

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



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EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

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SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Lent

FROM THE EDITOR

When I heard author Noreena Hertz discuss her most recent book, *The Lonely Century: How to Restore Human Connection in a World That's Pulling Apart*, I wanted to introduce her to our Journal. Hertz asserts, "Loneliness has become the defining condition of the twenty-first century. It is damaging our health, our wealth, and our happiness." This issue of the Journal concludes our 10th year of publishing the stories of those who have found wellness and happiness through adventuring into their creative spirits. Some have even improved their wealth. I suggest creative expression is an antidote to loneliness and calls out patiently to each of us, requiring only that we engage with all that we can be.

For many, our full name – *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* – suggests a kind of spiritual quest. A friend sent me this quote: "Creative practices are like therapeutic massage for the soul. They allow us to work out the knots, soothe the aches and pains, and ready ourselves for another day" (adapted

from Australian clinical psychologist Stan Steindl, author of *The Gifts of Compassion*).

The self-reflection that emerges when we create with curiosity, and a yearning to truly see, feel and share develop compassion, for ourselves and all we encounter. As we probe, we begin to feel a oneness within ourselves and with the universe, and we offer our audiences the opportunity to feel with us. Connection is the gift of creativity for the giver and the receiver. The Journal is ardent in our conviction that savouring self through creative expression brings a strong and sustaining sense of well-being. When you challenge yourself to enter all that you are with love, abandon perceived judgments and explore urges you might have repressed, you open to the beauty of your own capacities. This understanding of creative spirit as the route into true human connection needs to be reinforced in the 21st century.

Advancements in neuroscience have achieved the ability to measure how our activities, including creative expression, affect the brain. During the Journal's 10 years of publishing, we

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have been proud to be at the vanguard of emerging understanding about creativity, and encouraging our worldwide contributors and readers to be *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. Sharing and celebrating individual creative spirit unites us to each other and will evolve cultures into practices that will generate actions to sustain human connection better. Authentic creative expression is a path to empathy.

When we make art to know ourselves, to locate ourselves in the web of being and to make ourselves feel more alive, whether alone or in a group studio, what we create can be like a compass guiding us into the richness of being. I invite you to savour the wisdom of the articles in this issue and their glimpses into refusing loneliness. Choose your way to be with the final words of this issue by poet-musician John Lent:

“How lucky I am. Here I am in my own retirement, ageing with my own generation, and still wanting to recreate some of the joys and sorrows of that ageing through language, through creativity. What luck!”

Karen Close

SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

• **Article is to be related to aging and creativity, in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining wisdom and self awareness and/or the act of harvesting life’s wisdom as a legacy for future generations.**

- Article to be attached as a document in .rtf format;
- 500 to a 1500 word maximum;
- Photos: Please attach each photo separately including: the writer’s headshot photo and four or five photos, related to article . All photos should be attached in high resolution jpg format with a caption;
- Insert the word “**photo**” with its caption within the article where you would like each image placed (we’ll try to honour this request as layout permits).
- Please include brief bio information (one or two short paragraphs) placed at the end of your article; this is meant to give the reader an idea of who you are, your passions and/or what you do and have done with your life that feels relevant to the article. Include contact info: email, website, blog address – whatever you want to include. For each journal, due date is the 10th of the month preceding release date. We release around the equinoxes and solstices. **For next issue due date is August 10th, 2021**
- Email the article and photographs to karensageing@gmail.com

Antiquity identified a sage as a wise person ... wisdom is a form of goodness, and is not scientific knowledge but another kind of cognition.

– Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b

A CREATIVE LIFE REINVENTS ITSELF



Linda Lovisa

“I love the outdoors. My paintings are a visual journal of my adventures. They reflect the places I have been and the beauty I have seen. I am drawn by the light, colour and movement in the subjects and scenes I choose. I have been creating for as long as I can remember. My hope is that my art will inspire others to want to create too.” Linda

I had a dream. Sometimes you just have to follow your dreams, even against all odds. That is exactly what I did. I opened New Moon Gallery in November of 2009. I was advised it might not be a good time to open a new business; the economy was spiralling downwards at the time. My heart was telling me differently.

I had very big plans for New Moon Gallery. It was exciting! It would be a place to teach and to create works of art. It would also be somewhere to showcase and celebrate art, a creative space for artists to show and share their work with a community that had no art centre. I did just that! It was unique and special.

It began in a small space at Paynter’s Market, then it moved to Dobbin Road, and finally to its 2000 square foot space on Byland Road. Those ten and a half years were both the best of times and the worst of times, but I never gave up. At the end of the day, while closing the door, I would look back into this inspiring place and smile. “This is a good place!” I would say. I always had more to do and share. My students, adults and after-school children, were a huge part of my mission: sharing the joy of creating with as many people as I could. Sharing the joy of seeing the world around us was my passion that kept the gallery alive. It was my determination that was the driving force in trying to instill in a community that the arts are an important part of healthy living. It is in times of need that the arts can be a big part of healing. I have lived this first-hand, and I have seen it for myself over the 25+ years I have been teaching. I am not just talking about visual arts; I mean all art forms. At the gallery there was live music; there were live performances, poetry readings and artists’ talks by those working in different media. I tried as much as possible to include various types of art forms in the gallery so that when you entered its doors you were amazed. I wanted the public to feel at home in its inviting environment. I wanted them to know that they could come anytime for a tea or a coffee to talk about art and to enjoy the ambiance. It was a place to educate others about artists: What it takes to become an artist. How each artist pours heart and soul into what they do. Sharing my love of the arts was

The arts are an important part of healthy living



my joy. I was living my dream every day. On April 30, 2020, New Moon Gallery closed its doors for the last time.

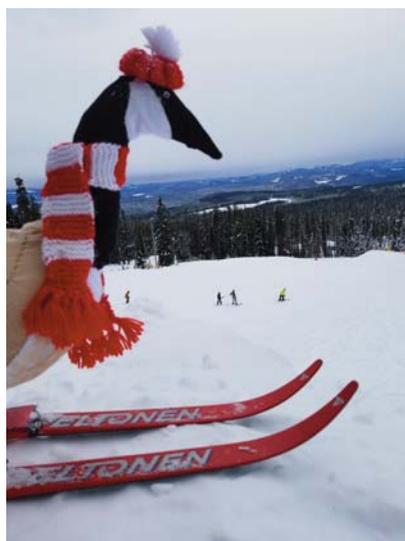
May 1, 2020, a new day, a new beginning and new direction. I was still reeling over the closure of the gallery, but I had an unusual saviour to keep me smiling and thinking about the future.

On December 26, 2019, a goose was born. It all came about in an interesting way. I had the most amazing Christmas at the gallery, and the new year was looking very good. Our Christmas with family and friends was full of love and thankfulness. All of the celebrating had occurred and Boxing Day was a quiet day at home. I had not painted in weeks as the gallery was busy, so there was very little time to create. I was so excited finally to sit down and paint. My son and I had a conversation about doing some cards for the gift shop at Big White Ski Resort. He lives up there and he had spoken to the shop manager; she welcomed the idea. I thought about doing my usual winter watercolours, but on that day I was feeling especially playful and thought about a Canada Goose on skis! I had so much fun creating the four images. I shared them with my son, he laughed out loud and said, "Mom, there is

a story there." I shared the images with friends and they said the same thing. So, how does a Canada Goose end up skiing? What's his name? It was like naming a child. My husband and I thought it had to be a G name or a C name. The search began, and *Gordon the Canada Goose* was born.

The story begins: Gordon lives in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, Canada. There are vineyards, orchards and small farms all around Lake Okanagan. The farmers are busy harvesting fruits and vegetables. Fall is in the air; leaves are changing colour and Gordon is very excited about the journey south.

The first colourful page shows the valley with vines and orchards in the foreground and a snowy mountain in the distance. The page is bordered with fruits and vegetables, which are planned to strike a conversation with the young listener or reader. Creating the story was so much fun. I used some skiing experiences that most people have when they learn to ski. One thing led to another, and the next thing you know there are 58 paintings and a story that is entertaining. The prototype was ready to pick up at the printer's on the eighth of May, 2020. I was so excited to see the book, to feel the book and leaf through the pages. I was in tears. There was so much emotion. I could not believe I had created this children's book. I could hardly wait to share it. I had so many more stories to tell. So, the book "Gordon Goes Skiing" is the first in a series of books under the name of *The Adventures of Gordon the Canada*



Top: "Gordon Goes Skiing"
Above: Is that Gordon on the slopes?



Illustration of Gordon and his friend Marty heading up Carrot Mountain for the next book in the Gordon series

The creative mind never really stops.

Goose. I am currently writing and illustrating book two of *The Adventures of Gordon the Canada Goose*. In the story Gordon and his friend Marty head up Carrot Mountain to see if there are carrots on Carrot Mountain.

I also published a second book in October 2020. I had written a winter poem years ago that I had always wanted to illustrate, so I busied myself creating the images for *Winter Came Softly*. It was released just in time for Christmas. It is a completely different book than the Gordon book.

I find it hard to believe that I have been creating for 50 years. I still have so much to do. I truly believe I will be creating on the way to my grave (laughing out loud).

Currently, I am continuing my virtual teaching with adults via Zoom as well as in-person outdoor sessions with my after-school students. I am painting a series in acrylics, continuing to create with watercolour and am writing two more books. Do I miss my gallery? Yes, I do. I miss the people and their art. I miss art lovers. Will I open another gallery? Not likely, I lived that dream. Now I'm on to the next dream. The creative mind never really stops. What is the next idea? How do I create that? As an artist I am always learning. Nothing is perfect in our world. There is always

something to strive for. All it takes is one step. It just takes the will to try something new. Let the arts excite you and bring you joy. *Create for you first* – that has always been my motto. I am so happy that I have art in my life.

