

A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close & Carolyn Cowan

NUMBER 1, AUTUMN 2011

# SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,  
GRACE & GRATITUDE



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

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NUMBER 1, AUTUMN 2011  
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### A PUBLICATION OF THE Okanagan Institute

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# INTRODUCTION

Thomas Merton wrote: *May we all grow in grace and peace, and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being. It is the voice of the creative self waiting to be called to speak.*

This journal invites readers to unite in evolving a changing paradigm from Age-ing to Sage-ing.

- Connect to creativity
- Connect to yourself and others
- Free imagination
- Feel power
- Improve health
- Expand optimism
- Honour who you are
- Feel respect
- Know Thyself

Antiquity identified a sage as a wise person. Aristotle noted that “wisdom is a form of goodness ... not scientific knowledge but another kind of cognition.” A pronouncement of the sages was to “Know Thyself.” Creative exploration and examination of one’s life is magical alchemy, translating experience into self awareness, integrity and peace – relaxation into grace and gratitude.

Theosophy, a philosophy dating back to Plato, asserts that humanity has to act so as to unite love with wisdom. Making art was seen as a practice directed towards achieving this goal. Theosophists envision that the end of art is peace, individually and collectively, because art making brings people into harmony with themselves and each other.

The internet has redefined community. Together we can effect change in ways never before imagined. This magazine is an invitation to share in creating a community for successful generous aging in the twenty-first century. It is an invitation to understand generativity and the role of elders in a culture.

Find your voice. Restore the authentic creative expression you enjoyed as a child. Rediscover play. Fearlessly relax into your unique intuitive creative urges. Connect to like minded seekers. Share your legacy. Feel purpose.

## Statement of Intent

Our raison d’être is to provide a showcase and venue for all ages to express their creativity.

*Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture.* – Elliot Eisner, emeritus professor of Art and Education at the Stanford University School of Education

Our aspiration behind this quarterly online journal, *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude*, is to develop, over time, an organic art piece. Our hope is this first edition will resonate with a broad population.

We encourage you to not just read us, but also to participate with us. Whether you are an experienced artist, or just beginning to explore your own innate creative impulses, we urge you to join your voice with ours.

This first issue of the journal is laid out in broad strokes. Each new issue will expand the content into unforeseen territory in the same way authentic art evolves organically from its seed of inspiration. We are a small grassroots group of volunteers compiling this first issue in September 2011. Our intent is to return quarterly, and to incorporate your responses – both critical input and creative expressions.

Let us evolve together as we share and get to know each other better, trusting that the best in each of us will facilitate *creative spirit, grace and gratitude* for all of us.

## Submissions

**Please send an edited submission (maximum 1500 words) for our next issue. Topic: What we gain from intergenerational creative activities. Email your story before December 1st – as an email attachment in rich text format with original photos as attachments, not inserted into the text document. Send to: [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)**

# SAGE-ING IS SEEKING



Elgin Marble from the top of the Acropolis, Athens, Greece. Painting by Karen Close.

**Sage-ing is about seeking – satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing.** Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to *Know Thyself* and contribute that knowing to our culture is indeed our highest purpose. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves.

The roots of sage-ing are deep. *Know Thyself* is carved in the gate to the Delphic Oracle. The site dates back to the 5th century BC in Classical Greece. The shrine was sacred to Apollo, guardian of spiritual clarity. Greek mythology is rich with riddles and discrepancies, but a favourite recording I discovered says that in ancient times woman over fifty were the oracles at this site answering human's spiritual questions.

The first seeds for my journey of *karensageing* were planted just before my fiftieth birthday. Now fifteen years later I want to reach out and, in the way of the Greeks, create a band of revellers sharing and celebrating the incredible process of opening to spiritual maturity, creativity and wisdom.

The Greek god Dionysus and his band of revellers travelled about pricking the imaginations of mortals and inspiring them to create, as well as initiating them into the mysteries of fermentation and alchemy.

The wild and daring side of Dionysus was feared by the other gods and they sought to destroy him. Times have not changed much. Dionysus was dismembered and the pieces burned, but as a son of Zeus, he possessed deep resources of wisdom and the power to resurrect himself each spring. His rebirth is said to offer hope because after his dismemberment he returned stronger than before. The Greeks believed humanity was created from his ashes. Reclaiming his wisdom and power is the gift I imagine being offered to each of us who chooses to join in *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*.

Just before the firestorm of 2003, I moved to the Okanagan, British Columbia. I perceive a metaphor in that tragedy suffered in this wine growing region. It is growing to have proportionately Canada's largest senior population. I began to look for others who, having chosen to mature in this valley, might also want to embrace the aging process cognisant of its rich local and mythological legacy. *Let each man exercise the art he knows*, proclaimed the Greek dramatist, Aristophanes, rebel and a champion of the Dionysian spirit. Indeed, I believe a rebellious spirit is just what's needed to begin to *Know Thyself* and Sage or as psychologist Carl Jung described it *individuate*.

Describing this process in his book *Finding Meaning In The Second Half of Life*, James Hollis Ph.D, notes: *Your Self is seeking itself, so to speak, through the realisation of the possibilities inherent in you... If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you. This is the essence of what*



The Okanagan Revellers.  
The Greeks believed humanity was created from the ashes of Dionysus. Reclaiming his wisdom and power is the gift I imagine being offered to each of us who chooses to join in Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude.

This journal is grateful to the inspiration gained from these sources:

AGING INTO SAGE-ING: A PROFOUND NEW VISION OF GROWING OLDER by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, 1997

THE CREATIVE AGE: AWAKENING HUMAN POTENTIAL IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE by Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D, 2000.

There is no denying the problems that accompany aging. But what has been universally denied is the potential. The ultimate expression of potential is creativity.

