

## **This Week in the Annex:**

**February 16, 2022**

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### **Grassroots Albany**

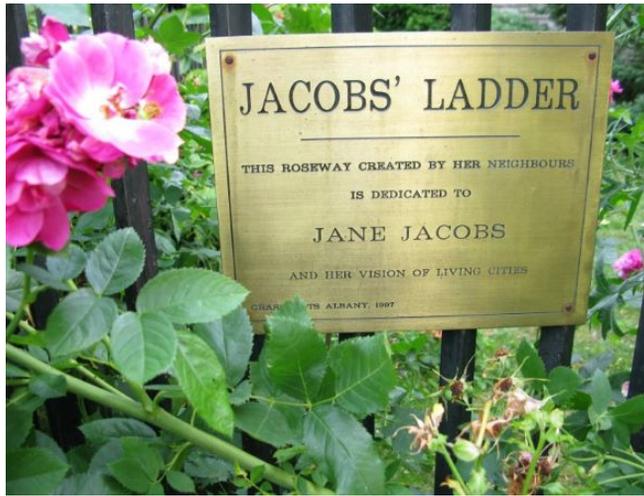
Much as we prefer to bring you cheerful news from the 'hood each Wednesday morning, we're saddened to be reporting a cruel attack on "Jacobs' Ladder" – aka the roseway in St. Alban's Square. Last Friday a man armed with a saw was seen hacking away at the rose bushes that parade along the wrought iron fence that borders Royal St George's property – wielding his weapon the full way from Albany on the west to Howland on the east.

#### **Jacobs' Ladder**

Before we go on, let us take you back to the dedication of the roseway on Saturday October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1997. The name "Jacobs' Ladder" was a clever pun coined by John Blazina who, together with his wife [Amanda McConnell](#) and neighbour Mel Greif spearheaded the creation of this tribute to the inimitable Annexonian, Jane Jacobs.

Jane was heavily involved that weekend in preparing for [Ideas That Matter](#), an inaugural conference arranged in her honour that assembled thinkers and activists from all over the world to explore everything from new forms of city planning to the ethical issues involved in everyday work.

The conference was just days away, but its star still managed to find the time to slip away from intense last-minute preparations to attend the roseway ceremony mounted by her Albany neighbours. Jane admired the planting, listened to the tribute given by John, and planted a kiss on his cheek before racing back downtown. It was just one more testimony to her commitment to neighbours and neighbourhood. No wonder the ceremony has remained a clear and treasured memory for those who were in attendance.



Most of the roses are the extremely hardy, especially the somewhat reblooming [Canadian Explorer](#) variety.

Jacobs' Ladder Dedication Plaque: Image courtesy of Louise Morin

## The Project

Solidly behind the project was a neighbourhood environmental group that dubbed itself "Grassroots Albany." It was founded in the late 1980s after Amanda had returned home in despair from a two-month assignment filming the ecological devastation in the Amazon Rainforest. Instead of giving up in the face of such alarming ruin, she gathered with like-minded neighbours to "think globally; act locally."

For the roseway, members of Grassroots Albany contributed their own funds to pay for the plants, dug the beds, and planted the roses. But they did much more than plant ornamental flowers. They undertook a tree survey in their quadrant of the Annex and then worked with neighbours to "wild" their environment, planting native trees and shrubs to replace grass and sometimes pavement.



For many years Grassroots Albany hosted a sale of native and local plants with proceeds used to fund local environmental initiatives. The image above by Louise Morin captured the action back in 2008.



Photo: Canadian Museum of Nature

A lifelong environmentalist, Amanda is co-author with David Suzuki of two books including *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. She has written scores of documentary scripts, many for *The Nature of Things*. And in [2020 she was a finalist](#) in the Canadian Museum of Nature's "Nature Inspiration Awards" for her work with Grassroots Albany.



Amanda McConnell is at the far left at a tree planting in St. Alban's Square. Photo courtesy Louise Morin.

### **The Roseway Today**

Of course while the roses initially thrived – planted as they were in direct sun and occasionally treated to a boost of fertilizer or light pruning by the Grassroots' members – the fact is that in the past 25 years, the trees the group also planted in the square have grown equally well. And so the shade they cast has somewhat diminished the number of blooms on the roses.

According to our resident garden expert, Marjorie Harris, when the City of Parks, Recreation and Forestry took responsibility for the square from its previous guardians – Toronto Transport – the newly assigned workers gave the roses a severe pruning, cutting them firmly back to the ground. Yet the shrubs easily rebounded.