To obtain copies of my books, *The Adventures of Gordon the Canada Goose* – “Gordon Goes Skiing” (appropriate for ages 3 and up) and “*Winter Came Softly*,” please email me at llovisa58@gmail.com.

Linda Lovisa paints alla prima (direct approach). This type of painting keeps the colours fresh and vibrant, which she mixes directly on the canvas. Her techniques include Impressionism, symbolism and abstraction. Although she works primarily in acrylic, she continues to explore a wide range of media including pastel, mixed media and watercolour.

Linda's paintings have appeared in exhibits across Canada and the United States and can be found in private and public collections nationally and internationally. Linda has been honoured by The Federation of Canadian Artists with a Gold Award and an Award of Excellence.

Linda's creativity and beautiful artwork can also be found in two children's books she has recently written and illustrated in watercolour. She is looking forward to sharing more stories with you in her series *The Adventures of Gordon the Canada Goose*.

Please visit www.lindalovisaartcanada.ca



THRIVING IN THE AGE OF LONELINESS



Susan Leblanc

I remember that, when I was younger and actively creating something with my hands, there was a sense of calm that allowed my body to relax and ideas to take shape. I felt a sense of being myself, a feeling that didn't question if or how I fit in. That feeling continues today as I paint without a focus on outcome or image, but rather allow myself simply to apply paint on paper without thought or intention. I believe that our creativity, or creating, is an engagement of soulful energy. It is energy that we may not be aware of, yet it fuels our experience of being human. It is energy that renews us, gives us a sense of love, belonging. This sense is an antidote to a perceived loneliness, an isolation we can feel in our 3D, human only, perception of reality.

Loneliness has perhaps become its own pandemic within our global Covid pandemic. It may not be that Covid created an increase in the experience of loneliness, but rather it exposed what was already present in our society – a growing perception that one is isolated, of no significance, does not matter or is easily dismissed. We have placed an emphasis on being *social* beings who are hard-wired to be together, therefore we need to gather and spend time together. The pandemic has limited our ability to do this and offered novel ways of being together, but not in person. I feel that our understanding and experience of “social” and “loneliness” are being challenged by the constraints of Covid and helping us to see how our understanding of both is limited because we increasingly relate to each other only on the surface, the external look and feel of being together: Do I fit in? Am I like you? And what might that mean? One then puts effort into finding those who are like what one may desire to be, based on internal longings to match a desired look. If the effort to find those like-minded ones remains a search that does not include self-reflection and a process of looking into one's SELF, the result may be a never-ending sense of disappointment, loneliness and increasing dissatisfaction with life.

Loneliness, however, may be the key to engaging our own creative energy and thriving. In a recent study inspired by our experience with living a pandemic, it has been shown that when people are alone they are more easily able to tap into intuition, a unique perspective or vision with less emphasis on “fitting in” or concern for being criticized (December 2020 issue of *Nature Communications*). Creativity can nourish, inspire, heal and develop a sense of confidence in being and belonging from a broader and deeper perspective than comparing oneself to the people and reality around them.

Our creativity, or creating, is an engagement of soulful energy... It is energy that renews us, gives us a sense of love, belonging.



Girl Dreaming

At some point I felt the movement in my hands slowing and the desire to look into the painting for images.

I believe our creative energy, our creative spirit, our creation energy resource us in a way that other activities do not. This energy allows our memory to be activated and for the motion of our hands to shape that memory, that knowing, into our awareness. This deeper awareness expands our perception of who we are, and what we are here for. Remembering within soulful energy promotes well-being. It connects us to the oneness we are seeking in our external relationships, but cannot find simply by being “social.”

In the phenomenon of human becoming, the ability, the responsibility to develop and to expand one’s SELF is an imperative. That is to say that I believe it is essential that we know of our SELF first so that we can thrive in any condition and contribute in a conscious, knowing way to life on the planet. If we only develop from references to external representations, we will remain limited in our understandings of being human and of human nature and human potential. As a species we will not evolve in relation to the planet and instead will stagnate. Our current global circumstances are encouraging – even guiding – us to look more closely within for that which we are seek-

ing outside of our SELF.

Girl Dreaming is a painting I completed a few years ago and gave to a dear friend of mine as she spent her last days of life on her well-loved couch, nestled into her thoughts and dreams where she could create a reality much easier and more gentle than the physical one she was soon to leave.

This painting started, as all of my paintings do, with no plan or intention. I simply picked colours that felt right and quickly applied them to the canvas. I played with water, as I had a sense of being fluid and it felt cleansing to allow the paint to move freely over the canvas. As happens, at some point I felt the movement in my hands slowing and the desire to look into the painting for images. I could see many faces peering this way and that. Some of the faces were looking directly at me and some seemed more like reflections. I chose one outline to enhance, and that became the girl within the ship. It took very little to enhance both of these images. From there arose the bubbles that to me percolate as thoughts in a vast ocean of possibility. The snake is a companion that appears in many of my paintings, and this one floated in with markings inspired by Aboriginal art that I had seen on a recent trip to Australia. That trip opened my mind to dreaming as a conversation with my higher heart. The seahorse took time to emerge, although the image was quite clear to start. It became apparent to me that this seahorse had a very specific way it desired to be presented. I found that I could paint it only when I left all preconceived ideas of a seahorse behind. I needed a clear mind and

Over the course of a few months the images gradually emerged, and I felt when it was time to stop.

a loose hand in order for the brush strokes to form the image. This often meant that I painted in short spurts, as it was a challenge to remain free of thought and loose of hand. Over the course of a few months the images gradually emerged, and I felt when it was time to stop.

The girl who is dreaming, I know intimately as my deeper SELF (Soul Evolving Love Form). She is awareness within me of love and belonging that transcends our physical-only reality. The ship she is in represents leadership or my own way of navigating life. The snake is a companion symbolizing healing and rebirth, and for me represents the creation process. The seahorse is a symbol and totem animal for me. It has many meanings in different cultures. The meaning that most resonated at the time of this painting and when I gave it to my friend was the awareness of stretching perspectives, particularly spiritually and emotionally, and of unlocking matters that have been buried deep in the unconscious.

It was three years ago this May that my dear friend transitioned. My friend and I never did have the conversations I wanted to have about what was being unlocked within her. I trust this is something for me to explore and understand further within myself. *Girl Dreaming* was returned to me and it now sits in a place of honour in my home.

Susan LeBlanc initially trained as a nurse, completing her BScN at the University of British Columbia in 1986 and a Master's of Health Sciences at McMaster University in 1990. She found a deep love in caring for adults and children undergoing treatment for cancer, and this formed the basis of her educational studies and work experience for over 20 years. Laterally, Susan began an ongoing exploration into her own creativity through the art of intuitive painting, or what Susan now calls *The Art of Becoming*. This has been a journey into the deeper reaches of her soul, which has nourished her heart and opened her being to creative potential. Susan's journey has shown her the importance of recognizing and developing the creativity that dwells within each of us and how that creativity can be central to our sense of well-being.

Editor's note: "People with the Seahorse totem are 'the knight in shining armour.' They will sacrifice their own needs to help others. These folks have a strong desire to protect the young and those weaker than themselves. People with this spirit animal totem have a gentle strength and serenity about them" (seahorse-animal-totem-symbolism).

CABIN. CANCER. COVID. KERNEL.



Eleanor Deckert

I sold my clarinet. Kevin and I got married, jumped into our VW van, left the city in Ontario, found land in B.C. and built our tiny, uninsulated log cabin. “Back-to-Basics” we called it back in the 70s. It was the hippy thing to do. “Back-to-Nature.” Grow a garden. Raise chickens. Milk a goat. Heat with firewood. Become “self-sufficient.”

Reducing our physical needs to the bare minimum, we became vegetarians, bought second-hand, traded work with others. It was fun to solve problems and get a start on life without debt, without pressure to keep up with the Joneses, without electricity, running water, a phone or neighbours. Selling my clarinet was symbolic of all the cultural and artistic things I left behind. Does God really care whether or not I attend church? Can I not sing alone without a choir? Does a person really need an art gallery? an orchestra? live theatre? a Christmas pageant?

It would be impossible to describe the thrill of achievement I felt during those first days and nights living in our cabin. In mid-December, 1978, the temperature was still mild. We melted snow. We sawed logs. We snuggled into our zipped-together sleeping-bags. We were 21 years old and we had conquered the world, or so we thought.

On December 28, the temperature dropped overnight to -40C. The radio said it would last for three weeks. The van wouldn’t start. I lost my job. We hitchhiked to town for my last paycheque, then stocked up on essentials and faced the extreme endurance test. There were only three things to do every day: go outside to scoop more snow to melt for water, bundle up to continue using the handsaw for more firewood, climb up the ladder into the loft to burrow into our sleeping bags for warmth. Did I mention we only had a cook-stove with a firebox about the size of a shoebox? The fire had to be fed every one-and-a-half hours. Add sleep deprivation to the list of hardships.

When the bitter cold shifted and mild temperatures returned, there was another, harder to recognize difficulty. Everything was grey. The sky was continually overcast. The logs, floor boards and plywood table were grey. My layers of clothing were black or navy blue or grey. The monotony was, well, monotonous. I made happy faces with raisins on my oatmeal. I braided the bread dough. I made pancakes in the shape of our initials. I covered the table with floral fabric. I noticed the redness in the twigs of some bushes and arranged them with evergreen branches and yellow grasses for a winter bouquet.