*Jung means by individuation. It is a service not to the ego but to what wishes to live through us. While the ego may fear this overthrow, our greatest freedom is found paradoxically, in surrender to that which seeks fuller expression through us.*

Jung also asserts the importance of individuating in community: *as the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation.*

Enter the evolution of the World Wide Web and social networking in the twenty-first century. From my home on the shoreline of Lake Okanagan, I can share with you and urge you to join in community with me. I can look down the lake at the sculptural rock formation of Okanagan Mountain, right to where the fire started. I imagine baptism by fire and the ashes of Dionysus. I choose to absorb the power I see in those now exposed and vulnerable muscled volcanic forms - they strengthen my soul, calling directly to my inner being and the courage to create. Since moving here I have been drawn to others of all ages who like me are seeking fuller expression and deeper self awareness through their creative voices. This magazine will bring you their voices exercising the language of the art or arts they have chosen. We are becoming a loose band of revellers who have chosen to take pleasure and delight in knowing ourselves and each other through creative expression. We speak to how we can build a better world.

We invite you to join us. Share, in whatever format you might devise. Speak from the heART of your spirit. Voice your experience.

Karen Close [karensageing@gmail.com](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com)

# THE ART OF SHARING

**Enjoy the satisfaction of spontaneous interaction. Where might it take you?**



Karen Close and Sandy McNolty relax into sage-ing and the art of conversation dockside on Lake Okanagan. They recorded and then continued via email. Imagine the possibilities voice activated computers will allow.

**K.** Doesn't this view truly feed your soul? It makes me feel a sense of primal energy. It gives me a confidence in eternity. My husband and I chose to retire to the Okanagan in January, 2003. Later that year the fire broke out - just beyond the point you see to the left. It was a dreadful tragedy for the community, but then it has also brought a special rebirth. There's an inexplicable power in this valley that seems to be calling people of all ages. Grounding myself in this view always opens me to reflection and it's also made me reach out to hear the stories of those who have been nurtured by the Okanagan.

**S.** The Okanagan really does have a beauty that feeds the soul. I am looking forward to listening to the stories of others and learning from their wisdom. I think that sage-ing means aging wisely and sharing that wisdom with others. Applying it to our lives and passing it on to the next generation could be considered a human obligation.

**K.** Sages can be any age too. You know I think sage-ing also means seeing life through the third eye. The depth of that vision is so rich; everything comes alive; every moment makes sense.

I remember reading that art making, even when it was just a stick drawing in the dirt, is a primitive impulse. If we allow ourselves this basic primal expression we can access the timeless sources of wisdom in ourselves. Shaun McNiff, who sees art as medicine, believes: *... through art we can reactivate the mind of the child within us, which knows with great simplicity and accuracy. Art is an articulator of the soul's uncensored purpose and deepest will.*

**S.** To me the third eye means being open to what is, connecting to what is and allowing the energy of what is to flow freely through us, in order to be part of it and to create what we are meant to create in our lives. Really, I think this third eye (or inner intuition) is always open, not just for me, but for all of us. We just need to pay attention to it. When I'm in a meditative state or connecting to nature I feel very peaceful and timeless. Being in nature allows me to feel connected to myself and others because we are nature.

**K.** How is it that we created a culture that overlooked so much of what is precious and left us hurting? Seeing through the third eye is what small

children do instinctively. When I was teaching art I could see that in the young kids. I see it in my granddaughters too. I think we need to cultivate opportunities for inter generational exchange. Listen to kids describing their art work. To them their imaginations make perfect sense until we *mature* their thinking. Philosopher Eric Hoffer said: *Man as artist is far more ancient than man as worker*. Play is the springhead of discovery about self. The third eye invites all the senses, the heart, and the imagination into the act of looking at the world outside and inside. The third eye is the inner eye or the gate that leads within to spaces of higher consciousness, but there is resistance from many. I love Wordsworth's line: *that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude*.

**S.** Your quote makes me think of another quote, it is a bit deep but it really does make one think: *When you turn your attention from the object of your awareness to the awareness itself, there is just silent, vast, openness that has never been wounded, harmed, angry, frightened or incomplete. This is who you are*. It's by Martin Laird from *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*.

**K.** That is deep and certainly gives food for thought. If there is any possibility of changing this path the world seems to be on now, each of us needs to dig out the little bits of wisdom we have to offer and then give voice to our discoveries.

**S.** Yes, I agree. I have always known from a very young age that there was something bigger than me and that I was part of that something. It seemed like I was watching *me* live this life as I was undergoing different experiences and also noticing my reactions to them. I know it sounds weird and as a child I thought I was very different from most people. I had a wild imagination and really believed I was magic!

**K.** Our culture doesn't encourage authenticity. There is little opportunity for a child to take pride in his or her own uniqueness. It has been as though school systems have sought to make everyone be the same and know the same things. Many possible contributions have been missed.

Have you ever read what is written on the bottom of our \$20.00 bill? In very small print are the words of a woman who was three time winner of the Governor General's Literary award, author Gabrielle Roy: *Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?* Ironic isn't it that we pass around this currency all the time, but never stop to read those words or receive their message.

The arts are so important because they open us to wisdom patiently waiting to be expressed. In any moment, if we allow that deeper vision of the third eye the time to meander and explore what is being looked at, or thought about, we open to a new range of our responses. The artist within emerges; memory is triggered; sensations are aroused and we discover the beauty in all the moments of our lives. We feel gratitude. The gift is first to ourselves,

but when we share our creations everyone gains. That's the gift of creative energy. The arts are about sharing. I think conversation is an art. When we take time to openly reflect, converse and share, bits of wisdom bubble to the surface. What, or who, inspires or guides you?

**S.** I am inspired by so many people and so many situations. I think the biggest form of inspiration for me is feeling gratitude. I read somewhere that choosing to embrace life by being fully present is what brings the sweetest joy. If we are willing to view each challenge from the highest perspective, life is filled with the alchemy of grace. Sometimes the messages and the messengers come to us in forms at first we do not recognize.

