

Laura Robinson demonstrated tremendous courage in researching former Vancouver Olympics CEO John Furlong's experiences as a missionary and volunteer teacher of First Nations children in Burns Lake in 1969 and 1970—a history that was left out of his memoir, *Patriot Hearts*.

She knew that Mr. Furlong was not going to be happy about her puncturing the popular myth that he had first arrived in Canada in 1974, where he was welcomed by a customs agent who allegedly said, "Welcome to Canada. Make us better."

We wanted to ensure that Laura employed sufficient due diligence to ensure that her story was accurate and responsible. So we asked her to get people to speak on the record using their full names. Laura did that. We believe that the First Nations people in Burns Lake who went on the record showed bravery. We felt their voices deserved to be heard.

We then asked Laura if it would be possible to have them swear affidavits. This would ensure that the interviewees appreciated the seriousness of their allegations. Laura provided the *Georgia Straight* with eight sworn affidavits of former students who alleged that they had either witnessed or experienced physical abuse or name-calling from Mr. Furlong.

Laura also said that she could provide more affidavits if necessary. We told her that eight were sufficient for the purpose of the article that she was writing about Mr. Furlong's history in Burns Lake.

We also informed Laura in advance that our insurer would not cover her legal costs should Mr. Furlong sue. She still wanted the article published, notwithstanding the personal risk this entailed to her and her husband.

Two months after publication, Mr. Furlong sued Laura, the *Georgia Straight*, publisher and editor Dan McLeod, and editor Charlie Smith. Mr. Furlong has issued several public statements disparaging Laura's journalism. He has dragged up previous stories she wrote many years ago in an attempt to discredit her.

Mr. Furlong has filed a notice of discontinuance in his litigation against the *Georgia Straight*, Dan McLeod, and Charlie Smith. But he has not discontinued his action against Laura, which is based in part on an email she sent to *Own the Podium* in November as a freelance writer seeking answers to new questions that had arisen subsequent to publication of her article in the *Georgia Straight*.

We believe that Laura's article in the *Georgia Straight* met all the standards of journalistic due diligence. We believe that Mr. Furlong's decision to continue his litigation against Laura is designed, in part, to silence her from researching his past or speaking or writing about him in the future.

Mr. Furlong has waged a public-relations war against the messenger, aided by some of the country's largest media outlets. As a result, this has become one of the most famous libel suits in Canadian history.

We stand behind Laura's story about Mr. Furlong in the *Georgia Straight* and we appreciate the trust that the First Nations people of Burns Lake had in sharing their stories with us. We also want to offer our sincerest gratitude and respect to the First Nations people in Burns Lake who stepped forward after all these years to say what happened. The experience of students in Indian day schools is an important chapter in B.C. history—and we're proud of Laura for doing her part in bringing this story to the attention of Canadians.

Dan McLeod, editor and publisher, *Georgia Straight*

Charlie Smith, editor, *Georgia Straight*