Late February was my husband’s birthday. I was saving oil pastels and a spiral-bound sketch pad to give to him. I ended up using them myself. And

Everything was grey ... monotonous ... I made happy faces with raisins on my oatmeal. I braided the bread dough. I made pancakes in the shape of our initials.



Our 1978 cabin

I began to volunteer. I brought music and dance, storytelling and acting, rhymes and games to the children ... Why is creating so necessary?

coloured pencils, too. And fabric. Before we left Ontario, I had raided my mother's sewing closet for scraps so I could make us a quilt, imagining how quaint it would be for my log-cabin lifestyle. Colour! It felt like vitamins were pouring into my eyes, spreading nourishment throughout my body. Looking for ways I could bring beauty to my days became very important. I remembered reading that Corrie Ten Boom (who hid Jews in Holland and was herself imprisoned) had pulled threads of one colour from her pants to use to embroider patterns on her shirt. I remembered reading in Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" series of memoirs that Laura

stood with her blind sister, Mary, to describe the vivid sunset, the prairie's abundant flowers, the swirl and swoop of the migrating birds. I thought of young David the shepherd who would one day be king, playing his harp, composing the Psalms. Yes. Even in circumstances of tremendous lack, beauty is a necessity.

When our situation improved, my husband was employed, we again had a vehicle and children arrived, but my sense of isolation lingered. I began to volunteer. I brought music and dance, storytelling and acting, rhymes and games to the children in the nearby town. I led a two-hour Sunday school with art projects galore, skits and songs, murals and maps. Every single child who attended came back for more.

What was happening? Why is creating so necessary? I observed the life force as I learned to tend my vegetable garden. Potatoes in the cellar know there is life within and reach their sprouting shoots towards even a tiny spark of light. Onions in the pantry and garlic in the refrigerator know when it is springtime and send pale green spears out to explore. Chicks hatch. Bulbs reach. Seeds break open and reach downwards for food and upwards for light. They all want to live.

Why does a spider build a web? Why does each kind of bird build its own kind of nest? They want to live. They need to make. I want to live, too. I seek what I need. I can live without a lot of things, but, in actual fact, I *need* colour, music, smiles and materials of some kind with which to express my creativity. I discovered this need in my loneliest of times, in our cabin way back in 1978. The experience of poverty and isolation had stripped me of so much, yet the life force within me, my creative callings, found ways to seek nourishment by both giving and receiving beauty. Perhaps the Creator has built the drive for creativity into each living being in all of creation?

Many years and many projects later, hardship struck again. Breast cancer. Every hour of every day was overwhelmingly spent learning, crying, making stressful decisions – angry, overflowing with self-pity, anxious, afraid. Death seemed to be stalking close beside me, torturing my nights, laughing at my feeble efforts to challenge him. Would information, interventions and a "positive attitude" be enough to exile the spectre of death and



Top: Eleanor the kid magnet with more children and the newspaper photographer
Above: Volunteering with kids is always a cheerful way to make music

This I know from experience. There is beauty. I need it. I can make it. I can receive it.

restore life?

As if I needed further insult, I had just submitted my first full-length manuscript for publication: my long-promised memoir, my Magnum Opus. I was at the top of my creative game, but then to be plunged simultaneously into a battle-to-the-death was terrifying. I had to travel five hours and stay in the lodge for a month to receive cancer treatments. I brought my manuscript to edit. I didn't touch it. I brought cheerful sewing. I didn't touch it. "You'll make new friends," my friends at home encouraged me. I spoke to no one.

What I *did* do was walk. I walked to church, to the homeopathic doctor, to window shop, into neighbourhoods with different kinds of houses. Although I did not actively make beauty, I found beauty. The hyacinths were in full bloom, with daffodils and tulips dancing together. The lilacs were opening and fruit trees blossoming. Architecture interested me. Hippy clothing, formal clothing, children's clothing caught my eye. Even shoe stores gave my curiosity a moment to pause and refill my creative imagination. Who would buy these? What else would they wear? Where would they be going? I invented characters, places and events. I had spent so much unhappy energy with worry and sleepless nights. I needed to find ways to refill my heart through my eyes.

I listened to every phrase of text and hymn while I attended morning Mass. I felt as if I was gold-panning, sifting through the prayer book I had brought from home. I searched for nuggets of truth and beauty preserved by others who had faced loss, lack and life-threatening situations. I made it through that dreadful time and returned home to find my husband had given me a pot of miniature daffodils, their trumpets blaring a welcome to my triumphal entry.

And now we face Covid. Restrictions. Isolation. Confusion. Anxiety. How long will this last? Will I ever have the basic necessities of a smile? a hug? a family gathering? Will I ever sing in harmony again? Will I ever attend a live performance? church? participate in a group of any kind? Can I somehow overcome the stress and, like the dandelion coming up through the pavement, find my own expression of beauty, creativity, become more and more who I am?

I'll be the first to admit, isolation and stress are not fertile ground for an abundant outpouring of exploratory new learning or the freedom to dabble, focus or produce loveliness. However, with Covid we do have time – a time to experiment – time to discover – time to ponder – time to experience – time to be calm – time to avoid the sensation of not-enough-time pressure. And



At the market

maybe, just maybe, time to produce something new *because* of the lack.

Under pressure or during times of difficulty, composers compose, poets write, singers hear lyrics deep inside and grab a pen, visual artists have patterns dropped in their laps, painters slap and dab and stroke and mix and notice and experiment. Can we allow our activities to become exploratory and not make performance the goal?

I don't like restrictions. I don't like poverty, illness or isolation. Yet, during these times in my life, by reducing to the bare minimum, there seemed to be more room in which to sense the kernel – my life force. How does it want to create? What is at hand?

How can I use the materials I already have? What message wants to be expressed? Or what does it feel like to play? Do I dare to try something new? Maybe, with neither an instructor nor an audience, there is no "right way."

Do I remember how to play? When we lived in the cabin, when springtime came, I arranged rocks in a pattern along the pathway: big small small, big small small... When I was in cancer treatments, I brought greeting cards with me from loved ones, their pictures and words were so encouraging, beauty I took in when I had no energy to give any beauty out.

This I know from experience. There is beauty. I need it. I can make it. I can receive it. It is like a kernel within me, trying to sprout and grow, seek nourishment and produce. Creativity is fragile, yet unbreakable, within me; thus, I am never alone. Art. Creativity. Beauty. Harmony. For me, these are essential.

Quilting, playing guitar, planning crafts linked to teaching, developing seminars, writing memoir. These are the ways **Eleanor Deckert** both refills and shares her creativity.

"Dream. Explore. Discover." This quote by Mark Twain points to her way to live.

"I started and quit university twice. I have never earned more than \$300 per month. I volunteer."

Homeschooling her four children, volunteering with children in educational settings, writing for local newspapers, she also works with her husband, Kevin, to grow and butcher and bake their own food, bring in firewood and enjoy water from a fast-flowing mountain creek.

"I like to play," Eleanor explains. "Remember playing *Warmer-Colder*?" (One person hides an object, then directs the other person: closer is *warmer*... farther is *colder*.) "I play that all the time while I make decisions. Shall I go in this direction? Or that? I like to experiment and then make adjustments as I see the results."

FINDING MY WAY

THROUGH CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Val Klose



My creative journey began on a warm summer day at an Art Therapist's day-long event in her home studio. I was struggling with my mom's health issues at the time. She was slowly slipping away from us with Alzheimer's disease and had developed breast cancer as well. My stress levels were pretty high and I was really looking forward to this artistic day of escape.

Janet, the art therapist, lived on a beautifully landscaped acreage in the country. Because it was a lovely day, the easels and tables were set up outside. The setting was really quite enchanting. We collected our canvas and paints and I settled in under a nice shady tree. We were guided to paint whatever inspired us. *Now what?* I knew nothing about painting. *What could I possibly do? I'm not an artist.* I felt a bit lost.

As I stared blankly at my canvas, I began to notice the shadows of the tree branches dancing across my page. Soon the hypnotic swaying of the leaves in the breeze inspired me, and I began to paint the shadows on my canvas. I quickly became completely entranced with the feel of the placing of paint on the canvas and the mixing of colours. Only the sound of the breeze in the trees and the movement of the brush on the canvas were real. I was totally absorbed by the process and loved the mindfulness. Soon the fear of not being "artistic enough" or "creative enough" disappeared. Time didn't exist... just the brush, the paint, the rhythm of the strokes on the canvas. When the day ended I realized I hadn't thought of my problems once. No other meditations or activities had ever pulled me in so completely. This was it! This was the key to managing my way through the complexities of my mom's disease. This was also the beginning of my release into creativity.

My "she-shack"



Being a mom, I was very good at nurturing my children's talents and abilities. It had never occurred to me that maybe I should nurture my own as well. I began to look for new ways to be creative and took an art class with my daughter. She had been painting for a few years now, and I marvelled at her ability to create beautiful art. In the past I had wondered how she could do something that looked so detailed and tedious. Was I ever wrong! I now realized the encompassing meditative effect creating a painting had. To really see something and recreate it on a canvas took so much concentration, there was no room for other thoughts. For me, this was freedom.



Top: Painted rocks in my garden

Middle: Painting old boards

Above: I love flowers

Since then, art has become more than a release from the stresses of life. It has become a joyful expression of who I am. I look at the world differently and see into myself and into my surroundings in so many more colours than I did before. Colour has new meaning. When I'm looking, I find myself wondering, "how would I paint that?" I find that the colours and shapes I create on paper give me so much joy and

satisfaction. I often look at my finished painting and wonder how I could possibly have created it. It doesn't seem to come from me. The wonder is sometimes accompanied by deeper feelings and emotions. There is an aliveness that stirs within me that is very satisfying.