I am also continuously guided by quotations which I love to share with others. I see them as maps given to us by wise individuals who have come before us. If we listen to the messages they have given us, we can begin to transform ourselves and our world through the art of their communication. One of my favourite quotes is by the ancient Indian sage Patanjali, the patron saint of yoga.

Mastery combines a balance of science and art. Knowledge of science is like the colors on an artist's palette- the greater the knowledge, the more colors available. The body is the canvas and the Asana's (postures) are the art we create.

I like this one because I think it is saying that all of us are both "science and art" Science is our physical composition and Art is our expression! Art is not only painting and drawing, but also dancing, music, gardening, writing - anything that is communicating who we truly are.

**K.** Art's greatest gift is the seeds it offers for understanding each other at the deepest levels of social, spiritual and intellectual questing. Creating this magazine, will help others to realise that artful sharing, in whatever form one chooses is transforming ourselves from whom we thought we were to who we truly are. It is perhaps our greatest purpose.

When I was your age I spent a year talking with a wise octogenarian who had spent her life in art. She set me on a path. When I moved here I received urging from another octogenarian born in the Okanagan. In 1976, she and a group of strong community minded individuals created a touring exhibition of works and performances by various Okanagan artists, dancers, musicians and actors. They called it *Okanagan Image*. Here's how it was described in the program by that woman I met, volunteer president, Ruth Schiller: *Okanagan Image is a unique cultural event ... a grassroots response ... a small pebble tossed into the waters. As ripples and reflections widen, may they deepen the quality of life and increase awareness, appreciation and participation in all forms of art.*

Sometimes things take a long time to germinate, but I think our magazine will further the dream of those volunteers from thirty-five years ago.

# A BAND OF CREATIVE REVELLERS



Ruth Bieber

## Ruth Bieber

Ruth holds a Master's degree in Education, from the University of Calgary, with a specialization in Rehabilitation. Prior to obtaining this degree, her professional focus was as a Counselling Therapist, working with clients with disabilities - often more than a single disability.

Legally blind since the age of 7, Ruth understood her clients' needs from a very personal point of view. Her practice encouraged Ruth to discover ever more effective therapeutic modalities. To this end, she shifted from traditional, verbal approaches, to the power offered by the arts.

In the early 1990s, she founded, InsideOut Theatre. The group became a reflection of her personal evolution from therapy to theatre and demonstrated the power of performance for people with a wide range of mixed abilities. Ms Bieber was the Artistic Director of this ground breaking, integrated theatre company for seventeen years. During this time she spoke and performed at conferences and festivals, both nationally and internationally. Her manuscript recounting how she met the varied challenges of these years is currently in publication.

In midlife, still passionate to expand her talents and perceptions, Ruth has begun to paint and explore the visual arts as another avenue towards personal insight and evolution

Ruth has received numerous awards for her specialized work including, YWCA/Global T.V. Woman of Vision (2004) and The Euclid Harry award for Leadership (2006).

Visit Ruth at [www.playwithperspective.com](http://www.playwithperspective.com)



Karen Close

## Karen Close

Study of Canadian Art History gave Karen an awakened sense of cultural inheritance and the need for creative expression. The history of fine art teaches that although art has value as a commodity, more importantly it is a resource to help us communicate with each other the beliefs and values that will be our legacy. Art is about discovering and sharing who we are. Teaching English and Visual Arts for 30 years also gave Karen deep appreciation for the healing benefits of creative expression. Retirement in 1995 gave her the opportunity to meet vibrant senior Canadian artists and to hear their stories. She resolved to share her discoveries and advocate for the preventative and healing benefits of ArtsCare. Karen is a painter and author of two books.

*Unfinished Women: Seeds From My Friendship With Reva Brooks* chronicles Close's friendship with the Canadian photographer Reva Brooks. Their efforts created the exhibition Reva Brooks, photographer which opened January, 2000, at The National Gallery of Canada. Available at [karensageing@google.com](mailto:karensageing@google.com)

*Spirit of Kelowna: A Celebration of Art and Community* profiles a community art project. Available at [www.okanaganinstitute.com](http://www.okanaganinstitute.com) In 2005, Karen presented at the international conference of the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, Edmonton, AB, and in 2006 at the Canadian Society for Education through Art, Winnipeg, MA. Her heART FIT classes at the Rotary Centre for the Arts, Kelowna began February 14, 2008. At weekly sessions Karen leads participants to *honour the urge to create ... for ourselves and for others.*



Carolyn Cowan

## Carolyn Cowan

Many people have their life direction planned from the beginning. They persevere through the peaks and valleys of their life. Undeterred, they continue to work toward goals, successfully meeting them and moving into the next phase, progressing toward an end.

I am not one of those people. My career has been varied and serendipitous.

For the first four years, I was employed by CBS Records as their Product Controller operating out of London, England. I was very young in a challenging and stressful job. After four years, I chose to return to Canada. I continued with CBS Records but in the Artist & Repertoire Department that scouts, hires and records new talent for the record label and its publishing arm. We would regularly check out night clubs and bands around Toronto. Definitely, one of my best jobs.

After the music industry, I worked for an environment organization and then a large investment firm, bought out later by a major Canadian bank. There, I remained working in different capacities over a number of years.

I mention all this to explain that from the beginning to the end of my career, I was involved in business administration in various forms. My left brain was getting a full workout. My right brain was begging for equal time. My only artistic outlet, throughout life, has been writing. Over the years, writing took a variety of formats. Still, it was not enough to balance the detail and analysis demanded by the jobs.

Eventually, I ended work and two years ago moved to Kelowna, B.C.

What a different 2,500 kilometres and freedom from a figuratively 9:00 to 5:00 job makes. In Kelowna, I am surrounded by beauty and determined to exploring and expressing my creativity. Old habits die hard, as a wise person said, but I am learning diligence in parceling my time and investing in creativity.

