

ARTS

Telephone: 250-380-5346 > E-mail: features@tc.canwest.com



timescolonist.com

WEB EXTRA: Hollywood loves a bug
We list the Top 10 movie plagues



Into the Dragons' Den

Teacher takes her turn at being quizzed by CBC's business gurus



MICHAEL D. REID
Behind the Screen
mreid@tc.canwest.com

During her 20 years as a high school language teacher, Kathryn DaSilva has marked and created more quizzes than she cares to remember.

And she says she grew frustrated with having to pore through several books on a single subject to create assignments.

Then came the "what if" moment that turned the Fairfield educator into an "accidental entrepreneur," as she calls herself.

"Grammar is grammar, so why not put everything in one place?" DaSilva wondered. It inspired her to collaborate with a former student to create four software programs for students and teachers of French and Spanish.

Thousands of hours and several years later, her company, eStudent.ca, has wracked up \$500,000 in sales to more than 1,200 schools across Canada, the U.S. and U.K. of software that the mother of two created and sells from her basement.

"It's like 50 grammar books together," she says, referring to one of her collaborative programs with Garry Morse, a shy student she once taught in Grade 11 at Vancouver's Roberts Education Centre, an alternative school for disadvantaged youths.

Morse, whom she describes as a quiet genius — "the epitome of silent" — gave her a note one day. It praised her as "the greatest French teacher." He offered to write the code if she was willing to provide the content for educational software.

"I must have written out 20,000 pages by hand," she says. "If I had known it would be so much work when I started ..."

The result was *Etudiant and Estudiante*, two 20,000-page grammar resources for students and teachers, complete with a verb conjugator and 3,000 practice exercises. The products designed for time-strapped teachers — *Professeur and Professeur* — include two 8,000-question "test generators" that can also be used to create exercises and homework sheets.

DaSilva, 41, admits she was surprised by the word-of-mouth popularity of her resources that have prompted accolades from educators in schools from Montreal to Nevada — especially since it was originally created for



Victoria teacher Kathryn DaSilva will be seen on CBC-TV on Oct. 6, pitching her classroom software business to such "dragons" as Boston Pizza and Mr. Lube co-owner Jim Trelliving, right.

herself and her students.

"Neither one of us expected this, and people are incredulous," she said. "They say, 'No, really, come on who made it?'"

Having taken on a life of its own, her small business is now casting DaSilva as a TV personality. After going to an audition at Royal Roads University last April on a whim, she was selected to present her local business on an episode of the CBC-TV show *Dragons' Den* that airs Monday Oct. 6 at 8 p.m.

She says her husband, a sales executive, and her 11-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter put her up to it when they were watching the show where aspiring entrepreneurs who need funding pitch ideas to business moguls, a.k.a. the "dragons." If one or more of the dragons agrees to invest the requested amount, they get a percentage of the company stock.

DaSilva, who still teaches at Robertson Education Centre, was flown in May to Toronto, where she found herself in the "dead silence" of a studio with host

Dianne Bruckner and the five dragons. This season they include marketing guru **Arlene Dickinson** (Venture Communications); IT security tycoon **Robert Herjavec**; **Jim Trelliving**, real estate developer and co-owner of Boston Pizza and Mr. Lube; **Kevin O'Leary**, founder of The Learning Company; and First Energy Capital Corp's **W. Brett Wilson**.

"It was a bit of a surreal experience," DaSilva recalled. "You walk in with nothing and they can shoot you out of there in five minutes or you can stay there for an hour and a half."

Admitting she was "super nervous," she said it was nerve-wracking having to go into the studio without props or charts and knowing you could be very quickly interrupted with questions from such big-league biz types.

Deal or no deal — she can't reveal the outcome as she's bound by a confidentiality agreement — DaSilva says getting access to such a high level of expertise and connections and gaining exposure is reward enough.

"I went in just thinking, 'These five people are never in the same room other than this one week a year,'" she said. "Getting a chance to talk to just one would never happen, never mind all five. I had nothing to lose."

Trelliving says watching the wannabe entrepreneurs reminds him of when he made his pitch to buy the Boston Pizza chain.

"Very much so," he said from Dallas, Tex. "And they're more prepared than I was, although I had more time than they did."