Painting opened up a feeling of "what else can I create?" I have since sought out projects of all kinds. I have done wood burning and painted rocks, old barn boards and fabric. I've made rag rugs. My eyes are always searching for something new to try. I particularly enjoy making something new out of something old and discarded.

I am privileged to be part of a group of gals who gather once a week on Zoom to be creative. We are led by my friend, the art therapist and accomplished artist Janet Stalenhoeft. She sets the tone for the gathering and brings in new techniques for us to try. Connecting in this way has been so rewarding during these isolating Covid days. But for me, it is more than that. I look forward to exploring creative time with like-minded friends. The energy of the group is very nurturing and supportive.

My husband is also very supportive of this new creative me. He built a "she-shack" in the backyard so that I could have my own creative space. What a guy! I feel so fortunate to have found the expression of art to be my way, my release, my freedom. It has brought sunlight and joy into my being. I am so grateful to have found my way home.

Val Klose: "I have been married to a wonderful man for 40 years. We had three children later in life so that, after a 26-year-long career in the airline industry, I became a stay-at-home mom. My father passed away soon after I left the airlines, and my mom developed Alzheimer's quickly after his passing. I was fortunate to have the time and energy to deal with her needs while caring for my young family. I became actively involved volunteering in my children's school activities. I was particularly fond of the creative art projects that required little skill and lots of paint and glue. As my children grew and volunteering was no longer required, I began to feel something was missing. It was then that I was fortunate to discover the fulfilling and healing benefits of being creative."

BIRDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

EXCERPTS

Chad Norman



Chad Norman lives beside the high-tides of the Bay of Fundy, Truro, Nova Scotia. He has given talks and readings in Denmark, Sweden, Wales, Ireland,

Scotland, the United States of America and across Canada. His poems appear in publications around the world and have been translated into Danish, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and Polish. His collection, *Selected & New Poems*, was published by Mosaic Press, and *Squall: Poems in the Voice of Mary Shelley* is out from Guernica Editions. *Simona: A Celebration of the S.P.C.A.* will be out early 2021 from Cyberwit.Net (India).

THE CURB, MY TEACHER

Pieces of the poster
about the lost dog,
green shredded info
blown around last night,

into the nearby curb
one easily seen
at the other side
of the avenue I
pay attention to,

learn from the days
I hear nesting crows,

those kind enough
to have spent the Winter
with what my hands left,

when all of us
may have known once
how frozen the earth was.

THE SUN CANNOT BE A LIAR

As I waited for the first
knowing how the swoop
begins after the food
is left in his or her spot,
a potion in my thermos
changes not only eyes
those glaucoma tried to take,
but all of what other men
drive by during their chase.

What money plants in their souls,
so far from what I am
now able to cash in on,
going only to the words,
the spot I have for me,
looking down on the first fly
alive in the waking grass
winter has given back.

One crow has a wire,
another on top of a leafless tree;
I know how to talk
and politely ask them
if one more peanut
is why we continue to meet
each and every new season.

ALIVE AS THE VIRUS IS VICTORIOUS

The way
moving water
shimmers, others say
glimmers.
in the moving sun.

I see how
the "his & her" thing
happens, when it
comes to littering
their only planet.

Not only am I
in a relationship
with crows.
there is
a chipmunk too; I
never considered
myself a singer,
but when I call for
mainly a crow family
in that spot beside the flags
my other curious one
comes closer.

DAYS WHEN I AM MOST ALIVE

Old men out walking
to keep themselves involved with living,
old women there too, beside them
mysteriously managing to support
barrel-sized breasts, days I observe
choices they save for sunny afternoons,
healthy looking, among firs and maples
only beginning to seek what I
have no idea may be there for them.

I can shed the blur caused by
a lack of family, what friends may be,
that brief bewildering stall
both trees and kind crows
ask me to overcome, say is
how life offers more, if I choose it,
the wealth of clarity,
already being a rich man.

FACE TO FACE

A MEDITATION

Susan McCaslin



“My heart says, “Seek the face!” Your face I will seek.”

– Psalm 27: 8

“The face is a living presence; it is expression...The face speaks.”

– Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*

During one of my meditations, this phrase from Psalm 27 arose out of the silence: “Your face, Lord, will I seek.”

I recalled the verse from the King James version of the Bible because that was the translation to which I was exposed as a child. It also came to my attention that this psalm had been my favourite throughout my twenties and thirties when I learned it by heart. I came to translate the word “Lord” not as an authoritarian king or a masculine figure, but a spirit of infinite love and wisdom circulating in and through all creatures and things.

During the meditation, my attention kept returning to the significance of the word “face.” Throughout my life I have worn many faces – that of the anxious child, the young reader, the teacher, the partner, the mother; yet all these personas, though manifestations of parts of me, are not the all. It is as if I contain them, but there is something else, a forcefield of essential being, some deeper self in unity with the whole of things holding all the masks and stages of who I was and am. Could it be possible that, even when we don’t know it, a core unity holds us in grace?

During the Covid pandemic, some realizations about the word “face” in the above passage occurred to me. Though we are bodies with torsos, limbs, feet, hands etc., the face becomes a point of intimacy and interconnection with another, with otherness.

During this time of social isolation during the pandemic, many of us “behold” the physical faces of loved ones in our respective pods. We also see the faces of friends and associates streaming their way into our bedrooms or studies through Zoom sessions where we survey a gallery of faces. Often in these virtual sessions, if I leave my computer window open, I find myself attempting rather ineffectively to rearrange my face, “put my best face forward.” Should I smile more often, look directly into the camera, sit up straight, or assume a casual slouch? I feel often like a *poseur*. Since attending many of these sessions, more and more I miss being physically present with the other participants, chatting face to face at a concert, public talk, or gathering with similarly incarnate friends. I miss bear hugs, warm handshakes and leaning vis-à-vis into more intimate conversations.

Thinking about the intensity and beauty of a face, I am reminded that the face in many species is a threshold of profound interconnection, especially

Thinking about the intensity and beauty of a face, I am reminded that the face in many species is a threshold of profound interconnection



Emmanuel Levinas, philosopher
(1906-1995)

The metaphor of the face implies a communing of one with another that transcends, but includes, words and concepts.

through the eyes, which can convey fear, wariness, anger, curiosity, searching, kindness, compassion. Many faces contain two eyes, two nostrils, two ears and a mouth. These orifices are passages of ingress and egress, portals of exchange and transmission through which sound, breath, nourishment and meaning flow. They can become passages to “the within,” not just of the body, but of sensation, perception – the deep interior experienced as the soul or spirit in many spiritual traditions.

Faces are conduits of physical and spiritual seeing, smelling, hearing, eating, speaking, whispering, singing. When lovers unite physically, they commune through both bodies and faces by gazing, talking, listening, smelling, laughing, crying, articulating pleasure and joy. They breathe in each other’s fragrances. In what many see as a spiritual relationship, communication is finely nuanced, occurring at many levels. Lovers speak of union as being connected as both one and other in a region where unity and diversity do not dissolve into an undifferentiated mass but enter a new energy field larger than the individuals involved.

People who are physically blind or deaf commune in this intimate way and can be said to “face” each other metaphorically: “Your face, O Holy One, I will seek.” What these words of the psalmist suggest to me now is a desire for a supercharged intimacy with both others and with a cosmic Beloved, however we name this mysterious ground of all being. The metaphor of the face implies a communing of one with another that transcends, but includes, words and concepts. For harmonious lovers, the face of the beloved is beautiful and delights the heart, a seat of the integration of thinking and feeling.

Perhaps that line from the Psalms and the reflection that followed struck me deeply because the desire of my heart is for a deeper communion with others, with the divine core within other people, living creatures and the world. It is a longing for union with the earth, Gaia, the big household or cosmos, but through individualized and particular sites (sights) of contact. At another level it’s a desire for union with a vaster, more inclusive presence dwelling within and without us all. But these are abstractions and facing the face is experiential.

For the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, gazing into the depths of the face of the other challenges us to embrace otherness. The “face” in his work becomes the ground of ethics – respect for that which is not an extension of ourselves, our egos. As he puts it: “In front of the face, I always demand more of myself.” (“Signature” 294 in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*). Elsewhere he states: “Thou shalt not kill is the first word of the face.” As Martin Buber also argues in *I and Thou*, the face faces us with the reality of a “thou” rather than an “it” or object to be manipulated.

For me, gazing into the face of another human is only part of the story. How does one, for instance, behold the “face” of a peony, a Douglas fir, a quartz stone? How does a blind person “see”? The face is not something perceived merely through the physical eye, but the place where the Other is



Peering Eye Whorl of Tree Gnome. Photo by Susan McCaslin

In the process of writing the poem below, I began to see “the face” as a metaphor for unified perception, an embracing of the mystery and whole-ness of the other.

both essentially interconnected to ourselves and fully individualized. It is where communication becomes communion, a locus of longing, silence and singing.

During the Covid months, I occasionally came to embrace a giant Douglas fir tree just outside my kitchen window. I named her “Victorine” because she has survived so many winter storms and also because she brought to my mind the Victorines, a group of twelfth-century French monastic philosophers.

In the process of writing the poem below, I began to see “the face” as a metaphor for unified perception, an embracing of the mystery and whole-ness of the other. A tree for me does indeed have a face, though not a replication of human features. A tree’s face is a living structure of form and energy where distinct forms of consciousness interconnect and exchange gifts.