I've taken up writing poetry and painting combined on the same canvas.

Life is expanding greatly and in a direction of my choosing. A sense of fun has always been my critical antidote to a serious side. Now I find more

opportunities to play. The problem is finding others with the same inclination.

My hope for this journal is that, over time, we can encourage people of all ages to take a risk and build trust in their innate creative ability. They can reconsider the misconception that art is an indulgence instead of an essential part of our heartbeat.



Sandy McNolty

## Sandy McNolty

If I were to describe myself in two words they would be “Free Spirit” because I’ve always felt connected to my spirit and knew that the best things in life are free. Even though I grew up mostly in the city of Vancouver, I knew that someday I would marry a man from the country and live on a ranch. While working at the Royal Bank, I met my husband Dan and we moved to Fraser Lake, B.C. and settled on a 400 acre ranch. Together we managed the ranch, a construction company and raised our two boys. I also worked at the local school as Assistant Librarian and Teachers Aid. I became a Personal Fitness Trainer and worked in the school gym and trained both staff and students. I loved those years!

In 2001, my husband of 22 years was killed in a work related accident and my life suddenly changed. I chose to move to Kelowna in 2002. I didn’t know anyone here but it seemed like a beautiful place to nurture my soul and start a new life. I took a 2 year Diploma Program in Counseling and am an accredited member of the CPCA. I also worked as a fitness trainer. My intention has always been to learn and teach about healing the body, the mind and the spirit.

I had been a student of yoga since my early 20’s, but now felt it was time to become a teacher. In 2004 I began studying with Deepak Chopra at the Chopra Center in San Diego, and became certified in Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda. I wanted to learn more so the next year I traveled to Nicaragua to take a 500 hour Yoga Alliance Certification. I then traveled for 5 months across Central America and Cuba teaching yoga and meditation.

Upon my return to Kelowna I took a position for 1 year at Sandalwood Retirement Resort as the Activity Director and also taught yoga there. I loved working with the residents, I learned so much from them.

Last year, I traveled across Australia, Vietnam and Bali. I took another Yoga Teacher Training as well as a Yoga Psychology Course for Counsellors.

This magazine begins another adventure for me.

# THE GODS, THEY DO CONSPIRE!

## Ruth Bieber

*We pose questions with the dumb hope that there may be gods that exist in the silence of time who in their own inscrutable ways will respond secretly and cunningly to our most honest expressions, assuring us that the ideas that riddle and beguile us are true and beautiful and worthy of our attention. – Jack Mathews*

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."  
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

**In the spring of 2008, three events occurred in my life which created a window of opportunity; a huge window, which upon frequent reflection consistently leaves me in a state of gratitude and complete awe.** The three events include: the death of my Mother (I became an orphan, thank God), the independence of my two sons (I became an empty nester, thank God) and the departure from my beloved creation, *InsideOut Theatre*, (after 17 years, it was time, and yes, thank God!). So, there I was, an unemployed, empty nested orphan; the liberation was palatable! The question was what to do, and where to do it?

I had always wanted to live in New York, and so off I went. The logical activity for a theatre artist was to write plays, so that is what I did. When I wasn't working on one play or another, I focussed on a couple of book projects I had on the back burner. You might say I was a freelance writer in New York City. This I did for the better part of two years, and it was a blast. I love New York! Here is where the Gods conspire yet again. My two secret passions beyond theatre, were Shamanism, and the visual arts. In fact, during my final years as artistic director of the *InsideOut Theatre*, I attended a two year Shaman training program, as well as secretly harbouring a deep desire to become a visual artist. Guess what? New York hosts a rich and alive network of Shaman, as well as a project called Art Beyond Sight.

Naturally, I became involved deeply in both, and vowed to bring the riches of each back to Canada with me.

Although I have been legally blind since the age of seven, I knew I wanted to paint. The paintings you see here are my own, but I must give many thanks to Karen Close and her HeArt Fit project, It provided me with the opportunity to paint. Also, many thanks to the Kelowna Art Gallery for enthusiastically agreeing to host Canada's first art gallery tours for people who are sight impaired. Finally, eternal gratitude to my New York ayllu for welcoming me into their Shamanic circle. The Gods, they do conspire!



## Mind's I

Mind's I is my first painting. I rarely knew which colour I was finger painting with, at least, not until one of my painting companions would stop by to remark from a visual perspective. *Such a beautiful green*, or this looks very atmospheric, were common types of comments I would hear. The painting is acrylic, with quite a lot of modeling paste and other bits of stuff, including airplane shavings, which build up the surface, and make the piece interesting to the touch and pleasing to the eye. The ever so fun story behind this painting, hence its title, relates to my initial inspiration. I told Karen I had a deep

desire to paint what I see behind closed eyes, you might say; a world full of beautiful colour and dancing geometric shapes, accented by sparkling pin pricks of light. "Never mind that for the moment," was Karen's advice. So, I never "minded," and just painted from the heart. Now, I ask you to look closely, and tell me what you see.



## Step Mother

When I began my second piece, I had no idea what it was all about. That is the beauty of the process I use; the painting tells me what it is all about. As a freelance writer, I had just begun writing a memoir, which oddly wasn't including anything about the 30 years of my step family phenomenon; odd yes, but true. As the painting evolved, it became increasingly obvious to me, that the message was one of needing to include my step family experience in my memoir; at least my relationship with my step Mother. The painting is in her honour. Ironically, my original intent with this painting was to invite a bit more control, by self determining

the three colours I would use, as well as step away from finger painting only. As much as this was the case, my desire for some control was nevertheless superseded by the free flow of my subconscious, rendering the process yet again out of my control.

