

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



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EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

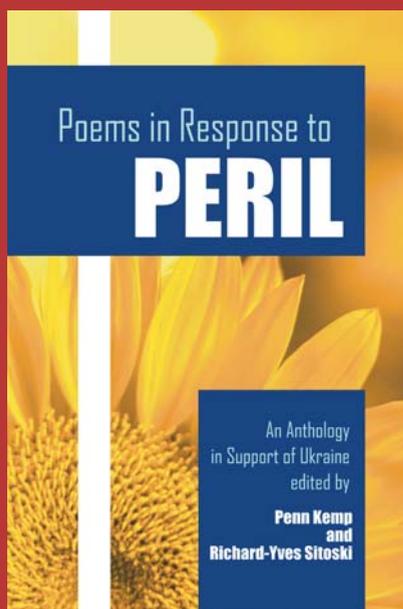
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For a deeper look at our process, take a look at

- <https://poets.ca/a-gathering-of-poets-in-response-to-peril/>
- <https://www.inanna.ca/2022/04/18/gathering-voices-in-response-to-peril-penn-kemp-and-susan-mccaslin>
- www.pennkemp.wordpress.com

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An Anthology in Support of Ukraine
edited by Penn Kemp and Richard-Yves Sitoski

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light" by Judy O'Dell

FROM THE EDITOR

For our September issue we invited readers to share moments of creative courage and what inspired them to find that spirit. Too, we asked readers to tell us how the Journal has affected them. Several told us they never miss reading an issue. Others wrote that the Journal has renewed their commitment to their own creative practice, while others are feeling the nudge to submit their own stories. Thanks for letting us know.

The stories we received for this issue are a beautiful harvest – ripened from the hearts of contributors. In the first article of this issue, our publisher Robert McDonald introduces the practice of BRICOLAGE: A field guide to the search for meaning. The term describes when the artist in each of us "shapes the beautiful and useful out of the dump heap of human life." When 'the dump heap' is ripened, meaning often reveals itself. By expressing one's identity, concerns and aspirations through some form of creative expression, one's sense of self is enlarged and transformation happens. Heartfelt creative expression brings an increased sense of self-acceptance and well-being. I am reminded of Tunisian Collaborative Painting, an art form that expands our thinking into broader acceptance and tolerance, developed in Tunisia in the mid-1980s when the country was under a dictatorship. The process is unique in its method of allowing a group of artists to work simultaneously on a canvas

without discussion or planning beforehand. Together the groups produced paintings that mixed the best parts of themselves with the best parts of each of the other artists. One painting thus represents the individuality of all, brought together for the good of the work, and a preservation of the value of shared free expression. In creating the Journal I was impressed by the power of the meaning able to be produced by silent, sometimes unconscious, collaboration evident in Tunisian Collaborative Painting, although each painted from their own experiences. Incidents that may have seemed trivial at the time often have the potential to grow into something much more essential to our greater understanding. "*Time ripens all things; man is born wise.*" Miguel de Cervantes.

Are attention, appreciation and wisdom kin? In assembling this issue I became sensitive to the power of the unconscious directing collaboration. Articles had come in at very different times, and yet I felt a homogeneity emerging. Contributors were not collaborating, but perhaps the Collective Unconscious, identified by Carl Jung as the part of the unconscious mind that is derived from ancestral memory and experience and is common to all human-kind, was at work. Does our wisdom rest in the Collective Unconscious waiting for our greater attention?

In FINDING POSSIBILITY IN 100 DAYS OF WRITING Nicole Frederickson finds a new

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recognition and begins to cherish 'the bits and pieces of life,' as do Linda Lovisa's students in INSPIRATION IS EVERYWHERE: Open your eyes and see. Marie Bisson shares her delight in revisiting THE MERRY MERMAID MOTEL: Postcard from the past. Patricia Keeney recognises a collaboration with the past in FROM PICTURES TO POEMS. Brenda Weinberg shares the value she has discovered when she pays attention to, and allows herself appreciation for, GIFTS FROM THE UNCONSCIOUS. Susan McCaslin reflects on the cycles of creativity in SEED TIME AND HARVEST WITHIN CREATIVE COMMUNITY. Quoting William Blake, she writes:

"In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."

We hope you'll open to new contemplations as you 'collaborate' with this issue and that 'something much more essential' emerges. By the October, November and December of our lives, it's time to celebrate what we've sown in life and mentor others for rewards too. We invite contributors to our next issue, December 2022, to share how they have detected a cycle in the expressions they have explored as they reflect on their own creative life and feel inspiration grow. Too, in the spirit of collaboration, we always appreciate hearing from you, our readers. Please take a moment to let us know what you've learned, harvested and enjoyed reading this current issue. Email us at karensageing@gmail.com

– Karen and Katharine

SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

The theme to consider for our next issue will be in the FROM THE EDITORS in each issue. Your story is to be original, related to creativity in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining self awareness and wisdom, and/or the act of harvesting your life's wisdom as a legacy for future generations.

Please attach it as a word document (.doc) – not a PDF - to enable editing, using calibri font, 14 pt, 1.5 spacing. 500 – 1500 word maximum (use word count).

