

## Inspiration behind the poem, Tourists Stroll a Victoria Waterway:

Reena Virk was murdered by a girl she'd never met in November, 1997, in Victoria, B.C. For years, my mother sent me all the newspaper clippings surrounding Reena's death and trial, I still have them. I grew up in Victoria, I learned to swim in the Gorge Inlet where Reena Virk was murdered. As a 12 year-old I rode my bike across town to participate in the *Times Colonist* free swimming lessons.

Fast forward twenty years to this past spring, 2017, when the parole board granted Reena's convicted killer, Kelly Ellard, escorted passes to take her infant son to medical appointments and to attend parenting classes. I imagined Kelly pushing her baby in a stroller, and along with many tourists, strolling along the very beautiful, manicured Gorge waterway. At the same time, on the other side of the country, I attended Stratford's *Romeo and Juliet* (Scott Wentworth, directing). I was deeply moved by Wentworth's artistic direction, especially his emphasis on the familial and societal failings in R and J's deaths. Shakespeare's line, near the end of the play, *A glooming peace this morning with it brings*, reminded me of Reena Virk's death. My years-earlier research had revealed what I saw, generally speaking, as systemic cracks in the children's aid societies and other organizations, as well as cultural weaknesses. As I contemplated these disparate images, I somehow substituted Shakespeare's line with one of my own, *The ruin this mooring brings*. I kept repeating it, picturing Reena's "moored" body and the ruined lives of the young people and their families. Also, Reena's empty notebook (see my poem) contrasted with images of Romeo (Antoine Yared) and Juliet (Sara Farb) reading and writing in their notebooks, that, along with their delight in metre (Romeo counted syllables on his fingers), showed both the power of language and its inability to save. Both writing, as well as not writing, ended in death for two fictional young people, and one real girl.

