

- [Meet Boo the grizzly bear](#)
- [Special Section: The Royals](#)
- [Alberta Floods 2013: Rebuilding](#)

»

## Corbella: Vancouver's easy drug access may have helped kill Monteith

By Licia Corbella, Calgary Herald July 21, 2013 10:09 AM

Recommend  Tweet

[Pin it](#)

[Comment](#)

0

• [Story](#)

• [Photos \( 1 \)](#)



## Licia Corbella

Ask any informed Vancouverite where you could pick up a bit of heroin and they'd be able to tell you. Everyone from teetotaling old ladies with blue hair to a straight-A student in elementary school — all know if you want hard, just go to the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and heroin will be as easy to acquire as chewing gum.

Heck, ask virtually any informed person across the country and they'd be able to tell you that if you want to go on a trip of your choosing — be it a heroin holiday or a crack cocaine carousal — just head down to East Hastings and you will find what you're looking for with no risk of arrest.

Which brings us to the heroin-alcohol overdose death of promising young Glee actor and singer, Cory Monteith.

The Calgary-born actor, who was raised in Victoria, was found dead Saturday in his room at the Fairmont Pacific Rim, which is a five-minute cab ride away from the Downtown Eastside, but worlds away in terms of ambience.

It's unlikely that the 31-year-old would have risked bringing hard drugs across the border from his home in the States, so it's safe to assume he either picked some up himself or had a gofer do it for him by visiting InSite, the government-sponsored and funded safe injection site at 139 East Hastings. The next step is easy. Wait for an injector to show up, ask them to score you some heroin, grab a few clean, free needles and distilled water, and you're good to go.

So the question is, if Monteith were visiting virtually any other city in Canada, would he have been able to find a safe injection site? Would he have died? I think the likelihood is much lower.

Proponents of safe injection sites argue that such harm-reduction strategies save lives and that's inarguably true. If an injection drug user overdoses in the safe injection site, then a nurse is on hand to offer assistance and call an ambulance. This has happened numerous times.

But no one ever asks how many people have died of drug overdoses who use the safe injection site as a legally procure drugs.

Several years ago, while partaking in one of my addictions — the double crunch sushi roll at Midori Japanese F 17th Avenue — I overheard a group of three young people talking excitedly about how on their upcoming trip t they intended to drop by InSite to try heroin for the first time. I have since long wished I had butted into their c and intervened.

There will be some people reading this who will assume that finding heroin in any major Canadian city is an ea do, so InSite really doesn't make things that much easier for first-timers to find and partake in their inaugural h for people like Monteith — who had a history of drug use, to find some easily. But an anecdote, dating back ma now, proves this wrong.

Back in the early 1990s, I was assigned to cover the growing heroin trade in Toronto. I had great police contact: they told me to head down to the Parkdale neighbourhood and ask virtually any of the street prostitutes I saw if talk to me.

Sure enough, the first working girl I approached was Sam — whom we called Jackie for the article — who alor boyfriend, Danny, had to make enough money daily to support their \$600-a-day heroin habit.

Sam and I hit it off. We shared a lot of laughs and some tears as I injected myself into her messed up life for a v we stayed in touch. I made sure she had my home number as well as my work phone number, and one night, m the story ran, she phoned me in a panic from Montreal.

She had left Danny for a regular customer and had run out of heroin in Quebec. As she entered into the agony c she begged me to drive to Parkdale that Saturday night, find Danny and get him to put some heroin on a Greyh her, as she couldn't find heroin in Montreal.

I told her what I'd do instead was call the Montreal police and ask them if they knew where the heroin users an hung out. I didn't have any Montreal police contacts, but called the on-duty sergeant. He didn't know and neith various other police officers I was transferred to.

In other words, show up in most North American cities and even a heroin junkie can't necessarily find their poi police don't know where to go in their own city to find the stuff. But ask my strait-laced 82-year-old mom in V: even she knows.

Would Cory Monteith still be alive had he been visiting Halifax, Toronto or Calgary instead of Vancouver? In n highly likely.

InSite is well meaning. But the time has long passed for an independent investigator to really study how many p using it as a gateway into hard drug use and a legally “risk free” way to procure an illegal substance.

Licia Corbella is a columnist and the editorial page editor. [licorbella@calgaryherald.com](mailto:licorbella@calgaryherald.com)

© Copyright (c) The Calgary Herald Buy this article at [www.HeraldContentMarketplace.com](http://www.HeraldContentMarketplace.com)

- [E-mail this Article](#)