Please attach 3-4 photos, separately, including: Your headshot, 2-3 photos related to your article. All photos should be numbered, given a caption, and attached in high resolution jpg. format. 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 a brief bio note, written in the third person (one or two short paragraphs of up to 200 words). Your bio will be placed at the end of your article and is intended 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. Please include your preferred contact information, including email, website, blog address – whatever you want included in the publication. In your cover email, please share how you found your way to submitting to Sage-ing. Please email your article and photographs to Karen Close at karensageing@gmail.com and Katharine Weinmann at panache@interbaun.com

Quarterly issues of The Journal go online around a solstice or equinox: March, June, September, and December. We need to receive your intention of submitting an article by the first day of the preceding month or earlier. **Your complete submission is required by the first day of the month preceding publication.**

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

BRICOLAGE

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Robert MacDonald



Now halfway through my seventh decade, I have returned to a practice I mostly abandoned 50 years ago. I write, for my personal pleasure, and for a measure of understanding and solace. I use my old notebooks as one source, the ones I've used most of my life to sketch, to copy passages from books and magazines, to start poems, to note the things I see, and the things I think, to remind myself of the people and places I've been along the way. I use my memories as another source. What comes out is a bricolage of words, a sort of "field guide" to my personal landscape, my inner and outer being, in the form of dozens of stories, hundreds of poems and thousands of pages of arguments with myself, with the past and the present, and prayers for the present and the future.

Prayers, poems and stories are better suited to other venues and times. This is an argument. Or, at least, this is the beginning of an argument.

Bricolage, according to Merriam Webster, is a noun, pronounced bri-colage. According to French social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the artist "shapes the beautiful and useful out of the dump heap of human life." Lévi-Strauss compared this artistic process to the work of a handyman solves technical or mechanical problems with whatever materials are available. He referred to that process of making do as *bricolage*, a term derived from the French verb *bricoler* (meaning "to putter about") and related to *bricoleur*, the French name for a jack-of-all-trades. Bricolage made its way from French to

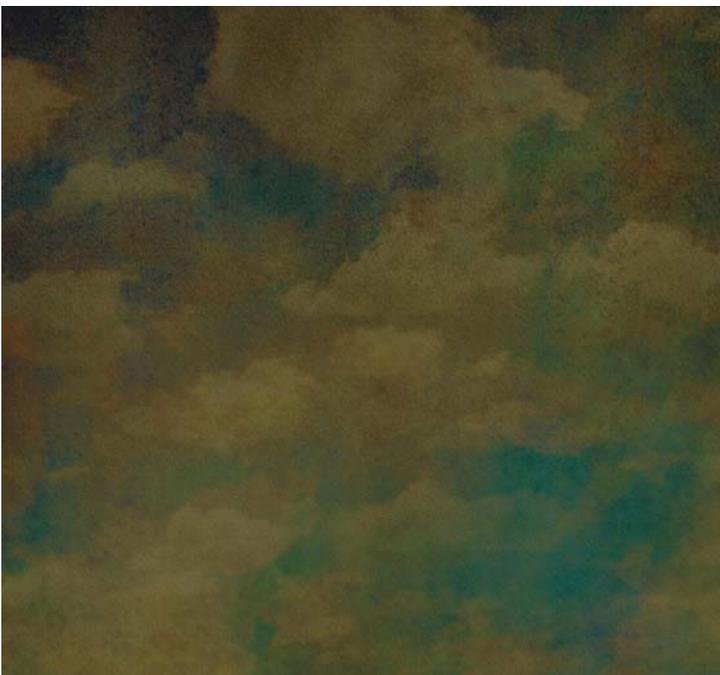
English during the 1960s, and it is now used for everything from the creative uses of leftovers ("culinary bricolage") to the cobbling together of disparate computer code parts ("digital bricolage"), to works such as this.

The Canadian author Edward Chamberlin, in his 2003 book *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*, references a poem:

It is often said that nobody pays attention to anything as unpractical – as dreamy – as poetry any more. I'm not so sure. During the Cultural Revolution, poems were plastered on walls and notice boards everywhere in China, expressions of belief in the power of words to make things happen. And in Poland, during the Solidarity uprising, the fences around the Gdansk shipyard were covered in poetry. A few years ago, during a

"In the Far Away, 2008"

One of my ongoing experiments – acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 inches, attempting to penetrate and illustrate an inner landscape. Courtesy New York University.





A selection of small images from my notebooks, illustrative of several hundreds of simple caricatures, whereby I attempt to capture the linear facial essence of the multitudes of people I've encountered in real life, in my imagination, and in my dreams. When in need to create, I've found this vehicle my most reliable shortcut in my constant quest of creativity. These are dream people.

The images above, and the notebook pages shown opposite, are the product of the person shown below, circa 1985.



program on war poetry, the BBC broadcast a poem titled *Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep*. Its author is unknown, but it had been written down by a soldier in Northern Ireland and left in an envelope for his parents in case he was killed. Within weeks, the BBC received thirty thousand requests for copies. This is the poem, a catalogue of metaphors that stand testimony both to the moving power of poetry and to the ability of listeners and readers to embrace its contradictions and surrender to its charms.

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft star-shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

Every time I read this poem I cry, for it brings back very personal memories of loss. It also helps me in ways I cannot explain. There is mystery here, in a clarity of metaphors, and there is the intensity of death.

