

## Editorial Opinion

GUEST EDITORIAL

By Heather Conn, Roberts Creek

### *The alternative: restorative justice*

Last year, a drunken stranger kicked in my front door in Roberts Creek when I was home alone. Surprisingly, he did not enter my house and left me unharmed.

Later, I agreed to participate in a restorative justice session – a form of collaborative justice for minor offences – instead of pressing charges and following the usual court procedure. The restorative justice process allows victims to share with an offender the impact of a crime and to seek a mutually agreeable outcome.

At the RCMP building in Gibsons, the offender and I spoke freely for at least an hour, accompanied by the young, female officer who had made the arrest. She shared how fearful she had felt, alone in a squad car, on a dark stretch of road, about to arrest a belligerent man who was taller and stronger.

I felt moved to hear of her vulnerability. The offender was learning first-hand the fear he had prompted in our community.

At first, he tried to distance himself from his actions, saying that he rarely drank to excess or had never been violent towards anyone. Yet he admitted that years ago, while angry at a girlfriend, he had punched a hole in a wall.

This is your wake-up call, I told him. Metaphorically, hitting his girlfriend was at twelve o'clock. He stood at ten o'clock. What he did now with that knowledge was up to him.

We discussed his lack of impulse control; during the incident, he had gone from sheepish to abusive in mere seconds. He agreed to see a therapist. The officer made this a formal condition of accountability; if he didn't *show up for therapy, he could be rearrested.*

It was deeply satisfying to sound off at and to help this young man — things I could not have done if we had gone to court. At the end of our session, I agreed to shake his hand, something I'd refused to do initially. I felt that I had gotten through to him.

If you have the opportunity for restorative justice, I invite you to take it. It was a deeply healing and rewarding experience.