Victorine is a nesting-place for birds and a playground for squirrels. She has a life of her own. Yet sometimes I see gnome-like limbs and facial features in her tree-ness, whorls or tree knots resembling eyes in her thus-ness. That my subjectivity interacts with the holism of the tree doesn’t mean these perceptions are unreal or that I am imposing an anthropocentric vision on a tree. Gnomes and faeries live on in our perceptions of the sylvan beings that surround us. For lichen, thriving in Victorine’s bark, other aspects of her being come to the fore. Somehow, connecting with Victorine gifted me with this poem, which I see as one of her many signatures.

Douglas Fir: Energy Grounder

Under the sway of her ample trunk
my face brushes her knotted bark
and tapestry of mosses

I am lichen-kissed
held in sentinel presence

Energy-mother
heals, solaces

face to face

What can I give back
but my gaze and breath
even with eyes closed?

Susan McCaslin is an established poet from Fort Langley, B.C., who has been writing since the age of twelve when she discovered the magic of great books and the power of poetic language. In graduate school at Simon Fraser in 1969, poetry found her again and became her life’s deep vocation. She is drawn to the mystical traditions of many cultures and religions, and experiences poetry as a musicality arising from silence.

LONELINESS

THE MULTIPLE FACETS

Jacques G. LeBlanc, MD, FRCSC



Human species

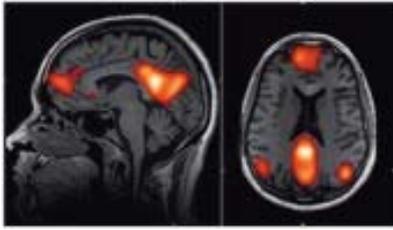
Thousands of years shaped human evolution through natural changes and the need to adapt to the environment. We also learned that cooperation with others offered protection crucial to survival. Our reliance on other individuals has made us “ultra-social animals.” These interactions led to a more sophisticated, calculating and metabolically developed brain. Today, through brain imaging, we can measure the impact loneliness has on our neurophysiology. This article will discuss how grey matter volume, intrinsic functional connectivity and white matter tract integrity show distinctive features in the “lonely brain” and how that brain may increase creativity.

Ageing and loneliness

In 2019, the World Health Organization declared loneliness a significant health concern. In many cities 50 per cent of people live alone. Loneliness is estimated to affect 10–20 per cent of adults who lack companionship, consider themselves left out or isolated from others. It is mainly a subjective experience. The health burden of loneliness is pervasive. Lifespan research has long demonstrated that loneliness is associated with ageing outcomes, such as increased morbidity and overall mortality, and is closely related to diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and immune system dysfunction.

Other research found that social bonds stimulate the white blood cells, whose core function is to destroy harmful bacteria and viruses. Socially active people have better physiological processes such as lower blood pressure, body mass index and lower C-reactive protein levels – the latter being another molecular response to inflammation. This insight was evident in four age groups (adolescents, young adults, middle age and old age) based on four large longitudinal American health databases. The investigators found that, in adolescence, lack of social engagement had as significant an effect on the risk of inflammation as lack of physical activity. In old age, lack of friends had a more considerable impact on the risk of hypertension than the usually cited clinical causes such as diabetes. Those with a lack of friends are susceptible to psychiatric disorders, cognitive decline and clinical dementia. In healthy older adults, the jury is still out on the neural structures and processes associated with loneliness. Once lonely, humans can become trapped in a downward psychological cycle that can be difficult to escape. This downward cycle might include a skewed perception of negative cues and perceiving a social threat from others, or the expectation of being socially excluded by others.

Today, through brain imaging, we can measure the impact loneliness has on our neurophysiology.



Brain regions related to cognitive processing

Previous research showed that depressed people can reduce their risk of depression if they join a social group such as a sports club, church, political party, hobby group or charity.

Neurophysiology of loneliness

With the development of new technology, such as functional MRI and biomarkers of brain metabolism, we can now study areas of the brain and their function under different stressors or stimulation. Loneliness may in part reflect differences in brain regions that are functionally involved in processing, expressing and regulating emotionally and socially relevant information. Age-related increases in loneliness could link to age-related structural changes in brain regions related to cognitive processing, defining and regulating relevant information from emotional and social stimuli.

Pandemic and loneliness

This pandemic has led to severe social, personal and financial ramifications. Most of us are lonely, whether we live alone, work alone at home or have been surrounded by the same two or four people for nearly a year. Usually, in times of distress, crisis or disaster, human resilience depends on the richness and strength of social connections and active engagement in groups and communities. Never have we experienced social isolation and losing family or friends on such a massive scale as we have in response to COVID-19. We must be resilient in our isolation for the greater good of the community: an immeasurable task. Feeling lonely and, worst, having lost a close family member or friend triggers a host of emotions.

While social distancing's physical isolation can enhance feelings of loneliness, experts also caution that isolation and loneliness are not the same. "The experience of loneliness is 100 percent subjective," said Jeremy Nobel of the Center for Primary Care at Harvard Medical School. "Isolation is the objective state of being physically separate. Loneliness is the self-perceived gap between our social connectedness and what we aspire to have." Older adults are also more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness as they are functionally very dependent on family members or supports by community services.

Evidence of digital communication does not change the general pattern of our social interactions and often lacks the richness of fundamental face-to-face interactions. In addition, many older adults may not be as familiar with these new technologies, and this style of exchange may not effectively serve their emotional needs.

Pandemic, creativity and loneliness

By nature, we need to belong. Since the pandemic disrupted how we can satisfy this need, many people feel lost. Allowing ourselves to handle and express our emotions through creativity can be both healing and meaningful. Interestingly, those who choose to keep to themselves are often highly

Allowing ourselves to handle and express our emotions through creativity can be both healing and meaningful.



Creativity and Loneliness

By engaging people and encouraging their interaction through artistic and cultural expression, actions in the field of culture can open a space in which individuals and groups can reflect upon their society

creative people. Virginia Woolffamously claimed her desire to be alone instilled her with a sense of wisdom and creativity. So how can we channel our loneliness into creativity?

The dramatic and abrupt changes in routines and livelihoods heightened our emotional burden. The consequences were catastrophic, provoking generalized anxiety, depressed affect, insomnia and fear worldwide. During the pandemic many have found that, in isolation, creativity can blossom. Grappling with anxiety and fear, people rallied to help others through creative

expression. Some with basic sewing skills started making homemade masks for healthcare workers. A few UPS employees took to dressing up as superheroes to bring some cheer to their customers. Residents in Italy took to singing from their balconies to maintain solidarity. Appreciation for frontlines workers took the form of applause, sirens, honking. These were expressions of gratitude from a distance, recorded and disseminated via social media to the world. Virtual learning and concerts increased accessibility regardless of status funding or time zones. Artists took to offering online classes to help at-home parents entertain their children. Small- and large-business CEOs needed to adapt to ever-changing circumstances to keep their company afloat. Some professional chefs volunteered to cook and distribute meals to those in need. A high level of scientific creativity brought researchers worldwide to develop a vaccine in record time, paving the way for unique collaborations and partnerships to defeat a common enemy.

In 2013 the United Nations declared creativity a human right – the right to freedom of artistic expression and creation through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy the arts, and to disseminate their expressions and creations. Perhaps this 2013 declaration offers direction for the 2019 World Health Organization’s declaration that loneliness is a significant health concern. Is there a correlation that in 2019, at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, 2021 was declared the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development? Who would have imagined that 2021 would be the year of a worldwide pandemic?

The loneliness caused by the pandemic suggests that by engaging people and encouraging their interaction through artistic and cultural expression, actions in the field of culture can open a space in which individuals and groups can reflect upon their society, confront and modify their perception of one another, express their fears and grievances, and develop resilience.

Summary

We are social creatures. Social interplay and cooperation have fuelled the rapid ascent of human culture and civilization. The expansion of loneliness in ageing people has only accelerated in the past decade. The Covid-19

As we move forward, the ideal situation would allow us to have the best of both worlds – recover the connections we have lost and engage the new skills we have gained to mitigate loneliness.

pandemic has added an unprecedented level of isolation and suffering. Despite this social and emotional chaos, people across all age groups and all levels of creative accomplishment and ability have attempted to respond to emerging challenges with a wide array of innovation and originality.

As we move forward, the ideal situation would allow us to have the best of both worlds – recover the connections we have lost and engage the new skills we have gained to mitigate loneliness. How the pandemic has shaped our future behaviour will remain unknown for the time being. Until then, we can choose to focus on our creative present, keeping somewhere in our minds all the potential ramifications of embracing our human right to creative expression and the resilience it nurtures.

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SUSTAINING CONNECTION

Penn Kemp and Richard-Yves Sitoski



Even as we are isolating in place during this long pandemic year, we need to conjure a sense of community... now more than ever, perhaps. These days, my community lives on-line and in memory through many decades. Because I think in poetry more than prose, my musings turned into a collection, *A Near Memoir: New Poems*, and I welcome the new connections my memoir is bringing to me.

MEMORIA TENERE: PENN KEMP'S *A NEAR MEMOIR: NEW POEMS* Richard-Yves Sitoski



I write this at 4:36 a.m. on a mid-May morning, 56 weeks into a pandemic that has left me simultaneously enervated yet full of a need to move, to do. I have become my cat, essentially, alternating between endless hours of otium and brief instants of frenetic activity. Because my priorities need realignment and my insecurities ministrations, I have, like many, turned to poetry, greedily hoovering up biographical and autobiographical works in an attempt to feel rooted. Penn Kemp's new chap, *A Near Memoir*, therefore arrived at an opportune time.

Kemp looks at the body of her cat in "For a Small, Beloved Descendent of Bast." There's a wonderful juxtaposition here of the promised mythologizing indicated by the title with the very matter-of-fact description of the cat's lifeless state, leading to a payoff at the end that takes us into Christopher Smart territory.