Chamberlin didn't know the whole story. There have been many claimants to the poem's authorship, including attributions to traditional and Native

American origins. *Dear Abby* author Abigail Van Buren researched the poem's history in 1998 and concluded that Mary Elizabeth Frye of Baltimore had written the poem in 1932. Frye had never written any poetry, but the plight of a German Jewish woman, Margaret Schwarzkopf, who was staying with her, had inspired the poem. Concerned about her mother, who was ill in Germany, Schwarzkopf had been warned not to return home because of increasing unrest. When her mother died, the heartbroken young woman told Frye that she never had the chance to "stand by my mother's grave and shed a tear." Frye found herself composing a piece of verse on a brown paper shopping bag. Later she said that the words "just came to her" and expressed what she felt about life and death.

Frye circulated the poem privately, never publishing or copyrighting it. She wrote other poems, but this, her first, endured. It has been recited at funerals and on other appropriate occasions around the world for more than 80 years. Some poems burn their way into the collective consciousness and uplift us in times of loss and grieving. This wonderful accidental bricolage is one such.

The Source of Wondering

Most of us come late to the realization that our lives are less than a 1000 months long and that by the time we're 20 years old we've burned through a quarter of them. The clock is ticking while we're making up our minds what to do with our lives, and many of us haven't really decided before the clock has run out and we drop back lifeless into the primordial soup. And some few lucky ones of us find our way in the last decades of our life that there are new journeys to take, meaning to make and things to discover.

My writing asks the perennial questions of meaning – Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? What are we supposed to do with it? – and tries to answer them by treasuring the ideas and voices of a broad range of people, from a wide variety of traditions, professions, attitudes, cultures and locales. The American writer Annie Dillard offered one beautiful response in 1988, when Life magazine asked her thoughts on the meaning of life. She wrote:

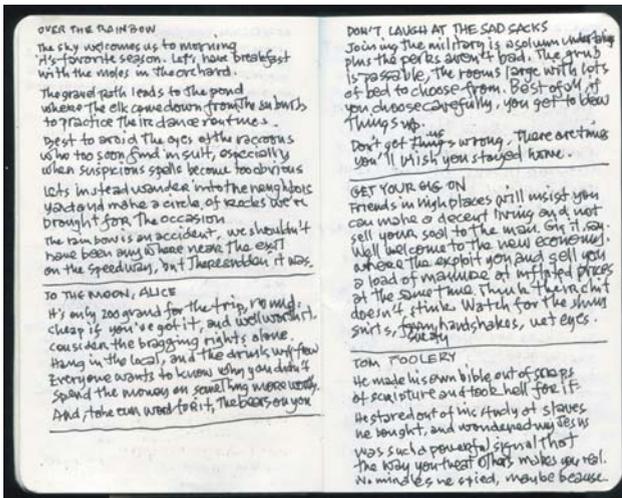
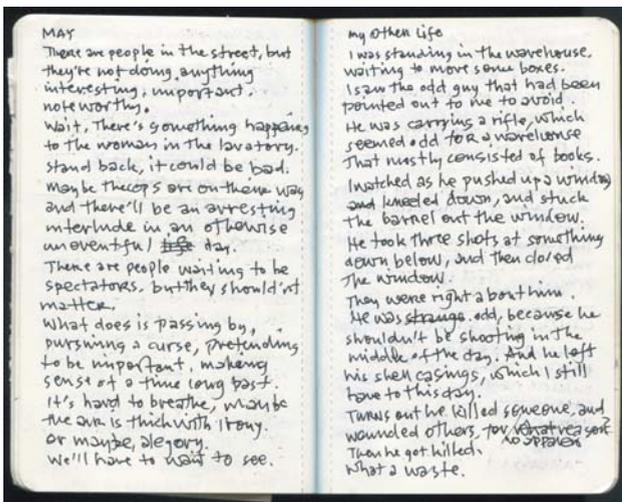
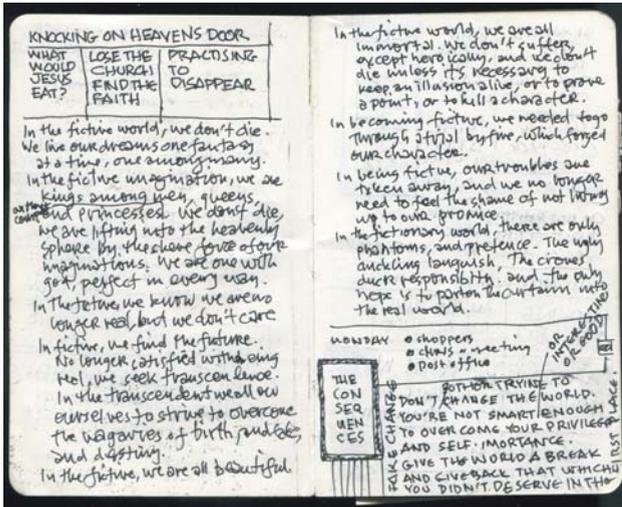
We are here to witness the creation and abet it. We are here to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed. Together we notice not only each mountain shadow and each stone on the beach but, especially, we notice the beautiful faces and complex natures of each other. We are here to bring to consciousness the beauty and power that are around us and to praise the people who are here with us. We witness our generation and our times. We watch the weather. Otherwise, creation would be playing to an empty house.

