

In 2018, five Pender Islanders were arrested on Burnaby Mountain for peacefully protesting the construction of what was then called the Kinder Morgan pipeline. They were charged and pled guilty of breaking an injunction and were sentenced to 25 hours of community service. It became clear during this process that many protesters were routinely involved in community service of one sort or another, so the “punishment” had them doing what they normally did. Taking note of this, the Crown began asking for more severe sentences for the same offense, and ultimately the sentence was extended to 28 days in jail. Among those imprisoned was a grandmother in her eighties. Supporting this approach the judge said, "We must deter seniors," noting that over 40% of people being arrested were seniors. He went on to say that these oldsters being arrested were a "particularly sinister challenge to the court's authority."

We old folks were delighted to be called "sinister". Four of the arrestees mobilized forces with other concerned Penderites, calling themselves Sinister Sisters, which evolved to Sinister Sisters and their Misterys and eventually settled on being Sinister Seniors. They began to organize community events with skits, films, panel discussions and letter writing. Very soon it made sense to amalgamate with another Pender organization, POD (Pender Ocean Defenders) which had been established in 2014 in response to Kinder Morgan's initial tree cutting in a conservation area on Burnaby Mountain. This original POD group had identified the health and viability of the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SKRW/Orcas) of J, K and L Pods as a major concern. POD had created a Facebook page - Pender Ocean Defenders - to raise awareness and share information. Our expanded group, now identifying as PenderPOD, with the mission to honour, protect and defend the natural environment of the Salish Sea - specifically the Southern Resident Orcas, Chinook salmon, and Herring which make up a significant part of the marine food web - got serious about our sinister activities. (See side bar)

Side bar:

Some of PenderPod's Actions

- Developed a website - PenderPod.ca
- Held information evenings with films, panel of experts, discussion and letter writing
- Performed skits, poetry and spoken word
- Painted a large banner, made wooden Orcas, salmon and herring for display at
public events
- Created Island events to commemorate the dead, and celebrate the living Orcas -Including the 2 new calves born in 2019

- Joined parades: Pender Pride, Fall Fair, Orca Songs and the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation(SPEC) anniversary event in Vancouver
- Successfully petitioned the Parliament of Canada to increase the distance between marine vessels and whales
- Worked with the Seattle based Whale Trail (thewhaletrail.org), who advocate watching whales from shore, joining Saturna islanders to bring it into BC.
- Produced a pamphlet which shows the best Pender Island spots for watching Orcas from the shore
- Posted *Be Whale Wise* signs at Pender docks reminding boaters of the distance restrictions when SRKW are in the area.
- Engaged with the National Energy Board, the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada, about freighter dangers, closure of the Chinook fishery and the establishment of Interim Sanctuary Zones for the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW).
- Organized the community to Commemorate the whales that have died by sewing 78 prayer flags
- Jointly, with Pender youth, organized the community to celebrate whales by painting tiles that will be displayed at ocean access trails.
- Established the Pender Sighting Network; a group of Pender citizens who report Cetacean sightings in the waters around the Penders and transgressions by vessels into the Whale Sanctuary Zone off Oak Bluff

The Plight of our Orcas

The Salish Sea teems with marine life in countless forms and inevitably they are all interconnected. The Orca loomed as the galvanizing issue of our ocean. Three SRKW pods were significantly reduced in numbers between 1965 and 1975 as a result of whale captures for marine park exhibitions. At least 13 whales were killed during these captures, while 45 whales were delivered to marine parks around the world. Today, only Lolita (Tokitae) remains alive in captivity at the Miami Seaquarium. The Lummi Tribe in Washington State considers her to be a relative and continues efforts to have her returned to her L Pod family.

In 2003, Southern and Northern Resident Killer Whales were listed as endangered under the Canadian Species at Risk Act (SARA). The Southern Orcas are Canada's most endangered

marine mammals. This declining population of 75 whales has a very low birth rate and their life expectancy is growing ever shorter. Chinook salmon are the Orcas's main food source. However salmon and the Herring, which the salmon depend on for food, are progressively declining. The ocean areas which are the SRKW's home are noisy and polluted. Habitat destruction, unsustainable fishing practices, and ocean-located factory fish farms are all serious threats to well being. Climate change and a projected seven-fold increase in tanker traffic carrying bitumen from the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion make immediate action more urgent than ever. Without permanent sanctuaries and enforcement, increased boating restrictions, protection of food sources, reduction of acoustic noise and ocean pollution, future generations of Gulf Island children will likely only know about the Southern Resident Orcas through their grandparents' memories.

The Orca Prayer Flag Project

Living on these islands in the Salish Sea gives us the gift of close connection with nature. With this gift comes increased awareness of the global climate crisis that is assaulting our cherished surroundings. PenderPOD has found that engaging with our island community in creative and celebratory ways has the potential to activate emotions and engage people's consciousness about the environment. We are especially concerned about the children, as it will be their planet after all. When our plans for film nights and a second annual OrcaSong parade were curtailed by COVID, we looked for ways to engage our all-ages community despite the restrictions. The idea was hatched to hand out prayer flag kits so that people could stitch on an image of their chosen whale and decorate the flag as they wished. The response was wonderful.

You can see the flags online at PenderPod.ca, and if you click on a flag you can read what each creator of the flags found out about their whale. This was clearly a project that engaged people's emotional attachment to our Orcas. Here are some comments from participants:

“. . . the more I learn the more concerned I become, but also so much more in awe of these magnificent beings!”

Sandra Johnson

“Being part of this amazing project was a wonderful experience for me, as well as my family! I feel encouraged to keep writing and creating art...”

Patricia Williams

The Orca Tile Project

As COVID restrictions lingered on we needed to do another project. A group of youth enrolled in the Community Development Leaders program run by the Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Center and Funded by WorkBC contacted us to get involved. This was the beginning of the *PODlings*. Since we had commemorated the whales that had died, they decided to celebrate the 44 whales who had been born since 1998. Thus was created the Whale Tile project.

We worked together with several youth to gather materials and make kits. Members of the Pender community could choose one of the whales that have been born since 1998 and take a kit that included brushes, paints and a tile. They painted the whale of their choice on a tile and researched the story of the whale. Every tile has been returned and we are in the process of mounting them so they can be displayed at the beginning of ocean access trails. Pictures of the tiles are on our website and when you click on a picture, you will see the story of that whale.

To see the flags and tiles, stories about the whales and other information about us go to our website PenderPod.ca

And for the latest news about whales, go to our Facebook page: Pender Ocean Defenders

What is most gratifying for us Sinister Seniors is collaboration with youth and the larger community, our human neighborhood, rallying to protect our ocean neighbors, the Orca and the ecosystem within which they live. Although these projects keep the community engaged in our movement to save our Orcas, nothing is as good as gathering together for information, inspiration and most important, action. We are dreaming of our next live event. If we are to save our iconic Orcas, we need to keep advocating.



[Following is a caption for a photo] Sasha and her sister Aimee are members of the Kawakatoose First Nation. Sasha is with her little sister holding her flag for Salish (J14). Sasha also commemorated another whale, Tanya (L5). Go to the website Prayer Flag page and click on her flags to read her story.



Nanako painted the tile to celebrate the latest calf to be born, L125



Half of our group turned 80- Lisa, John, Gregory and then Monica! We call them Orcagenarians. Here are all the the sinister seniors with their Penderpod banner. Banner design by Sarah Gayle, painted by Pender youth.

Left to Right: Peter Pare, Lisa Baile, Gregory Nicholls, Julia Nicholls, John Allen, Monica Petrie and Paul Petrie.