$2,500 fine unreasonable and reduced it to \$1,000, giving Hill six months to pay.

# Huron Hospice to host butterfly release again this year

**HURON COUNTY** - The annual butterfly release is back at Huron Hospice for its eighth year.

On Sunday, Aug. 25, people will release their butterflies and remember loved ones at a Huron Hospice Bender House commemoration ceremony.

The butterfly is a universal symbol of transformation, and the release is a much-anticipated event for Huron County families.

"It is a beautiful way to honour and remember those we have lost in our community and recognize the important work done at Huron Hospice," said Willy Van Klooster.

"We think the gardens at Bender House are an ideal location to release butterflies and remember. Families can also pick up and release them at an important place to their family."

Huron Hospice will livestream the commemorative event at the Bender House and broadcast it

on YouTube and social media.

Huron Hospice will sell Painted Lady Butterflies, Butterfly Bushes, Black-Eyed Susans, and Purple Coneflowers. Painted Lady Butterflies are \$40, Butterfly Bushes are \$38, and Black-Eyed Susans and Purple Coneflowers will sell for \$25. These plants are important pollinating plants and make wonderful additions to any garden.

The deadline for ordering butterflies is Aug. 1, 2024.

Painted Lady Butterflies are bred in a certified butterfly breeding facility near Peterborough, Ontario. The perennial plants ordered this summer will be available for planting in the spring. The plants should flower in time for the butterflies and bees in the spring and summer of 2025.

The International Butterfly Breeders Association (IBBA) has done thorough research on butterfly releases, demonstrating

that these events are safe when done correctly. They state the following:

- Captive butterflies retain their instinct to migrate, so relocation and release will not impact their ability to find resources and migrate during the appropriate season;

- Scientists have no evidence of a negative effect on the gene pool of wild populations after captive-bred monarchs are released; and

- Butterflies rarely die in shipping, and the IBBA has a shopping policy that breeders must follow to prevent such from happening.

Butterflies can be purchased at [www.huronhospice.ca](http://www.huronhospice.ca) or by email at

[reagan.vandewalle@huronhospice.ca](mailto:reagan.vandewalle@huronhospice.ca) or [sadie.carter@huronhospice.ca](mailto:sadie.carter@huronhospice.ca) or by phone at 519- 525-7352. The deadline for ordering butterflies is Aug. 1.