Think of it: to witness and abet. She continued:

According to the second law of thermodynamics, things fall apart. Structures disintegrate. Buckminster Fuller hinted at a reason we are here: By creating things, by thinking up new combinations, we counteract this flow of entropy. We make new structures, new wholeness, so the universe comes out even.

The first – to witness – is relatively easy during the good or easy times in our lives, and is relatively difficult when things go sideways for us. The world, and the things of it, are indeed wonderful, and it's not hard to find wonder to witness, *when we're paying attention.*

The second – abetting creation – is difficult at any time, no matter how talented, wise or capable we are. What we do, how we do it and why we do it defines our character. It too often turns out that, in order to abet creation, we surely need to be better equipped, and more robust, than most of us will prove to be in our lifetimes.



Top: Notebook page, 1982
 Middle: Notebook page, 1989
 Bottom: Notebook page, 1997

Non Zero Sum Game

*"The world is a ball full of wiggles,
and human beings must outgrow the idea
of trying to straighten it out."*

– Alan Watts

Walk this way.

Leave your assumptions at the door.

Ask your neighbours to keep you honest.

Shout out loud when the laughter ends.

Make sure memories don't punish you.

Laugh if you've heard it before.

The road into the future is treacherous.

Remember what lies came first.

Kneel down in the endless graveyard.

Take a lesson from one much wiser.

It's not the first time it's come to this.

Make a difference while you can.

Go on back for the meadows.

...

Walk this way.

Remember the first thing you heard.

Some among the lost are still with us.

The voices in the forest are for you.

Speak of multitudes while you still can.

Waiting is the perfect patience.

Shake the dust free from your memories.

There are people in the frozen elevator.

Hard time is bad for flowers and nerves.

Prisoners don't have time to wait for you.

Go up the staircase into the empty bedroom.

Stand with the ghosts of matrimony.

Go on back for the survivors.

...

Walk this way.

Kiss the guitar player before he expires.

Stick with the high horses while they last.

Let the noise continue until it stops.

Live up to the promises you once made.

Now is not the time to stop praying.

The glory hole is no longer easy to ignore.

Waiting until morning is a long time.

There are episodes you might best forget.

Lifting the lid has had consequences.

Stand by your principles while you still can.

Answer the call when it rings for you.

Go on back for the beginning.

That has challenged me most of my creative life, as I'm sure it has many others. How can I be sure I'm doing the right thing? How can I be better, smarter, more agile, wise, more creative? How can I live up to my potential, how can I overcome hesitancy and fear, how can I make my way through the contradictions and vagaries of fate? It's more than just physical skills and aptitudes we need in the ever more complicated world we live in. We need mental, emotional, social and spiritual tools as well. In fact, they are now critical to our individual human survival as well as that of our species, now that we have exceeded the carrying capacity of our only planet and put it in danger of extermination.

There is a long list of obstacles to living a life of meaning. Much of human autonomy and freedom is tied up in our ability to make choices. The aim of the good life is the achievement of worthwhile goals; happiness rewards the activity of seeking to achieve, to be and to do, whether or not it succeeds. Life has meaning in being active and in struggle, as struggle is just as much a part of life as anything else. The individual who lives self-chosen and self-imposed values that answer to a sense of the obligations of humanity and fellowship, and who appreciates the value of knowledge, art and nature, is in the best position to find happiness.

For me, this is what I need in the time I have left: to live wisely and fully, to find peace in honest and fulfilling work, to resist injustice and avarice, to find solace under the sky, to find grace and goodness, to be whole.

Robert MacDonald has lived by his wits, some hard work, and a good lashing of luck.

Almost completely unschooled, he has, over several decades, invented identities as graphic artist, typographer, printer, community activist, publisher, information architect, program director, programmer, and designer. He hasn't finished with inventions. Having spent most of his life thoroughly urbanized (Toronto, New York, San Francisco, Vancouver) he is now nestled into the grasslands and orchards of the Okanagan valley. He finds profound solace in the virgin wilderness upland from his habits. His works have appeared in the journals *Kosmos*, *Image*, *Sage-ing*, and more, and he has chapbooks: *Dead Drop* and *Hardwinds*, with more anticipated. He is transcribing several decades of writings from notebook to manuscript, and is otherwise bidding his time. He hails by oyonder.com

FINDING POSSIBILITY

IN 100 DAYS OF WRITING

Nicole Frederickson



I'm sitting here on the front porch this warm, July afternoon staring at the hundreds of bales in the pasture in front of our house. The hummingbirds buzz in and out, the cats laze on the fuzzy blanket the girls left out earlier this morning when the air was still cool and my mind wanders. I think back to one hundred days ago, it would have been somewhere near the tail end of April. A quick scroll on my phone reminds me that one hundred days ago winter still had its hold on us. While we were dreaming and hoping for summer days like today, there were still piles of snow on the ground, we were bedding the calves as they were being born in the middle of early spring storms and ice was still covering the river.

But time does its thing, as it always does, and days pass. Fields dried, were planted, grew and blossomed, are now cut and baled up, ready to keep the cows warm for those inevitable cold April days next spring.