As the title indicates, her book is not a memoir – it can't be, with only 23 poems – but rather a brief *compte rendu* of a life of dynamism and poetic invention. In its scope and concerns, however, it accomplishes one of the roles of a memoir, which is (to reverse engineer the paraphrase of Heidegger that serves as the book's epigraph) to "empresent" the past and bring it near in a process that slows the future's approach.

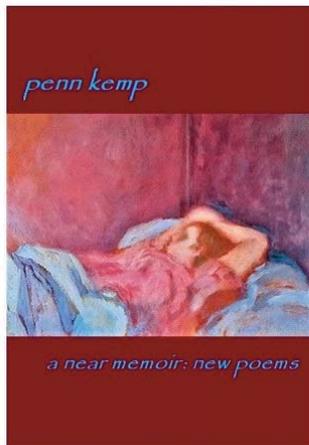
Context is key. Kemp situates the personal in the familial and the familial in the public, sometimes through slapstick satori slaps that take us out of our own egos – symbolic and physical falls to the "sous-face" of the Earth – and remind us that we are part of something bigger than we can possibly understand. In "Shooting the Duck," a young Penn becomes resigned to figure skating, fails in the process of "enduring" her mother's encouragement, and we find in her mother's motives shades of vicarious living.

Top: Penn with her new book alongside the painting done by her father when she was 14 and featured on the book's cover.

Photo: Joe Belanger, *London Free Press*

Above: Richard-Yves Sitoski, Owen Sound Poet Laureate 2019-2021

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A Near Memoir: new poems

by Penn Kemp

Poems of place, time, and family, by London's Inaugural Poet Laureate. A limited edition chapbook, each one hand-numbered.



Penn Kemp's *A Near Memoir: new poems* explores the earliest stirrings of the creative imagination in childhood and the joys of associative thinking. With narrative skill and vivid sensual detail, it discovers and uncovers the effect of adult perspectives on a young mind, the puzzling life lessons of parents and teachers, the wisdom and heartbreak of nature. Ironic and lyrical, accurate and ambiguous, playful and profound, these finely tuned poems—whether enlightened moments or deep dives into an evolving self—flow with the ease and excitement that only a seasoned artist can bring. A book full of surprises and affirmation.

—Patricia Keeney, author of *Orpheus in Our World*

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For a Small, Beloved Descendent of Bast

No birds sing for him, nor ever will.

The cat lies buried in a box,
a white cat in a barrow of snow.

No wind now lifts his protesting
fur. The cold is too still.

There are no maggots yet.
That will come in April

when the mud stirs in slush,
a small reprieve from indignity,

the last reduction to dirtied bones
for one who greedily loved his flesh

and the joyous stretch of being.

from a near memoir: new poems

“Circling the Gulf,” which to me articulates something that may seem heretical in the discourse surrounding mental illness: that what we call illness might very well be a rational, if not reasonable, response to trauma.

Shooting the Duck

During the snowy winter of 1952, when I was eight mom drove me each week to the Arena for a figure skating class. She outfitted me just right, in a navy blue velvet skirt that just covered my bum, a white rabbit muff that kept me warm, a pompom wool cap. En route mom told me romances of skating to Silver.

But those nasty nicks on the skate blades would trip me up just as I pushed forward. Even when I learned not to topple over, I could not figure out how to shoot the duck. The ideal was to hunker down till you were nearly sitting on your skates, then to dart one leg out like the barrel of a gun as you coasted along the ice.

Not me. Invariably I'd end up on my bottom, gangly colt legs galumphing out in front of me. An older girl skated graceful rings around the fallen and the splayed in a swirl of perfection as glumly shivering we tried to imitate her glide. Like an unwelcome, embarrassed dog, our wet legging stench slunk into the arena's crisp air.

But I'd been given a dime and a nickel. My reward after class was a soggy and savoured cone of chips, best chips ever, the paper cone soaked in salted vinegar, well worth taking mittens off for and enduring mom's encouragement on the wet-bottomed ride home. She'd been an avid skater on outdoor ponds and still had unwarranted hopes for me.

Her dream of Winter Olympic Championship held no sway.

Getting back to the importance of context, one of the most affecting pieces in *A Near Memoir* is “Circling the Gulf,” which to me articulates something that may seem heretical in the discourse surrounding mental illness: that what we call illness might very well be a rational, if not reasonable, response to trauma. How *should* we on the outside react to war? Is it not possible that the trauma of war can be visited upon some people not directly involved in conflict, simply by virtue of their extreme sensitivity to our shared humanity? Kemp leaves it to you to decide; what she does tell you, however, is that the situation played out in her family in a very specific way which ought to be considered by all of us, as we are currently living through a nightmare scenario that will have emotional ramifications the likes of which we can't honestly predict.

Circling The Gulf: A Gain A Loss, Ingrained

Signs proliferate as we pass by. Plastered on the auto dealership plate glass: SAVE THOU SANDS SAVE THOU SANDS. Save thou souls, save thy soul, grain of sand, rain of rant, cycles of want and plenty.

We are so defined by the stories we tell and those we as children hear.

For years, as I was growing up, 'war stories' were served with dessert at the table. Over and over, I listened to my grandfather's tales of leading

A Near Memoir, then, is a stop along the way in a career that has given us much poetry and given much to poetry. It does what poetry is meant to do, celebrating the universal by highlighting the particular, and whets our appetites for what will come next.

a regiment of Iroquois troops in battle on the killing grounds of France. This warrior tradition emerged in my son in a fantastical, twisted way. During an acute psychotic episode, he was hospitalized. His terrible adventure, coinciding with the Gulf War, took on metaphoric overtone. Even the word "gulf" looms between realities. Mind the gap, mine hole. As a child, he listened to my father's stories about his work as a bomb disposal expert in Scotland during the Second World War. That stress was internalized by my son with dreadful accuracy. I believe this literalization of memory occurs down the generations all the time. Our work is to stop the war in art and life so that the children don't continue to enact conflict. At the height of concern about the possibilities of chemical, biological or nuclear warfare, he became convinced that he himself was radio-active, a bomb about to explode. Yet who is to say what his response to threats of nuclear annihilation should have been? To me, his was a tortured way of reinventing personal history, of linking himself up with our tradition of war service, of families disrupted by early deaths from wounds borne on the field of battle. With the end of the Gulf War, my son recovered.

A Near Memoir, then, is a stop along the way in a career that has given us much poetry and given much to poetry. It does what poetry is meant to do, celebrating the universal by highlighting the particular, and whets our appetites for what will come next.

On Sunday, September 5, 2021, 7:30 - 9:35 pm, Kemp will be reading from *A Near Memoir: New Poems* as featured poet in the Red Lion Reading Series: <https://beliveaubooks.wixsite.com/redlionreadingseries/shows>.

Kemp is thankful for a CAIP grant from the London Arts Council, allowing time to write these poems.

A numbered copy of *A Near Memoir*, signed to you, is available by writing to pennkemp@gmail.com.

Penn Kemp has participated in Canadian cultural life for 50 years, writing, editing and publishing poetry and plays. Her first book of poetry, *Bearing Down*, was published by Coach House, 1972. The League of Canadian Poets acclaimed Penn as their 2015 Spoken Word Artist and she is the League's 40th Life Member. In 2020, she was presented with the inaugural Joe Rosenblatt (Muttsy) Award for Innovative Creators. In 2021, she was nominated for the League of Canadian Poets' Pavlick Poetry Prize.

Richard-Yves Sitoski is a poet, spoken word performer, visual artist, songwriter and poverty activist from Owen Sound. His works have appeared in periodicals in Canada, the United States and Great Britain.

THE PARK IN THE DARK

Robert MacDonald

*for Salinger,
with love and squalor*

Standing on a corner, waiting for a car to pass, late summer evening, on a sidewalk in London, across from a gated park in a Victorian square, well-appointed houses, hints of mist. He almost forty, alone, far from his familiar, predictable life, a visitor from another continent, going nowhere in particular.

Behind him sudden voices raised in disappointment. He turns to look, curious. There, slightly up and to the left, a window open to a bright room, an elegant chandelier, two shadows visible, cast on the ceiling like pantomimes.

A woman walks to the window and looks down at him, her face sallow and aglow, young and old at the same time, visibly wet with tears. He began to turn away, embarrassed by her naked emotion and wet eyes, but stops when her hand tentatively reaches out towards him in a hithering gesture, her fingers touching the window.

For no reason that he understood, then or ever would, he tipped the fingers of his right hand to his forehead, then to his lips, and then threw a kiss toward her as though it was a bird he was setting free, sending to her. She smiled for a second, a shadow passed over her eyes, she turned from the window and was as suddenly gone as she had appeared.

He spent the rest of the night wandering through mist-swept streets, troubled by what he have seen, polishing the details in his imagination.

The next night, he was drawn like a magnet to the same spot at the same time, expecting something to happen which would help him make sense of his compulsion with the details of what he had seen, felt, and imagined.

The window was closed, curtains half open, room dark beyond. Somehow, he knew she is in that room, waiting for him. He debates going to the door and knocking, but before he can, it opens and she comes out into the street, walks straight up to him, her eyes locked on his the whole time, unflinching.

"Be with me," is all she says, and turns, a swish of clothing. They move slowly off, side by side, down the sidewalk, through a gate, into a dimly lit garden, along a cinder path, the city slowly disappearing behind them, until they reach a bench far down, set back beneath tall looming trees. Distant lights spark in the rustling leaves, windows, streetlamps, headlights.

They sit in mute silence for a long time. He can hear her gentle breathing, feel more than see the dark bulk of her body as it settles in. Only the dim outline of her face is visible against the green foliage and her dark hair.