# BREAKING LOOSE

## Carolyn Cowan

**We are said to be born with a vast reservoir of intellect and creativity. From my perspective, our society tends to favour the intellect to the detriment of originality.** When I moved to Kelowna, I was determined to follow artistic impulses and break free of constraints I had placed on my own creative expression. To paraphrase myself, if that's possible, I spent the first two-thirds of my life in my head. The last one-third would be dedicated to exploring the artistic side of my personality.

After eighteen months, it's still hard to believe I live in the Okanagan Valley in B.C. I look outside my windows to agricultural land, blue green mountains and a deep blue lake. I was raised in the west, in south east B.C. and Lethbridge, Alberta. I have travelled around Europe, North Africa and worked in London for four years but remain a westerner at heart. I knew I would return home. The mountains, lakes and wide open spaces were in my bones.

## Rationality

Toronto, Ontario, was my home base for many years. I found that, like any large city, Toronto preferred the rational. Individual imagination and creativity were a low priority usually associated with minimal return on investment. After a time, the culture and the need for financial security tended to skewer my perspective and priorities. That's not said to blame the culture. I made decisions and set my own priorities. It's to my endless disadvantage that I'm lazy.

A necessary balance between work and an artistic outlet was missing. I enrolled in various English and writing courses, including programs in advertising copywriting. Copywriting was the most fun I had in writing. The copy could be funny, irreverent and quirky as long as it sold to the client and public. For a time, I tried to break into the advertising industry as a copywriter. The timing was wrong and I stopped trying.

I learned from that phase of my life that the playfulness of creating was missing. I mentally and physically craved it. I was drowning in boredom.

## Spirituality

Throughout my life, consciousness and spirituality have been fascinating sources for me to explore. Writings by some of the great world teachers and masters of spirituality and consciousness like Thomas Merton, Krishnamurti, J.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, Doris Lessing and the Sufi poet and writer,

## The Sanity of Hope

Carolyn Cowan

Hope and reality occupy different sides of a coin.

Each the antithesis of the other.

Hope, its function diminished through common use

From assuming its essential role in our health.

Reality, the consequence of our heartbeat moving forward

Relentlessly toward an end.

Wise counsel insists that reality is the most healthy place for us to reside.

Hope, in contrast, is a dream for happy endings.

It caresses us into a place

Where we are strong enough to survive.

When hope is dashed

As it surely is for everyone,

We descend into that black hole of despair, A place we dare not succumb to for long.

Healing begins as our spirit, like a magnet, Attracts new hope to make reality bearable.

Hope moves us forward and keeps us sane.

It is a balm that human beings

Apply to reality.

Hope is a wonder drug.

## Universal Grace

Carolyn Cowan

The state of grace exists.  
Whether sourced from outside  
Or within ourselves  
Is a mystery.

When grace floods our body and mind,  
We may have fought inner demons  
To arrive at a mental plateau  
That exists briefly as the unique  
State of grace.

I suggest most have  
Experienced grace simply  
Through aging.  
It is a powerful intersection  
On the far side of  
Happiness and contentment  
Merged as one.

Grace is one of Nature's  
Most generous and unexpected gifts.  
It is seldom given.  
Hence, so joyful its mark  
Upon our soul.

Idries Shah, exposed me to the promise of an internal world as rich and mysterious as the splendor of the natural world.

On a street corner in mid-Toronto, over 30 years ago, I suddenly understood the language of the spiritual masters: full consciousness on an endless continuum is a human evolutionary goal. I knew, that day, that the road to awareness required an unthinking mind. I was certain I could stop my thoughts. How hard could it be?

Impossible, as it turned out. I couldn't stop thinking even for two seconds. A mind clear of uninvited thought became my spiritual quest and an intellectual exercise.

During the following ten years, for all the hard work I invested, the effort offered me no obvious or tangible rewards. Still I persisted as the direction and effort seemed right to me. After that decade, in one moment, my consciousness changed or shifted. Words are inadequate to express the mystery although I can mention one change. I realized that previously the forward movement of my life unfolded sequentially, one event occurring after another. After the shift of consciousness, life around me unfolds simultaneously, in three dimensions. As Shakespeare said, so poetically, All the world's a stage. I understood what that meant. I viewed the world through a different lens.

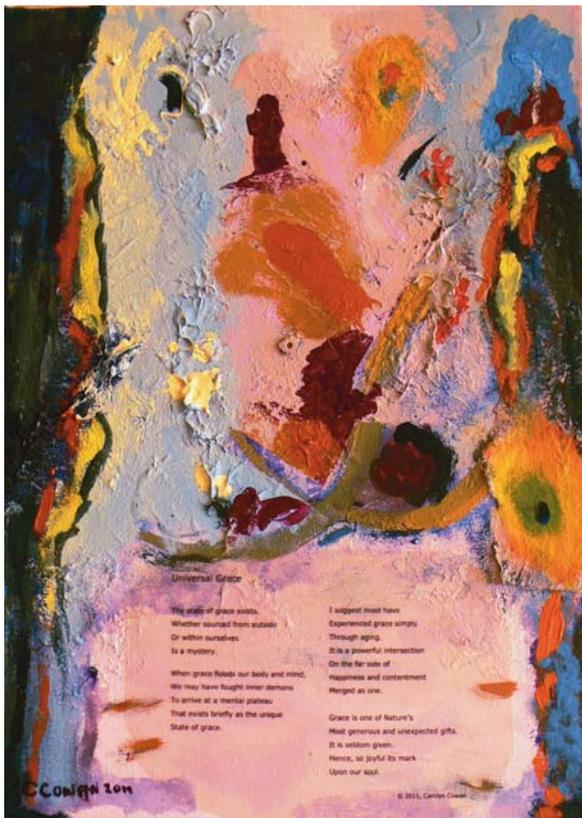
## Creativity

Looking back over my years in Toronto, I realize the problem was a lack of commitment to my own creativity. It would be wrong to suggest that I had no creative interests. They were, simply, in other people's artistry. I would seek it out and marvel at its inventiveness. My own creative impulses were ignored.