"Time is magic," said our five year old daughter / mystic Clara a few mornings ago, and I couldn't help but smile with newfound ease. My whole life I've had an anxious obsession with time. Crossing off seemingly mundane ordinary days, living for the highs, checking off milestones, focusing on the time I have left, both in the micro – waiting for the next vacation – and the macro – considering how much life I may have left – sense. So, when I took on a 100 Day Blogging Challenge this past February, little did I know it would, among so many other things, completely transform my relationship with time, coming to see that it is indeed magic.

One hundred days in the scheme of a lifetime, my lifetime, feels like a drop in the pan. So easily do they pass us by, another season. We are encouraged to live this linear life from beginning to end; yet, when I took up the challenge, picking up the baton from an elder and friend who had just completed a one- hundred-day journey of their own, it didn't take me long to begin living with eyes and heart more open to the poetry and beauty of our ordinary lives. Posting whatever was present and alive in me that day – a conversation with a stranger, a reflection from my current season of parenting, a question that was working and living in me, a few poetic lines alongside daily images of our life – I came to realize that I could experience time not as scarce and fleeting, but as generative, abundant and filled with possibility.

In my 100th and final post, I reflected:

"Mostly, I delight in the gift of seeing how full 100 days of living, learning, loving, wondering, and noticing is, it needn't pass us by in a hurried rush. And, that life truly isn't ours to choose, but an invitation to surrender and be

Front porch





Bales

I came alive in the extraordinary rituals of ordinary days ... I linger here just a little longer on the front porch, left pondering.

open to discover where the flow of the river takes us.” (Day 100 - “Through Me”)

A teacher, fellow writer and elder of mine, Tenneson Woolf, has shared with me on several occasions that the commitment begins as an outer practice of noticing, and writing words soon becomes a transformative journey of “being written.” So it shouldn’t much surprise me that this challenge changed me, nudged an inner shift to live more fully in the magic, as Clara says, of each day. I came alive in the extraordinary rituals of ordinary days: the blue sky as I roll over I wake up each morning, the way the breeze touches my skin so gently, the far-off giggle, the way the clouds look as the storm rolls in, the story of my daughter and her dad running the boat ashore yesterday. These are the bits and pieces of life, the seemingly insignificant passing details, the possibilities that make up a day, a year, a season, a life.

Not one to shy away from an inner journey, the greatest challenge in this for me was to share my writing publicly. As someone who lives a very quiet life on the farm, it’s easy to feel isolated and to isolate. So I grappled with questions such as Why bother sharing? And in a world of more and more noise, why am I adding my voice? And yet, this is, as I’m reminded again and again, “the solitary journey we cannot do alone,” as I’ve heard Francis Weller say. And so I not only clicked share each day, but I also invited along a soul-friend, Saoirse Charis-Graves, who walked alongside by contributing an added layer: a daily haiku, which began each day’s post. Sometimes her poems serendipitously aligned with what I shared that day, sometimes her haiku acted as inspiration, and mostly they just continuously reminded me that we aren’t ever alone, and neither was I.

A beginning or An end ... turning or return ... Still in the moment.

Saoirse Charis-Graves

One hundred days from now, so the calendar tells me, will find us once again gripped by the hands of winter. Long gone will be these slow summer days, the song of the birds and crickets gone silent; fields will be covered by snow and the river with ice. Yet, in between now and then are thousands of ordinary, magic moments, possibilities. Poetry of the everyday. And so today I linger here just a little longer on the front porch, left pondering ... is it the daily commitment to write that has me noticing and attending to the ordinariness of life, or was it the noticing and attending that gave me cause to write? As I sign off each post ...

“Until Next Time, N”

Nicole Frederickson lives on a grain and cattle farm on Treaty 4 territory in rural Saskatchewan with her partner, Blake, and their four daughters, Ava, Piper, Ella and Clara, along with many cows, cats, chickens, pigs and horses. A former school teacher, she now homeschools with the girls and delights in the possibilities and mysteries of life. She writes on her blog: “Becoming – With Wonder & Possibility” at www.nicolefrederickson.com Email: nbfrederickson@gmail.com

TENNIS ANYONE?

LATE-LIFE EMBRACE OF DOUBLES FORGES NEW CONNECTIONS

Liane Faulder



I crossed the parking lot at the tennis centre on a chilly, grey morning in April, and there she was. Not a long lost friend or family member — that would have been more dramatic, to be sure — but one of the women in my tennis foursome, a playmate I hadn't seen in about three months.

"Who is that, coming my way?" she beamed. "Can I have a hug?"

"Of course," I said, grateful for the request as our tennis bags awkwardly bumped and we renewed our quite recent friendship.

Walking onto the court, I greeted another doubles stalwart with warmth and excitement, and was introduced to a smiling new playing partner (tennis elbow had sidelined one of our regulars). We paired off and began our warm-up. I was struck by the feeling that I was part of a group with shared interests and sensibilities, and I liked the feeling.

This is new for me. I have only been playing ladies doubles for a few months, and in the beginning it was intimidating. I worried the other women were better than I and, furthermore, knew all the rules. (Both of these things turned out to be true.) Though they were kind as they suggested I was standing in the wrong position on the court or had lost track of the score, it felt hard to be the newcomer whose skills weren't up to snuff. Numerous times I came home feeling frustrated and wondered if it was worth the knot in my stomach. But I persisted, took group lessons, and watched online videos with my husband (also a tennis player and fan, and a patient teacher to boot). This determination to succeed, even at a novice level of play, was rooted in a true love of the game. But my commitment to tennis was also part of a need to propel forward in a positive manner. It was about learning something new, but it was also about replacing something old.