She is almost beautiful, marred only by the deep hurtlines around her eyes and lips. Something terrible has happened to this woman, and he wants to know what it is, even though he suspects it will trouble him. He looks for her hands, thinking to touch them, but she has tucked them into her coat.

It is many minutes before she starts talking, but when she does it comes out in a flood, the words swirling around the forest and his ears, and reaching into his heart. Before she is finished he is in tears, hears himself sobbing.

It was terrible, the story she tells. The story of her life, loves and hates, hurts and disappointments, pain, and regrets, her many regrets. As he listens, he also realizes that it is also his own story, the details different, but the results the same. But, unlike her, he has not been marked on the surface, only somewhere hidden inside.

She has not been able to hide the consequences of her destruction, her descent into a darkness she can barely describe. It is not an uncommon story, someone gone astray on their passage through life, unconscious or stupid or arrogant or blind or uncomfortable in their body and mind, using others and themselves badly, raging against fate, willful and damaging, dissolute, desperate, degenerate, and dangerous, reaching bottom in a murky blizzard of anger and helplessness, plagued by drugs, riven by terror, lost to hope.

That anyone survive such a rough passage is more than an accident, or miracle. Like the dawn starting to rise overhead as she finished her story, he realized that in spite of twenty years doing the wrong thing, being in the wrong place, making the wrong choices, she was here now, sitting beside him, he having not moved while she talked, both just letting the words stream out of her into the surrounding air, letting go of demons that have for so long possessed her.

She was also, in those moments, telling herself, for the first time, that the dark days and nights were over, that her body and mind were deeply and permanently scarred, that her terror was fleeting, that her memories of those days would always be there, just below the surface, but that a different future was now possible, that it was not too late to begin her real journey, to choose a different path, and reach a new home.

He had begun to imagine, as she shared her awful journey, that there was some purpose in his being there, some intentional transfer of consequence from one damaged soul to another, some confluence of destinies.

But he realized just then, as she came to the end, that she would never hear his voice, that they would never touch, that she would not look at him, that they would part at that bench in the park, that she would go back to the dark room alone to start her life over, and that he would travel back to his world alone and be forever haunted by her words, and that they would never meet again.

And so it was.

*London, England
September 1988*

FOOLS AND SAGES STUDIO



“Half my life’s in books’ written pages

Live and learn from Fools and Sages...” – Steven Tyler, Aerosmith

When Joan McEwan took over managing the studio she shared with four other like-minded creatives, she remembered these lyrics, and *Fools and Sages* seemed the perfect name for this shared space.

Joan Caroline McEwan

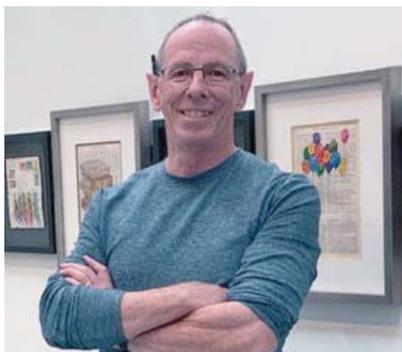
Fools and Sages Art Studio has become my favourite retreat. A quaint little working studio with a cool vibe on the edge of Kelowna’s cultural district is exactly where I go to get in touch with myself. Art enhances “my everyday” in a way nothing else does. It brings me back into myself in such a personal way. It is a nurturing, dare I say selfish act – a gift I give to myself before others. I have learned over the years that I am a happier, more content person because of the space I make for my art practice. There is often doubt, vulnerability, much self-reflection and fear when putting your work out there for others to see, but also courage and growth from doing so.

One of my hopes for Fools and Sages Art Studio is that people can feel welcome to drop in while the artists are at work creating, and that it sparks some kind of excitement about beginning or continuing a creative journey that they may have always wanted to go on, or one they may have left behind. Humans have always been driven to create, be it through art, song, innovation and the process itself is therapeutic.

<https://www.joancarolineart.com>



Top: Fools and Sages Studio
Above: Joan McEwan



Wayne Wilson

Wayne Wilson

This studio is lots of things. It is a destination for me in my day and for visitors when they feel the inclination to explore things just a bit outside themselves. It is a refuge from so much of the noise of modernity – the “scope creep” of social media into our lives and the onslaught of opinion that everyone feels they need to share these days. It is a collaboration (in this case anyway) – and, while that collaboration is defined in the loosest sense, there is a peculiar kind of comfort I enjoy knowing there are others here who are pushing ideas out of their heads and onto canvas and paper and textile and more.

It is a place of tactility (is that a word?) that confirms my love of paper and colour and water and graphite. In fact, the multi-sensory nature of the studio makes it at once enticing and intimidating. For me especially. I sometimes get lost wondering where to start because there are so many avenues before me.... each pulling with their provocative prospects of what I can do with them.

It is a place replete with ideas and images burbling just below the surface of consciousness and making their disparate attempts to be given form and to fly off in order to make room for others of their kind. I love being a partner with those ideas and images – much as Elizabeth Gilbert writes about the sentience of creativity in her book *Big Magic*. Like the studio, creativity is a collaboration.

I have to trust that it is a place of hope to others who see our work. Perhaps more than that, I hope it is a kind of dare that a 12-year-old would jump at. A dare to go and see old things in new ways and new things in unknown ways. I dare you!

<https://www.waynewilsonart.com>



Judith Mueller:

I challenged the viewer to find the colours that best described who they were and then to open their eyes to see the colours they could be and to be aware that we are all a combination of the same colours.

Judith Mueller

Colour has been a part of my life ever since I can remember. As a child I had a colouring book that I would work on every time I was sick. I spent hours organizing and testing the colours of my crayons. I remember that colouring between the lines and creating a picture was not my focus; it was the colours themselves and their magic.

Creating through colour has followed me through my art practice. I began as a Waldorf school handwork teacher, dyeing the yarns for my students with plant dyes. I was always an avid knitter and that took me to dyeing my own yarns with commercial dyes and painting on silk fabric. I went to school as a mature student, completing a Bachelor's of Fine Arts at UBC-Okanagan with my grad show installation entitled *What Colour Are You?* I challenged the viewer to find the colours that best described who they were and then to open their eyes to see the colours they could be and to be aware that we are all a combination of the same colours. The piece was for me a visual reference for the oneness of mankind. People, though we may look different and believe different things, are all human beings, and there is a oneness in our connection with each other.

I love to make things with the things I dye, and that has taken me on endless hours of knitting with my own dyed yarns. I have delved into the world of fibre and have dyed whatever I could get my hands on: wool fleece, mohair locks, silk fibre, silk and wool yarns, silk cocoons. I have used these also in my felting practice to create paintings, sculptures, wearables.

Fools and Sages Art Studio is a place where I can go and immerse myself in my world of colour, like a step back into my childhood discovery, where the practice is fun and exciting and exploratory. I am, right now, working on small-scale paintings, using oils, that explore the relationship between colour, shape and space. Every stroke inspires me to find a balance between the colour already laid on the canvas and the one on the brush. It is always super exciting to resolve a painting I thought impossible and take it to the next level.

<https://www.judithmueller.ca>



Robyn Flinn

I've been in love with vintage clothing and costumes for as long as I can remember. What began as a mobile vintage emporium (originally called Perch Travelling Boutique) has evolved into Perched Costume Conservatory: part private shopping experience, part costume rental – all fabulous.

I am smitten with my studio mates at #foolsandsages and the creative vibe we've fostered over the last three years.

Michelle Woods

Michelle Woods is a multidisciplinary artist currently focusing on modern abstract landscapes with vibrant colours and strong graphic design influences.

"Honestly, making art has always been a way to keep my mind from worrying. For as long as I can remember, my wild imagination and insecurities wound me up so tight, if I were a string I'd have frayed into a million pieces. It's the one thing I could always do to give my brain a break. I don't think about what I look like, how successful my career is, what others think of me, if I'm a good person – all I can do in the moment is enjoy it. So, while it's all a work in progress, I literally make things for sanity."



Top: Robyn Flinn
Above: Michelle Woods

Fools and Sages Studio

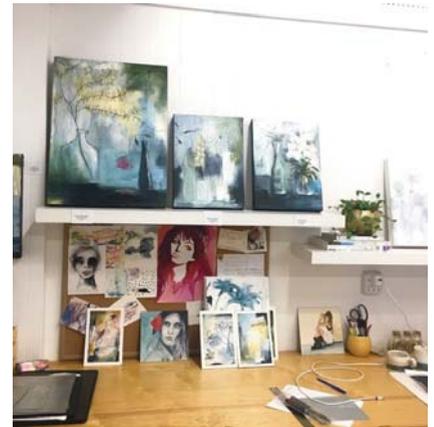
<https://foolsandsagesstudio.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/okaywoods/?hl=en>



Left: Our space is full

Right: Come join us for a conversation



IN SITU

John Lent

ONE

... It wouldn't matter, maybe, if I weren't 72, if I weren't closing in on the end of these pilgrimages now, my colorful, virtuous flags fluttering in tatters and pale tones above me in the balmy seemingly seaside air and pre-heat of the pre-morning.

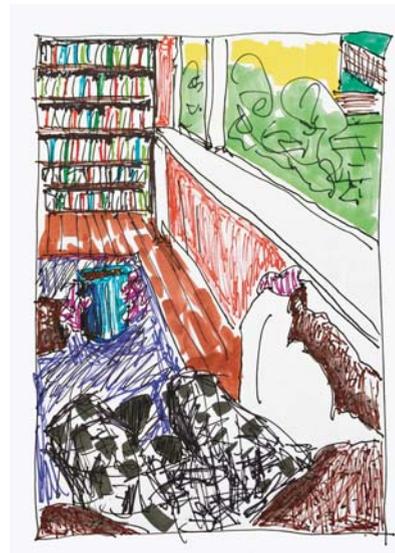
But it's not like I remember it, this setting forth in the body, this quotidian of the soul ascending. That old feeling is gone maybe, it's not like the beginnings of the roads in those first days in Edmonton, at least the way I remember them now, none of that breath-taking wonder and blamelessness.