Marjorie assured us that the roses may well repeat that performance given that their roots are still solidly in ground. To be sure, they'll take some time to regain their size. And there will likely be fewer blooms given the shade. But – fingers crossed – they'll be back.



Sadly, the attack on the roses was committed by a man who was clearly mentally ill, in distress, and -- quite likely according to witness testimony -- responding to taunting he'd been a victim of earlier that day. According to police, he was accosted and charged. But we're hopeful both that he will get the help he clearly needs and that Mother Nature is strong enough to undo the damage he inflicted.

## Notes and Queries

### Jane's Walk

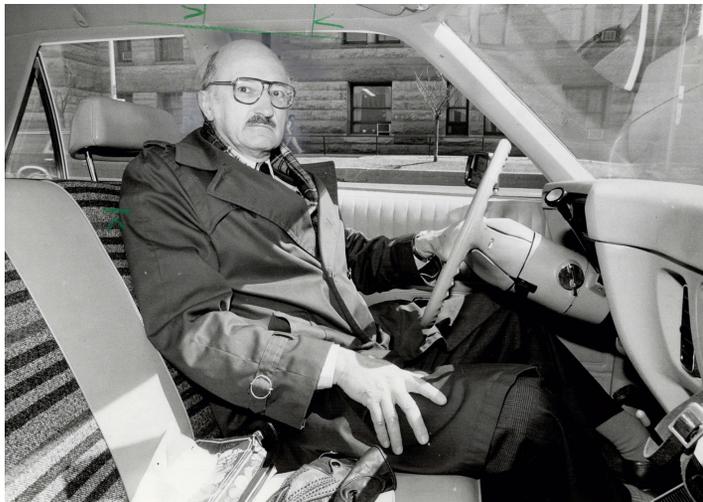
Jane's Walk is a movement of free, citizen-led walking conversations inspired by Jane Jacobs. It encourages people to share stories about their neighbourhoods, discover unseen aspects of their communities, and use walking as a way to connect with their neighbours. You can hear Jane, her son Jim (a stalwart member of the ARA Board), Amanda and others on a unique audio tour of the Annex. [Click here](#) to read the written program. And connect to the audio by going to this [City of Toronto website](#) and clicking on "Jane Jacob's Annex: A Guided Audio Walking Tour."



Jane Jacobs, a proud resident of Albany Avenue.

### In Memoriam Sam Cass

Sam Cass was the arch opponent of the Stop Spadina movement for which Jane Jacobs became the figurehead and inspiration. (You can read the story of the Stop Spadina movement in our 2021 newsletters of May 19, May 26, June 02, June 09 – available in a [dropbox folder at this link.](#)) Sam was also the brains behind the widening of Avenue Road between Bloor and St. Clair. Ironically, he passed away recently, just as the Avenue Road Safety Coalition achieved civic permission to study how to undo the damage caused.



Sam Cass never stopped insisting that the City's single biggest mistake was to halt the Spadina Expressway. Yet as [his obituary suggests](#), his only regard was for making the City function efficiently -- whether or not you agree with his vision.

### ARSC One More Time . . .

Many of you last week attempted to support the Avenue Road Safety Coalition's community letter to pressure for real changes on this dangerous roadway.

Unfortunately, the link we provided led to a blank email message, and many of you quite rightly backed right out of the site.

So . . . let's try this again. If you want to lend your support to real change on Avenue Road, then [click on this link](#) which will take you to the coalition's website where you can read the letter and, scrolling to the bottom, you'll find a place to sign your name to the petition.



Is it right that cars can occupy so much acreage while pedestrians are squeezed aside on sidewalks?

### **Fees for Single-Use Plastics?**

The City of Toronto is currently exploring the possibility of implementing mandatory fees for a variety of single use items including plastic cups and stir sticks. If you've got an opinion on this initiative, then you're invited to take a survey (available until March 4). You can find the survey link as well as explanatory information regarding the issue on [the City website](#).



Should we be paying eco-fees for these single use plastics?

### Re-purposing 19 Spadina Road

Councillor Layton is championing an initiative to convert the existing Green P parking lot at 19 Spadina Road into much-needed Indigenous housing. As he argues, surface parking lots contribute little to the well-being of Toronto residents. Rather, these spaces should be re-imagined to become important community hubs and to afford much needed housing opportunities. The ARA has added its voice to this letter, in support of local Indigenous service agencies who have applauded this idea. The full text of the letter [can be read on our website](#).





The Annex Residents' Association is a volunteer organization of residents committed to improving and preserving the distinctive character of our neighbourhood. Our strength depends on our base of support in a well-informed community.

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The Annex Residents' Association