I needed help, quite frankly, to leave my career as a journalist, which had occupied my heart and mind for nearly 40 years. I had always taken such pride in my work, driven not only to track down the story, but to craft it with care and attention. Near daily, I learned new things and met new people who often moved me in a myriad of ways. In retirement, would it be possible to value other pursuits and people just as much? Or would I be forever dragging around my old life, like a child with a now tatty but beloved bear she just can't let go of?

While that transition is still very much a work in progress — I have been retired for less than two years and still work a little part-time as an arts and culture writer — I can see the direction it is taking, and it pleases me. The new skills I am learning as a tennis player keep my body and mind engaged and fit. Furthermore, as a writer, I see metaphors and wisdom in the game and its

With my husband





Top: Getting better
Above: And better yet

players (amateur and professional alike) that are helping me shape a new kind of life. For instance, when world number one women's player Ashley Barty announced in March that she was leaving her enviable career at the tender age of 25, I was heartened and inspired. Barty said she wanted to get to know herself as something other than a tennis player. Hey! Me, too. Who am I if not a reporter? Well, let's see.

Though Barty and I have as much in common as Madonna and the soprano in the church choir down the street, her attitude is instructive. Like Barty, I wonder what awaits me in the big unknown after retirement. Where can I find fulfillment in these later stages of my life?

The community I am gathering through tennis shows me there are as many options for making the game work for you as there are serving styles. A retired lawyer in her seventies with whom I play regularly is a role model. She plays a lot of doubles, and when she can't find a game, she walks on the court alone and practises her serve. The younger women in my growing circle may still be working, but they find ways to fit in the game they love – a reminder that joy must be pursued at all ages, even if there are other demands on time (elderly parents in my case). I have even met several people who were part of my journalism life — either as colleagues or contacts – who are members at the tennis centre. I didn't know that tennis was part of their lives, and the game has strengthened the bond, however slight, between us and provided a new source of conversation.

All of these good things have come as a surprise to me, like coming home from the hairdresser after trying a new style and finding it an unexpected improvement. Though I'm still very much a beginner in the game of ladies doubles, I am gaining confidence not just in my game, but in my ability to weather change. New skills, new friends, a new perspective is possible at any stage.

Liane Faulder, a freelance writer and journalist, retired in 2020 after a 30-year career as a multi-award-winning feature writer with the Edmonton Journal. She has published stories in AMA's Westworld, as well as Reader's Digest, Today's Parent, and Chatelaine. Her personal essay, "About the Boys," was part of the best-selling Canadian anthology *Dropped Threads* 3. In 2007/08, Liane won the prestigious Canadian Journalism Fellowship at Massey College, University of Toronto. She is a Senior Living columnist for Postmedia, focussing on Life in the Sixties. Liane's 2007 book, *The Long Walk Home: Paul Franklin's Journey from Afghanistan*, chronicles the inspiring recovery of an Edmonton soldier who lost both legs in a suicide bombing. In 2015, Liane was awarded the Alberta Playwright's Network Discovery prize for her moving play inspired by *The Long Walk Home*. In 2018, that play, *WALK*, debuted at the Edmonton International Fringe Festival in a successful 10-day run. Liane is the mother of two (giant) boys and the grandmother of two (much smaller) boys. She plays tennis with a great deal of enthusiasm. liane.rae@gmail.com

WHAT THE CAMERA SEES

Judy O'Dell



It is a dark January day, and I am seeking inspiration for my photography. During her Zoom lecture, the famous photographer reveals that she only shoots film. In my basement darkroom, which has been little used since I started photographing with digital cameras, I find an expired roll of 120 black and white film and my Holga camera tucked in a drawer. The Holga is a cheap plastic toy camera with a plastic lens, giving the images a particular aesthetic: sharp centre, soft edges and vignetted corners.

It has been many years since I loaded 120 film. My fingers are not as agile as they once were. I fumble with threading the leader onto the plastic take-up reel and winding the film. I replace the camera's back and attach the brackets that hold the camera closed. Since the camera is not light-tight, and the brackets sometimes slip off, I remember to wrap the camera with gaffer tape. There are no settings on a Holga other than a dial on the lens for landscape, people or portrait. The shutter speed is set, so the images are better on a sunny day. The project will be portraits of trees in winter.

I make a few shots of a twisted tree along our road and can't remember if I wound the film. I try to count the images I already made but am not sure, so I wind the film. The rest of the twelve images on the roll are of solo trees on the beach at the lake, one at the courthouse and a few more in the cemetery.

I return to the darkroom with the exposed roll of film. Loading 120 film on the developing reel in the dark is always a challenge. I remember to cut the corners of the leading edge of the film so it will feed easily. I cried in frustration in my first darkroom class twenty years ago because I could not load the film. The instructor taught me patience and that trick. The same frustration bubbles up now as the old film is brittle and won't catch in the rollers, but I get it wound. I put the reel in the developing tank and close the lid.