"Maybe not."

But I want it back.

"Maybe not."

But I do. I *do* want it back.



"John Lent said the chances of releasing a book and an album in the same year was one in a million, but that's just what September 2019 had in store for him." (Caitlin Clow - Vernon Morning Star)

TWO

... The thing is I never knew that I knew what I knew instinctively, or even what I knew because I had actually learned something formally. Either set. I did not recognize the power, the gifts of those exchanges, those sets. I deferred them in the face of other gifts and voices I assumed were more powerful and knowing than mine. I made fun of myself instead, another long and twisting dance of insecurity and deferral, of masking what might have been true beneath all this other masking. And when I ended up on my own, maybe even facing these things by myself, I simply anaesthetised my presence so I could pass out, unknowing, ruined before the very thing I was seeking. How about that, eh? How about having to admit to that? Or live with that? I should have been quadruple thinking the whole time instead. Been more cautious. *A pair of ragged claws. See? I'm still making fun of it. I'm still kidding.*

... But what I'm saying or trying to say here is important because it holds and modifies and redefines the self setting out on this road this morning and into this sun today, into your world as well as mine. So I will put on these





imperfections regardless. They're just right these pilgrim tatters. And I will walk into any of the dark or light *as is*, a cracked crucible of wonder. Ready, now. Changed.

THREE

...I have come to either fear such directness or embrace it. It risks all the flatness of the world seen wrong and I know there may be no beauty there. Or there might be everything.

My head swivels in the praxis air and I can smell the fall, all of it strangely, all the decaying abundance in it, as if I were a walking filter this morning. Right here where I know I should be. There's a tiny light-brown field mouse skittering through the bulrushes at my feet. Mosey (my dog) doesn't see it or smell it yet. He just plunders on. I'm so happy I feel like crying. It's just the way it is.

Simply. Better.

Back and forth.

A love supreme, a love supreme.

Then gone.

FOUR

I know it's thinking about dignity that floors me here, literally. The ground of everything else that matters. Being able to walk out onto these grasses and paths in the early morning mist as a standing up on the earth, and as itself an embodiment of beauty and love. Moving as a singular series of panels of flesh and consciousness into the air, into the damp abundance until it's over. Unaccommodated. Body and soul. *A love supreme, a love supreme.*

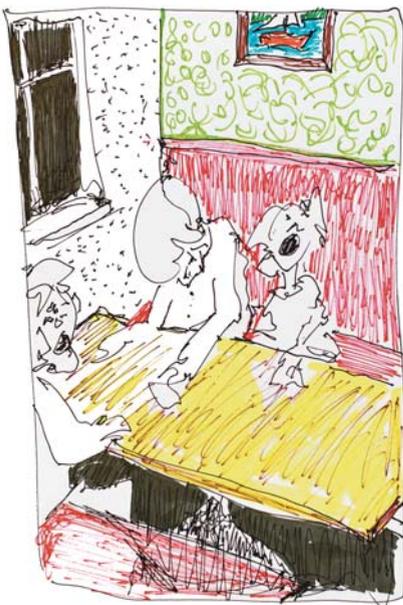


FIVE

...Trying, each of us, to crack the tightly wired syntax of our sentences and logic and vision, crack them completely open so we are only surprised now and then by everything all the time and laughing ourselves into the perfect high 'C' note that blows everything else away into the long rhythms of these sentences and paragraphs that accumulate a music that becomes the real logic of our lives instead of, *you know...*

A Love Supreme, a love supreme.





SIX

Yeah, the rupture of those sentences is a complex experiment in physics. One of the few roads to love: the dilation and opening up offered by language, the logic of language, and the deliberate collapse of the logic of that language sometimes to allow accidents for sure. Accidents in language that become a rupture, another way to see the real and replace our old selves babbling away in the first, more obvious real maybe.

... It's a certain kind of directness I want to lose in order to stay there, and it's another more fearsome kind of directness I need to gain so I can trade away something I'm used to for something that has a different optic in it, that allows me to see dignity *in situ*:

... What is this other love? How does it work and how does it speak itself?

SEVEN

So you end up learning things you probably didn't set out to learn. And that's part of today's road, too. *A love supreme, a love supreme.* In fact, you might even learn things you flat out never *wanted* to learn in the first place, about people especially. Not about the world, but that other great landscape...

... a bleak and comforting peace that I would never have sought out or expected in a million years surfaces, a peace that accompanies an understanding that we are utterly alone in a lot of things. Our impulse to love and include and rejoice and make community is an important and vital impulse, and we immerse ourselves in it and are driven by it, but beneath it, as part of a necessary foundation for it maybe, is a solitary human wonder that has no expectation of community at all. If there were a God peering over all this, it would have to occupy a singular, unaccommodated vision that he or she or they would embody in every cosmic moment: a loneliness that is required of each of us, too, a loneliness that is itself, and is, of itself, a radiant imperishable beauty—

...Balance. Abundance. Dignity. Enough.

Another kind of love.

a love supreme



John Lent has been publishing poetry, fiction and non-fiction nationally and internationally for the past thirty years. His work has appeared in various issues of: *The Malahat Review*, *Event*, *West Coast Line*, *NeWest Review*, *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *CV2*, *The New Quarterly*, *This Magazine*, *The Canadian Forum*, *Matrix*, *Waves*, *Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review*. He has published ten books of poetry and fiction and a book of conversations with Robert Kroetsch about the writing life, called *Abundance*. His last book of stories, *So It Won't Go Away*, was short-listed for the BC Book Prizes in 2005, and *Thistledown Press* released a volume of Lent's poems called *A Matins Flywheel* in 2019. Currently, Lent is working on a short/long poem called *The Ordinary's Incense* and a volume of essays and interviews with Jake Kennedy called *Marshall Fields*. Lent lives in Vernon, BC, with his wife, the artist Jude Clarke.

This sequence of eight panels discloses elements of a pilgrimage into the ordinary, into 'the everything' of the ordinary – a hymn to the sacredness of that.

On the writing of "In Situ"

Karen asked me to write a few words about the process of writing "In Situ." So let me be a bit ridiculous and blurt some things out without explaining them too much. That way, I can surprise myself and have a bit of fun. Otherwise, because of years of teaching and writing scholarly papers, I will try to explain myself too carefully and I'll end up pretending that everything about my writing process is calculated when in fact it's not. It's anything but.

I have always loved the series. I like the circuit board of the sequence. I am drawn to the kind of story you can write when the reader has to be the synthesis of everything that is whole, when the reader's mind finds unity by association and juxtaposition. In music, I am drawn to sequences or suites that use that circuit board, pieces like Arvo Part's "Spiegel Im Spiegel", or Miles Davis' "Sketches Of Spain", or John Coltrane's "Love Supreme." Musical suites inspire and move me so much sometimes that I will eventually use them to 'frame' a long piece of poetry. In this poem, "In Situ," I have used John Coltrane's jazz suite, "Love Supreme," as a primary frame on different levels.

I have always loved the world. I know how silly that must sound saying it like that, but I love the solid world of textures and smells and muck and mire that we live, grow and die in. The thickness of everything. All the magic is there, right in front of me, in that thickness. That's how strongly I feel about that world, a world we sometimes call the 'ordinary' world. And it's true; it *is* ordinary, but not in any negative use or meaning of that word, only in the way it designates material. Ordinary material. For me, it is the world in which the 'soul' of everything lives and moves. And that's what I want to write about, that 'soul.' So in the end, it's really important for me to explore and document that world because of the vastness of what it gives me back. The last sequence I composed before this piece, for example, was a poem called "The Ordinary's Incense."

"In Situ" is an archeological dig at the site of 'dailiness'. The phrase 'in situ' is used in archeology to designate something found undisturbed in its own natural context. This sequence of eight panels discloses elements of a pilgrimage into the ordinary, into 'the everything' of the ordinary – a hymn to the sacredness of that. Or at least the sacredness I sense in all that.

Very early on in the writing of these panels, the poem demanded something else in my life that goes back to my late teens in Edmonton when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Alberta, and that was my love of loose gesture sketching, a bold faith in improvisation that I learned from a wonderful artist, David Cantine. Somehow, maybe to drive my eye further into the texture in front of me, I began to paint these eccentric, contained sketches of the daily scenes I was writing about. They buoyed me up and seemed to talk to me in a different language and push me. Somehow, I knew eventually that they were necessary parts of the poem, of its music.

I hope you will receive some sense of these things in the passages that have been excerpted here from the larger narrative of "In Situ." And I hope you might be interested enough after reading them to want to buy the complete text of "In Situ" when it is published as one manuscript later this fall, by Okanagan Institute Press.

"How lucky I am. Here I am in my own retirement, ageing with my own generation, and still wanting to recreate some of the joys and sorrows of that ageing through language, through creativity. What luck!"

SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

The Journal of Creative Aging

Edited by Karen Close

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Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude exists to honour the transformational power of creativity. We are a quarterly journal intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. We present the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement. We invite all ages to contribute their discoveries.

Sage-ing is about seeking - satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Ageing can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to *Know Thyself* and contribute that knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and well-being for the individual and to our culture.

This journal exists for all those serious in exploring their creativity, in a chosen expression. It is a forum for publication and exposure to other artists, both novice and established. This journal is an easel for any form of artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination.