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A time to heal

Aunger visits P.E.I. for first time since drunk driver killed his wife in 2012

Ryan Ross



Edmund Aunger sits outside the Chez Shea Kinkora Country Inn on Thursday during his first visit to P.E.I. since his wife Elizabeth Sovis was killed by a drunk driver while the couple was cycling near Hunter River in 2012. The Guardian's Ryan Ross spoke with Aunger and attended a memorial service for Sovis held Friday. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

KINKORA, P.E.I. - Edmund Aunger is hoping for closure.

For the first time since a drunk driver killed his wife while the couple was cycling near Hunter River five years ago, Aunger has made the trip back to P.E.I.

During an interview with The Guardian, he talked about cycling to places across the country he visited with his wife, Elizabeth Sovis.

As he sat in a wicker rocking chair on an inn's porch in Kinkora, Aunger paused as he talked about working through his emotions during those trips that eventually led him back to P.E.I.

“I’ve been healing and I’m very happy to be back,” he said.



Elizabeth Ann Sovis and her husband, Edmund Aunger while on a bicycling vacation in P.E.I. on July 13, 2012. Sovis was hit by a vehicle and killed the next day. Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Journal

Aunger and Sovis came to P.E.I. from Alberta in 2012 for a cycling trip that was meant to see them stay on the Confederation Trail.

She died after a drunk driver hit her on July 14 while the two were cycling along a road near Hunter River on their way to a bed and breakfast.

Sovis was 63.

Talking about Sovis, Aunger remembered her as a talented, brilliant, loving woman who was dedicated with a sense of social justice.

“She was an exceptional woman,” he said.

That dedication included setting up the French language speech pathology program in Alberta.

“She had just a huge impact on children,” Aunger said.



Hannah Aunger leaves a flower on a bike left as memorial to her grandmother Elizabeth Sovis near the site where she died in 2012. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

Although Aunger was an avid cyclist, he said Sovis didn't take it up until she was around 50 years old.

When she did, her one condition was that she wouldn't ride on roads because it was too dangerous.



Edmund Aunger, left, listens as Sean Kemp plays the violin during a memorial service near Hunter River on July 14, 2017 for Elizabeth Sovis who died in 2012 after a drunk driver hit her with a van. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

It was a condition Aunger said she stuck with over the years, including cancelling a trip to Manitoba because they couldn't ride on the Trans Canada Trail the whole time.

During the couple's trip to P.E.I., they took the train from Moncton to Sackville when Sovis discovered the Trans Canada Trail was on a road.

Aunger said they didn't realize they would have to leave the trail in Hunter River to reach their accommodations for the night, and Sovis wouldn't have made the trip if she had known.

The couple was 2.9 kilometres down the road from where they left the trail when Clarence Arnold Moase hit Sovis with his van, throwing her 150 feet and severing her brain stem.

“We never even made it to our B&B,” Aunger said.

Although Aunger said his first reaction after his wife’s death was that the road wasn’t safe, he now sees it as an infrastructure problem because if they had been able to stay on the trail she wouldn’t have died.



The bags Elizabeth Sovis was riding with when a van hit her rest on the lawn during a July 14, 2017 memorial service near where she died. Her husband Edmund Aunger said the bags flew apart after the collision, but he was able to use them again during his recent trip to P.E.I. after one of his sons fixed them. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

Before she died, Sovis’s retirement plan was to work on making the Trans-Canada Trail safer.

She didn’t make it to retirement, and Aunger said he wanted to take up her project.

As part of that work, Aunger started a petition asking the federal government to adopt a Trans Canada Trail Act that would establish minimum safety and quality standards.



Helena Aunger prepares to leave a flower behind on a bike left as a memorial to her grandmother Elizabeth Sovis during a service on July 14, 2017 near Hunter River. Sovis's sons Edmund, left, and Gregory Aunger follow behind. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

Aunger said he thinks it's shameful to hear people boast of the grand Trans Canada Trail network when a lot of it includes travel on roads and parts of it are not safe.

"That's dishonest and it's a dishonesty that can lead to tragedy," he said.

While in P.E.I. Aunger held a memorial service for Sovis in Hunter River on Friday with about 100 people attending.

Aunger had with him the bike he was riding the day Sovis died.

It was the twin of her bike, but it has since been painted white to become a "ghost bike," which is used as a memorial to a cyclist who died.

He rode the ghost bike from the church in Hunter River to the site where his wife died and where it will stay until the property owners decide to remove it.

Although he was looking for closure for himself during his visit to P.E.I., Aunger said he hopes the memorial service will bring a kind of closure for Islanders, too.

“I hope this is a time for us all to heal.”

Rally for safety

Edmund Aunger will be holding a rally outside the Coles Building in Charlottetown Sunday at 3 p.m. promoting his petition for improved safety on the Trans Canada Trail.



Helena Aunger leaves a flower behind on a bike left as a memorial to her grandmother Elizabeth Sovis during a service on July 14, 2017 near Hunter River with Sovis’s son Edmund. Ryan Ross/The Guardian



Elizabeth Sovis's son Edmund Auger lays flowers on a bike left as a memorial to his mother who died when a drunk driver hit her with his van in 2012. Ryan Ross/The Guardian