The missing piece persisted until I moved to the Kelowna. So much beauty and inspiration surround us here. It is difficult to suppress creativity when you step out the door and the environment grabs hold of something deep inside you. As a young child I decided that when I grew up I would be surrounded by beauty wherever I looked. It was a childish dream but, strangely enough, my life has evolved and the circle closed.

Through experience, I understand that creative expression, in its myriad forms, is essential to physical and mental health and a rich life. There appears to be a large and growing movement of art and health professionals who point to the stifling of human creativity as a source of malaise, disease, hopelessness, discontent and boredom.

Aside from those involved in the arts, almost everyone I meet genuinely insists that they lack creativity. To some extent, I include myself. Until just over one year ago, if



## Two Faces of Leadership

Carolyn Cowan

We devolve personal power to  
Those who take the lead.  
Many oblige and we follow.

Across centuries, top down leadership has  
Owned the world and served us up.

If forward motion of the species  
Is the evolutionary goal,  
Perhaps history beckons us toward  
Another style of leadership.

Leadership from behind.

We are adults  
With inherent responsibilities  
To ourselves, humankind and nature.  
We can appropriate the power  
Previously ceded to others to act on our  
behalf.

We are adults.  
We can look within ourselves for leadership  
On those issues that directly affect us.

Leaders from behind  
Recognize our strength and embolden us.  
They seek to shift the parceling of power  
Into a more democratic force.  
They hold the lantern high  
To illuminate our individual pathway.

anyone had suggested I could paint, I would have scoffed, certain of the lack of creativity hidden in the crevices of my psyche. That was until last July.

Since then, I attend a Tuesday morning painting group that meets at the Rotary Centre for the Arts. This is an atypical art class for all ages. The artists and aspiring artists are as atypical in their sense of community and generosity. There is no instruction aside from observations and suggestions from the other art makers in the group. The base philosophy of the class is that everyone is creative. Creativity is born within us as surely as intellect. Karen Close, the art instructor who started the program three years ago, suggests that the class concentrates on painting using only intuition and spontaneity, without thought to technique. The class is perfect for me. Aside from writing, I have no artistic training. At this point, I postpone art instruction until I am more secure and confident in my own style. Then, I'll work on technique.

## Process and Rewards

The class teaches that art is not in our ability. It's in the exploration of our ability. The exploration is best accomplished by turning off or ignoring the critical, persistent and annoying gremlin that we each carry in our head. The gremlin (a description borrowed from a friend) derives its pleasure from harassing us at vulnerable moments, especially when we are creating.

After painting for a few weeks last July, I began to write poetry and integrate it with a painting on the same canvas. Poetry and copywriting are cousins, however distant. They require the unconscious or conscious ability to conceptualize the essence of the idea or object and articulate the essence in visual and evocative words that will capture and hold the audience's attention.

In terms of my own process, I begin to paint or write a poem, then move back and forth between the two mediums. When I find myself stuck with painting, I work on the poem. When no words form, I return to the painting. Oftentimes, the painting has no obvious relationship to the poem. I don't question that. I do know that they originate from the same source. With experience, I expect to see more of a relationship or perhaps not. The artistic process involved is compatible with my personality and exercises my long-term goal of "living in the moment".

Over the years, I continue to progress toward the state of a clear mind. Whereas, at the beginning, controlling a thought was impossible, now, an unthinking mind lasts for a longer time. I am convinced, and only time will reveal, that poetic and painting creativity will increase as I continue to work at clearing my mind. The artists of the world seem to agree that creativity comes through the artist, not from the artist. Creativity moves like a stream that originates somewhere outside the body, moves through it, and ends outside the body on a canvas or page.

Painting and poetry resonate most with me when they are born from a quiet and unthinking state. During these creative episodes, poetic phrases



pop into my head fully formed. I seldom have to rewrite the poem, only apply minor edits. Amazingly, the poem expresses precisely what I am trying to say.

Like so many other aspiring artists I meet, I've discovered that painting has an unexpected and calming affect on the body and mind. We lose ourselves in the painting. It has nothing to do with talent. It's all in the process.

Creative expression is an integral part of my life today. I am convinced of the necessity for a balance between the creative and the functional. I am more free and confident in expressing myself, of thinking and living creatively. My sense of fun is no longer confined to family and friends. I have even accepted that, occasionally, I'm the only one laughing.

# CAREFUL SEEKING

*First of all begin to live out of the glory of your imagination, not your memory ... as noted by the Sages of Sivana in The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari by Robin S. Sharma*



**Life is full of surprises! I am always so intrigued with the many circumstances that bring two people together.** What is the message? What can we learn about ourselves? What can we learn about others and our world? It is like embarking on a new adventure.

I can still remember the state of my mind when I entered the Compassionate Communication workshop in Kelowna, 3 years ago. I was a forty-nine year old widow who was angry and confused about losing my husband and feeling like life had ripped me off. At the time I don't think I was fully aware of these feelings and yet here I was trying to learn ways to heal my heart, and move past this lonely, painful way of living.

Hazel was an 81 year old woman who also entered the Compassionate Communication workshop that day. She was also a widow who was feeling angry and confused about multiple losses in her life and feeling like life had ripped her off too. She also was unaware of these feelings and yet trying to learn ways to heal her heart and move past this lonely painful way of living.

As destiny would have it, the teacher paired us together to do some projects; from that moment on the seeds of a nurturing friendship began!!

Two beings brought together through life's painful losses! This to me is a perfect example of when one door closes another door opens.....if we trust in the process and allow these seeds to germinate!

Here we are three years later, teaching and learning from each other as we share our stories, feelings and emotions. In this sharing I know that I have gained so much insight into who I am and what my purpose in this life is.

Through the art of communication we can all help each other to grow and understand not only ourselves, but each other too!

We are all responsible for our own happiness. When we become peaceful and content on the inside, our perspectives, and actions begin to change. This change is contagious! That's the alchemy possible through the art of conversation.