The RCMP officer-turned-business tycoon said some of the pitches he sees, where contestants have trouble making the distinction between a great idea and one that is workable, remind him of his days in law enforcement.

"It's like the bank robber who plans every detail like crazy, has everything in place to rob the bank and then maybe three seconds after he gets out the door he gets a flat tire," he said.

One pattern he has noticed is an "overvaluation" of a product, and too much financial emphasis



on marketing.

He advises potential pitchers to know your product, whether it can sell and whether you can really make money at it.

"The great thing is that there are a lot of Canadians who have great ideas," he says. "That gives me a good feeling."

METAL

Cancer Bats riding wave of interest in heavy music

IN CONCERT

What: Cancer Bats, the Black Lungs and Johnny Truant

When: Tomorrow, 4:30 p.m. (all ages) and 9 p.m. (adult)

Where: Element

Tickets: \$15 at Lyle's Place, www.ticketweb.ca, Ditch Records and the Strathcona hotel

FRANCOIS MARCHAND
For Canwest News Service

Cancer Bats frontman Liam Cormier may have been shredding his lungs out on the road with his metalcore buddies for most of the past two years, but he still has to do all the mundane things regular people do — such as patiently wait in line at the bank — when he gets back home to Toronto.

"I find it funny when you have to interact with people that are kinda outside of our circle," Cormier says. "Today,

I got the teller that I usually deal with and she was like, 'Oh, you're home from tour!' But those first few times they were just like, 'Do you deal drugs?' 'Noooo . . . I just have \$5,000 wrapped with scrap paper in a pouch — it's totally cool, right?'"

He laughs. Fair enough, Cormier's usual attire — black/grey items layered with other black/grey items, tattoos and punk hairdo — might turn a few "regulars" off.

Musically speaking, though, the timing couldn't be better for Cancer Bats to become all the rage on the "loud" scene.

"It's definitely a good time for metal," Cormier says. "I feel like heavy music is on a high right now. The new Slipknot debuted at No. 1 in the U.S. It beat out the Game. That's amazing. Metal's back on top."

Cancer Bats caused quite a commotion with the release of their latest album, *Hail Destroyer*, last April. With its



PHOTO CREDIT ALL CAPS

Liam Cormier, left, feared a backlash against *Hail Destroyer* but it's been hailed as a landmark for him and Cancer Bats cohorts Mike Peters, Scott Middleton and Jaye Schwarzer.

furious, hollering barrage of southern rock, hardcore punk and crunchy alternative metal, *Hail Destroyer* quickly earned the band a five-star rating and a cover story from trend-setting British rock mag *Kerrang!* "When we were getting

these reviews," Cormier recalls, "we were hanging out with the Alexisonfire guys and they were saying, 'Well, we've never gotten a five out of five; we've never gotten the cover of *Kerrang!*' This is so insane." Cormier admits he originally

worried that everyone was going to hate *Hail Destroyer*.

The band's extensive touring had led Cancer Bats to adopt a much heavier sound than on their noteworthy 2006 debut, *Birthing the Giant*, and Cormier was expecting a bit of a backlash from both fans and critics.

Instead, the album was heralded as a landmark. For Cormier, writing *Hail Destroyer* was his own way to express the struggles of being on the road and feeling like you're always escaping from normal life.

"You get to a certain age and you're either in it or you're out," he says. "This is going to be my life at this point. I'm probably going to be a 'death bro' forever."

Also known for their intense live performances, Cancer Bats are now back on the road for another long stretch of touring, ready to reconnect with fans

and friends.

"Little things like being able to sleep at people's houses or someone making us dinner at a show is the hugest deal," he says. "If you have a job, it's not. Whereas for us it's like, 'Uh, we've been sleeping in our van, can we take a shower here? Wow, you have fresh towels?' That's pretty much what *Hail Destroyer* is all about."

The old metal guard better watch their backs. With more and more bands like Cancer Bats breathing down their necks, it might not take long before the final nail is jammed in their coffins.

"Have you heard those new Metallica tracks? They're ridiculous," he laughs. "I don't hate them, but it definitely sounds like they're trying to grab at this older sound that they had — the *Ride the Lightning* or *Master of Puppets* era. But bands don't sound like that anymore."