

Newsmakers of the year; Part 1 of 2: From writers to philanthropists, athletes to rescuers, our list of the region's top 10 newsmakers for 2011 covers an eclectic group

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10. ESI EDUGYAN

A year ago, the Victoria writer's literary future was on hold because her publisher suddenly closed shop. She wondered how she would get her second novel, *Half-Blood Blues*, published.

Twelve months later, the 34-year-old is riding a wave of acclaim she could never have imagined.

Edugyan's novel was not only published, it went on to win the Giller Prize and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award and the Man Booker Prize in Britain.

In total, Edugyan took home \$57,500 in prize money.

Edugyan's novel examines how blacks were seen by the Nazis.

It tells the story of Sidney Griffiths, an elderly former jazz musician who decides to uncover what happened to his young friend and talented bandmate Hieronymus Falk, a black German jazz musician who vanished in the early days of the Second World War.

Her tale of a multinational and multiracial band of musicians explores the different levels of freedom they would have experienced in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Edugyan told Postmedia: "When I started this year, if I think about it, I didn't have a Canadian publisher at all. There was nobody on the horizon. It was pretty dire.

"So yeah, it's just been a complete reversal within the space of something like six months."

Half-Blood Blues wasn't Edugyan's only major achievement this year. In August she gave birth to a baby girl just as the buzz around her other creation began to grow.

9. DJAVAD MOWAFAGHIAN

He's given away tens of millions of dollars since founding his own charitable foundation eight years ago.

But this Iranian-born philanthropist outdid himself in 2011.

In April, Mowafaghian donated \$15 million toward a brain research and patient care facility to be built at UBC Hospital.

The building, to be completed by 2013, will be called the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health.

In September, Mowafaghian gave a \$4-million cheque to Lions Gate Hospital where he spent a few months the previous year after suffering a stroke.

In November, he donated \$2 million to the VGH and UBC Hospital Foundation. The gift was the largest ever given toward stroke care in B.C.

The 84-year-old business titan made his fortune in the construction industry in Iran and Canada. Mowafaghian owned a large construction firm in pre-revolutionary Iran.

He moved to Canada in the late '80s, and started a foundation in his own name in 2003, with a focus on donations to health and education institutions.

Since then, he's given \$19 million to the University of B.C.; \$9.5 million to Simon Fraser University and \$6.5 million to Children's Hospital.

8. RUMANA MONZUR

When she first arrived in Vancouver a few years ago, the academic from Bangladesh was full of hope and pride, looking forward to studying graduate political science at the University of B.C. Monzur returned to UBC from her homeland again this July but with much sadder emotions and under tragic circumstances. "Now it's so different," she told reporters waiting for her at Vancouver International Airport.

Monzur's life was shattered in June when she was brutally attacked by her husband during a visit to her homeland.

Her eyes were gouged, part of her nose was bitten off and her cheek, lips and throat were chewed on in front of the couple's five-year-old daughter.

The assault, which allegedly lasted 25 minutes, left her blind. She returned to UBC to see whether physicians could restore her eyesight. But after four surgeries, physicians concluded that she would never see again.

A few days after the brutal assault, hundreds of people gathered outside the Vancouver Art Gallery at a rally to show solidarity with Monzur who was recovering in a Bangladeshi hospital.

Well-wishers, private donors and UBC students raised over \$40,000 to help support Monzur and

her young daughter.

"I didn't expect this kind of support. These people have given me hope to go on," said Monzur. "Now I have a hope that if people love me so much, God will love me too."

Monzur has undergone rehabilitation with the Canadian Institute for the Blind and still hopes to finish her master's degree at UBC.

Her husband died in custody of an apparent heart attack earlier this month. In response to his death, Monzur said: "The last six months have been very difficult for me and this news has not made my situation any easier. My focus continues to be on my recovery and taking care of my daughter and family."

7. ROBERTO LUONGO

The Canucks Stanley Cup run dominated this city's conversation in the spring. And at the centre of all the puck talk was Roberto Luongo, who many fans believe can't find his game in the big game.

Never mind that the Canucks, the NHL's highest-scoring team, were outscored by Boston in the final series 23-8.

Luongo will always carry the can when the Canucks don't win the big one. Huge expectations surround the netminder because of his 12-year contract, which includes \$64 million in salary and a no-trade clause.

The soundtrack to Luongo's career in Vancouver has been one of "Lou's" and "boos" because of his habit of running hot and cold. And the "blame Luongo" mob ratcheted up the negative "oooo!" sound when the Canucks blew crucial games.

Luongo was brilliant in winning two 1-0 games in the final round against the Boston Bruins. But he suffered a meltdown when the series shifted to Boston, ceding eight goals in Game 3.

In the next game, Luongo was pulled for the third time in the playoffs after allowing 4 goals on 20 shots.

Luongo returned to form in Game 5, stopping all 31 Bruins shots in a 1-0 win. But he and the Canucks failed to clinch the title in Game 6, with Luongo being pulled again after allowing three goals in less than three minutes in the first period.

In Game 7 Luongo allowed three goals on 20 shots, as the Canucks lost 4-0, sparking a riot in downtown Vancouver.

His implosion in the final two games revived the anti-Luongo faction of Canuck Nation.

The "boos" from Luongo's doubters grew louder in the early weeks of the 2011-12 season as the goalie had the worst start of his career, and was yanked in favour of backup Cory Schneider.

But the fans changed their tune again by the year's end when Luongo was back in winning form.

In 12 starts in December, Luongo is 8-1-1. But only a Stanley Cup victory next year will silence his critics.

6. PLANE CRASH HEROES

They were choking on aviation fuel as flames engulfed the plane.

But John Redmond, Jeremy Kerr, Shawn Nagurny and Haim Peri didn't hesitate to enter the burning fuselage of Northern Thunderbird Air Flight 204 after it crashed in Richmond on Oct. 27.

They began pulling out injured passengers while flames spread through the aircraft.

Redmond said he didn't have time to gauge the risks of going into the fiery crash scene. "I was on autopilot. I just went. I didn't think."

Redmond saw an injured woman collapsed behind the co-pilot and, along with another rescuer, managed to haul her out. "You're just so focused. And there was smoke coming into the cabin. It was really hot up on top of your head because heat rises. It was like a scene from hell."

Kerr saw the plane plunge on to Russ Baker Way while driving his car. He immediately rushed to help and afterwards couldn't remember the faces of other rescuers.

"It's like looking down the barrel of a straw. All I can remember is the victims."

Kerr afterwards said that waiting for emergency vehicles to arrive wasn't an option.

"If they were my loved ones on board, I would hope that someone would do the same for me."

Kerr felt regret about not being able to reach pilot Luc Fortin and co-pilot Matt Robic. "We knew we couldn't hold our breaths," recalled Kerr. "I know we would have been dead if we went back in again."

Fortin died shortly after the crash of severe fire-related injuries. Robic died about three weeks later from burns that covered 80 per cent of his body.

Injured passenger Carolyn Cross said she owed her life to the heroes in the cockpit and those who dragged her to safety.

"I want them to know how brave they were."

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Illustration:

- Mark Van Manen, PNG Files / No. 6: John Redmond, Jeremy Kerr, Shawn Nagurny and Haim Peri didn't hesitate to enter the burning fuselage of Northern Thunderbird Air Flight 204 after it crashed in Richmond on Oct. 27.
- / No. 10: Esi Edugyan
- / No. 9: Djavad Mowafaghian
- / No. 8: Rumana Monzur
- / No. 7: Roberto Luongo

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