**SANDY** Hazel what would you say to me if I were a small child and you were in your last days of life and I asked you for the one piece of advice that you felt would help me to have a happy, peaceful life?

**HAZEL** I would tell you to believe in and trust yourself!

**S.** Wow! That is powerful. Do you believe in yourself?

**H.** No, but that is something I am really trying to grasp and hopefully will before it is too late, before I run out of time.

**S.** It must be scary to feel like you are running out of time?

**H.** Yes, it is because I still feel like I have not got it. I am feeling a bit of anxiety and fear that I will not find this peace within. I would love to truly understand who I am and feel it and know it in my heart, beyond a doubt. I feel sometimes that it is too much work and I am getting very tired of searching and trying to find it.

At 84 years old I am still searching for the same thing I was searching for as a young girl, that ever elusive inner peaceful self. It feels like everyone else is getting it and I am not. I get so frustrated!

**S.** Do you believe it is possible? Do you have a feeling that you are somehow getting glimpses of your peaceful eternal self, your true self?

**H.** Yes, I think I do get glimpses and then as quickly as they come they disappear. I want that feeling to stay and not to go. It seems like it vanishes too quickly and then all I am left with is this struggle between my head and my heart. There is a part of me that just wants some guarantees that all will be well. I guess I have some very unrealistic ideas of how things should be. I want everything and everyone to be the way I need it to be or else I don't feel like I can be happy.

**S.** Well that sounds like quite an insight into how you are feeling. It sounds like you need to have guarantees, and that you struggle with the uncertainty and the loss of control over situations in your life!

**H.** Yes, that's it exactly. I really have a hard time with accepting things the way they are and a really hard time with not knowing what is going to happen or not happen in my life. I WANT TO KNOW, NOW! I guess I am really impatient as well as making excuses for why I cannot allow myself to find that peace and contentment deep inside myself. I guess I need to work on taking more responsibility for my own happiness. Ugggggg, it is so much work!

**S.** It sounds like you really want peace and contentment, but perhaps are looking in the wrong direction.

**H.** Perhaps, I think there is an answer everywhere you look? But you have to see it! I have trouble recognizing it, I guess.

Since I have been on my own, I have come to realize that I used to think that I was pretty worldly - but now, I am more conscious of my inner self and

with that comes lots of inner conflict and confusion. It is like learning to live all over again. I used to think that living life without family was perfectly manageable, but now I am feeling a big sense of isolation.

This quote I read last night comes to mind: *Hurt is the teacher, wisdom is the lesson.*

I am reading the *The Lost Mode of Prayer* By Gregg Braedon, and it is really giving me a lot of insight into life and into myself. I feel good when I read it.

**S.** I think it is great that you are reading inspiring and positive books that can help teach you who you are, and introduce new ways to find more peace inside. Feeding the mind with positive thoughts creates a healthy environment where we can begin to access deeper levels of consciousness. This leads us to understand, know and love our true self.

I also think that all the struggles you are feeling are so similar to the struggles that are felt by so many of us. I believe that our experiences in life mislead us. Through our individual perceptions we create a very defensive and protective way of seeing and believing. This brings to mind the wise ancient saying: *our thoughts become words, words become actions, actions become our character and our character becomes our destiny.*

It is like you were saying before about seeing things. It is all about perception really. If we perceive something to be good, it is good and if we perceive something to be bad, it is bad. Sounds simple, but what this actually does is send messages to all our cells, which equal our physical body and mind. We interpret these messages as good or bad, happy or sad. Does this make sense to you?

**H.** I think you lost me a bit. I think I know what you're saying, but I guess I just don't have a clue with this information. How do you purge all of these past painful experiences all at once? (Hazel is laughing.)

**S.** That I do not know. I do think that our perceptions of our experiences, if they were negative, will then cause us to see ourselves in a negative manner. These perceptions are what cloud our knowing, so we cannot see the truth. The truth is that we are not our experiences, our pain, or the thoughts in our mind. We are so much more than that. We just have to learn how to change our perceptions. When we can learn how to do this, our lives and our feelings about ourselves will change too.

**H.** How do you see the truth? I truly want to grasp this and yet I find it hard to fully understand how.

**S.** I know what you mean. Sometimes I feel like I am *in the flow* and I am truly connected to my *self*. Then, something will come out of left field and boom, I am taken right back to that old way of believing and responding. The good news is that the more I practice yoga and mindful ways of being conscious,



I am finding that I can recover more rapidly than I used to. I think this shorter recovery is called progress and is part of the process. Life is an ongoing process. If we can look at ourselves with more compassion and understanding, we can nurture ourselves. It is so exciting to me that this is available to all of us; we just have to keep reaching towards the light and we will grow. This is the law of nature.

**H.** Okay, if you say so. I know intellectually what you are saying. It makes sense, but I don't feel it - I mean really feel it. I guess that is what I am trying to grasp, to feel a real connection between my head and my heart. Unfortunately, at the moment I have a real disconnection.

I have never really talked so much about myself to anyone before. I have had more dialogue with you about myself than with anyone else. I have always been mindful not to burden people with my feelings.

I can definitely feel a difference in my energy since I have started this process of sharing and looking deeper into and expressing myself. It is a bit scary, because what if I discover something I don't like about myself? I am beginning to see that I am quite resistant to change and the unknown. It scares me.

**S.** Yes, change can be scary sometimes. What other things are you doing that allow you to communicate to yourself who you are?

**H.** Well, I have just started going to heART Fit, which is a spontaneous process painting class. I have gone twice, and notice that some things are coming up. During the class I am becoming a bit more aware of some of the ways in which I respond to situations. After the class, I feel like I have been away - like on a trip. I guess that is what you call being in the moment; it is helping me to become more present. We shall see how the process goes.

In our next issue, Hazel and Sandy will continue this interview.