After turning on the light, I place the brown chemical bottles in the sink and line up four one-litre plastic bottles. Each is labelled with the liquids used in the process, so I don't mix them up. I fill the first with 500 ml of distilled water. In the second bottle, I mix the developer 1:1 with water. The third is filled with distilled water for stop, and the fourth with fixer. I put a Carly Simon CD in the player, pour the water from the first bottle into the tank, set the timer for one minute, tap the tank on the sink several times to dislodge any air bubbles on the film, and agitate the tank for 5 seconds. Suddenly I feel over-

My Holga





From my darkroom

whelmingly happy. I had forgotten that I always felt that way when working in the darkroom: the music, the rhythm of agitating the tank every 30 seconds, dancing and singing in between, hibernating in a small space, the familiar chemical odour, anticipating what I might have captured on the film. Developer for 11 minutes, pour it out, stop for another minute, pour that out, then the fixer for five minutes. The fixer goes back in the bottle to be reused. The film washes for ten minutes as I clean up, still singing along with Carly. Add Photo Flo to prevent water stains, and then I remove the film for the ah-ha moment. Disappointment. Some frames are unexposed, some too dark, and one is a double exposure.

It is so much easier to use my digital camera, but some force drives me to continue with the Holga. I order new film and load the Holga when it arrives. I leave the lens cap on and lose two shots of a beautiful

tree twenty miles from home. I throw the lens cap away; no need to protect a plastic lens. I look for solo trees as I drive on my errands, but these are rare in the forested mountains where I live. A giant sycamore tree by the covered bridge in a nearby town catches my eye. There are solo trees along the roadside, and I look for vantage points to avoid power lines in the photos.

The second roll of film is more successful, with no blank frames since I had religiously wound the film after each shot. But the images made on dull days are muddy grey, even the snow. The photos taken on sunny days are better. The tops of some of the trees are cut off. What I see through the viewfinder isn't what the lens sees.

I stack my nightstand with books about trees. In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben writes that trees are social; they need the company of other trees. From Diana Beresford-Kroeger's book *To Speak for the Trees*, I learn about Celtic wisdom and the laws of trees; trees as fundamental to human survival and spirituality. A Pennsylvania State University School of Forestry newsletter contains an article about how trees pull carbon from the air. I begin photographing trees in their community on my daily walks in our woods. I tread the remnants of logging roads where I walked with my father and realize that I have now lived three years longer than he did.

I photograph glistening trees after an ice storm. I venture out on snowshoes to photograph trees after a snowstorm fills the woods with profound silence. I photograph the gnarled apple trees behind the barn and the maple and beech trees along the edge of the hayfield. I photograph the trees growing through the old stone walls. I photograph the trees that border the natural gas pipeline cut through our woods. I notice the distinctive shape of each deciduous tree: maple, cherry, birch, beech, oak, locust, and how the hemlock needles differ from pine. I watch how the trees' shadows shrink as

I learn about Celtic wisdom and the laws of trees; trees as fundamental to human survival and spirituality.



Photographing light

From experience, I know that a camera always sees more than I do.

the sun retreats behind a cloud and observe the change in the light as the calendar moves towards spring.

Every few days I am in the darkroom, dancing and singing. I scan the negatives and share the images with a photographer friend. She asks why I am making them and comments that the photos are fuzzy, dark and almost menacing, unlike the beautiful light in the sharp colour images in my book. I tell her I don't know why, but I am happy in the woods and the darkroom.

I print some of the images and hang them on the wall in my studio. They are dark, and the light leaks and unsharp focus make them mysterious. They seem like trees in a dream. Studying them, I realize that I am not photographing trees, but rather my grief. My youngest sister, Jane, an oncology nurse practitioner, died of cancer seven months ago, and we often walked these woods together. Our last walk was over Memorial Day weekend, and she insisted on coming with me

despite the neuropathy that caused numbness in her feet. It was a short walk to Conklin Run, where we sat on a rock and talked. I have saved our text exchanges on my phone from the last months of her life to keep her alive.

I look at the photographs again and realize that there is light in all of them; they are not as dark as I thought. From experience, I know that a camera always sees more than I do. I was photographing light while seeing darkness.

Judy O'Dell is a visual artist and writer who splits her time between Laporte, Pennsylvania, where the forested Endless Mountains surround her, and Rockport, Maine, where "the mountains meet the sea." She is an avid outdoors woman and posts images on Instagram using the hashtag #woodswalk. Judy's artistic practice includes film and digital photography, writing and making postcards and books. Her backyards provide the inspiration for her work.

Judy holds a BA in Economics from Immaculata University and has been CPA for nearly fifty years. Her current practice is limited to business valuations and consulting. After years of taking photography workshops, she completed her MFA at Maine Media College in 2020. Her thesis project was a self-published book of photographs and essays, *Goose River Field Notes*, which was juried into the 2020 Photo Book Show at Davis Orton Gallery/Griffin Museum of Photography. Her photographs have been exhibited at Praxis Gallery, Minneapolis; Arts League, Chestertown, MD; Arts Council, Onslow County, NC; Maine Photography Show; Rayko Photo Center, San Francisco; Montpelier Museum, Thomaston, ME; and Prairie Village Museum, Rugby, ND. She has essays published in various anthologies and the local newspaper.

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THE MERRY MERMAID MOTEL

POSTCARD FROM THE PAST

Marie Bisson



Mermaid Motel and Restaurant (Google image)

Marie Bisson is an emerging writer of creative nonfiction and poetry, learning with the support of and gratitude to Vancouver Island Regional Library's online "Blue Pencil Posse," facilitated by Richard Stephenson. She'll next take her pen to "Down the Rabbit Hole: Writing for children and youth" at the Elder College, Vancouver Island University.