# ANSWERING THE CALL TO CREATE

## Karen Close



Painting by Karen Close

**Early in the first week of this twenty-first century, I was CALLED TO CREATE while enjoying an early morning walk on the beach in Maui.** The call came from a pile of coral along the shoreline. I knew exactly which piece was seeking me. I picked it up and saw my husband, daughter and son merged within this chunk of melded life forms. Stuffing the coral into my beach bag, I felt my heart pound and my mind blur. It was five days before my fifty-third birthday. Since turning fifty my mind had been in a constant whirl of agitation. The gift of mid-life retirement had given me time for myself and the luxury of time for contemplation. Yet, I felt a deeper unrest such as I'd never experienced. In the juggling act that had consumed the past four decades of my life, I'd never really experienced time.

The gift of mid-life retirement had given me time for myself and the luxury of time for contemplation. Yet, I felt a deeper unrest such as I'd never experienced. In the juggling act that had consumed the past four decades of my life, I'd never really experienced time. As a wife, mother of two children, full time teacher and part time student, I had learned to manage time. I had not considered how to savour and enjoy it. I knew how to fill my time, but not how to let it fulfill me. I had denied my 'self'. I needed to be introduced to kairois. The ancient Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time, the latter signifies a time in between, a moment, an undetermined period of time in which something special happens. It's soul time.

With my new beach find in hand, I rushed back to our hotel and boldly presented this chunk of limestone to my husband and young adult children. They stared, a bit incredulous, as I gushed about how I could see all of us clearly entwined in this piece of coral. They looked blindly. My husband said, "I hope you're not thinking of taking it home. That's frowned upon by native Hawaiians." "Then I'll paint it." The words blurted out. I recognised the call to create. I had been an English and Art teacher and had taught a generation of youth to find themselves through creative expression. Blindly though, I'd let responsibilities prevent me from allowing myself this gift - but I did have supplies. When I'd packed for this new millennium, I'd decided to bring a small watercolour kit with me. I hadn't yet used it. Holding that piece of coral, I headed for the pool. I set myself up at a table, and began to let my eyes unravel all that seemed buried within this remnant of earlier life forms. My soaring imagination was my guide. I was filled with optimism. Water had

nurtured and formed the coral and so I reasoned it should inform my actions. I didn't know what I was seeking or why, but I felt powerful. Wetting the page, I dropped bits of paint. I blew on them. I joined them together in an invisible pattern only I could discern. I allowed myself to be immersed in a process that was directed by my eyes, sometimes open, sometimes closed, both my hands, and an inner voice. Kairos enveloped and cared for me while time evaporated. There was confusion, struggle and fear, but a need to persist and stay with the moment. The part of the coral, whose form had looked to me like my children, dissolved within my vision and on the surface of my painting. "Trust the process" I heard. I breathed deeply. "They are grown. Their lives are separate now". I relaxed into my creative spirit and soared into new understanding.

Throughout the next decade, I sought to let my experience of being inform me. I have watched my life grow, like I watched my painting grow, into personal meaning and needed understanding. After reading Shirley MacLaine's book *Sage-ing While Age-ing*, I developed my own theory of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. I dreamed about evolving in community and about making a difference by encouraging others to reach out to share the joy and healing power of creative expression.

Within every community, there are valuable untapped resources of adults ready to respond to their creative urgings and role model the joy of creative expression within their families and the extended community. *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* is about awakening to and sharing human potential. Adult participation in intergenerational arts activities may lead to exchange of new values and knowledge.

When I became a grandmother and began to learn from my granddaughter, my resolve strengthened. The words of Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* have always inspired me:

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday ...

His were the words I wanted to heed with this next generation of my children.



Xyla adds to her grandmother's work.

When I noticed how determined my granddaughter was to make her mark, particularly with her food, I seized the opportunity. I started facilitating her to paint. I created an acrylic background canvas on which she could happily spread her beats, blueberries, all her colourful foods as she finished her meals. Later we sprayed her marks with polymer to preserve them. She is now two, and her room is filling with an expanding gallery of 'spontaneous process paintings' we've made together. She will not grow up inhibited by beliefs that her marks are not those of an artist or that there is some level of appropriateness to which she must aspire.

I now have two granddaughters with whom I paint. In all things, I encourage them to be expressive beings. In January 2012, I will celebrate my sixty-fifth birthday. My gift to my 'self' is to create a path for the journey into the house of tomorrow in which I strive to be like them' (my grandchildren) and not to make them like you or me.

They move in their bodies with joy eagerly dancing to each new experience. I am in the vanguard of the Baby Boomer generation with a value system where I have often felt at odds. My hope for the *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* journal is to build a community of playful, creative beings open to inner wisdom and generatively sharing dreams for the house of tomorrow.

*C=ME Creativity equals me to a greater power. "M" equals the mass of knowledge from all that I have experienced combined with "E", all the energy I bring to the act of creating,* Gene D. Cohen, MD

# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

## A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close  
& Carolyn Cowan

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**Our raison d'être is to provide a showcase and venue for all ages to express their creativity.**

*Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture. – Elliot Eisner, emeritus professor of Art and Education at the Stanford University School of Education*

Our aspiration behind this quarterly online journal, *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*, is to develop, over time, an organic art piece. Our hope is this first edition will resonate with a broad population.

We encourage you to not just read us, but also to participate with us. Whether you are an experienced artist, or just beginning to explore your own innate creative impulses, we urge you to join your voice with ours.

This first issue of the journal is laid out in broad strokes. Each new issue will expand the content into unforeseen territory in the same way authentic art evolves organically from its seed of inspiration. We are a small grassroots group of volunteers compiling this first issue in September 2011. Our intent is to return quarterly, and to incorporate your responses – both critical input and creative expressions.

Let us evolve together as we share and get to know each other better, trusting that the best in each of us will facilitate *creative spirit, grace and gratitude* for all of us.