She credits her "raging-spirited, red-headed" granddaughter, Saje, for inspiring the internal search for peace and humility during Covid, resulting in her writing. Eternally grateful to the Universe for the blessing of four beautiful adult daughters and nine amazing grandchildren who, too, live in B.C., Marie believes in and practises an attitude of gratitude when blessings come into her life.

This is a 'postcard' form of short story about my life growing up by the water. It is also about facing fears and moving forward, especially difficult during Covid for most everyone on Earth. I am lucky enough to live across from the sea on Vancouver Island, finding inspiration there and looking forward to further adventures in creative writing.

As a girl, Marie loved vacationing in Montauk at the Merry Mermaid Motel. Except there was a life-size mermaid at the bottom of the swimming pool that terrified her. Marie would enter the water but always hung onto the side for dear life, ready to hop out if the mermaid should swim up and grab her ankles and pull her under. Marie still remembers almost drowning as a girl: sitting on the bottom of a different swimming pool until someone pulled her off, up and out. Despite these experiences, she learned to love swimming, winning races at the local pool and eventually becoming a lifeguard.

To this day Marie still doesn't like touching the bottom, especially if she can't see what's down there. Snakes chasing after her in the lake. Riding a wave with a stingray larger than she in Costa Rica. I guess her fear of the dark depths of the unknown helped her become a fast swimmer, escaping what might be lurking behind her.

I wonder, is it the need for speed or the adrenaline rush of fear that has made her such a sprinter?

Writing the postcard short story "The Merry Mermaid Motel" helped me reflect on my life in and around the water, and, also, the impact that imagination has on a child's fears of the unknown. I have worked with thousands of children throughout my thirty-plus-year career in aquatics, giving the gift of staying safe in the water by learning to swim. Now retired from the frontlines in nursing, I have a growing appreciation for life's finite preciousness, and believe it should be nurtured for generations to come. I am excited to start expressing memories and emotions from my life, for my family and others to enjoy and ponder, and hope it may evoke similar reflections in them. Writing in this way has been an inner journey of self-healing as I find the courage to do so. Encouraging children to strive and reach out when they most need to is sometimes difficult, but we can help them find the words to express fears, and the safe people with whom to do so. This is a focus I will explore in my future writing. Looking ahead, I can't wait to go swimming with my family this summer by the beach where I live, having fun in the sun!

INSPIRATION IS EVERYWHERE

OPEN YOUR EYES AND SEE



Linda Lovisa

I often receive comments on my photographs after people have viewed them online. “Where were you?” they ask. Some of my answers include: my backyard, Glen Canyon, Goat’s Peak, the High Rim Trail, or Crystal Mountain trails. It’s a long list of near-home places that are special to me. “I wish I could join you,” they often respond. This year, I advertised a “Hike, Sketch, & Wildflowers” adventure.

I wanted the students to experience nature, peace, discovery and creativity in a completely different way than they were used to. They arrived at the meeting place, and I had them park so they could ride along with me. They thought they had arrived when they parked their cars! Surprised and curious, they gathered their bags and got into my Jeep. Where I was taking them, their vehicles were not suitable for the rough road ahead. The Jeep ride on the gravel road was an adventure in itself – avoiding big dips and going through wash-outs. A bumpy ride it was. A ten-minute drive and we arrived at what I call My Secret Alpine Meadow. I parked along a narrow backcountry road.

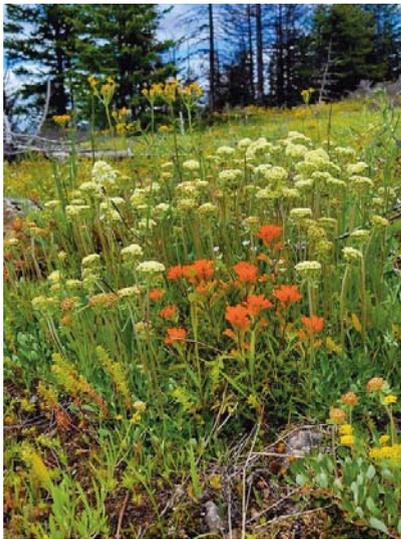
We grabbed our gear and sprayed ourselves with bug spray. I sounded my horn to let all creatures, great or small, know that we were there. “Follow me up this ridge and use your poles,” I instructed. When they got over the ridge, they could not believe the beauty before their eyes. A sea of colour was spread out before them against the distant mountain backdrop. Such a bright show of colour. It seemed solid blue and yellow until you looked down to the carpet on the ground.

I pointed out many types of wildflowers present: larkspur, yarrow, silverleaf phacelia, Indian paintbrush, prairie smoke, lupin, daisy, Bonneville shootings stars, scarlet gilia, lemonweed and yellow salsify, to name a few.

I suggested that we hike before we settled to sketch. We found fresh moose tracks from the day before, a frog and a toad. The sound of bees was a constant hum in harmony with the songs of many birds. Squirrels chirped, “Strangers in the meadow!” There were no traffic sounds, just the sounds of nature, which seemed magnified that day. We had had quite a bit of rain this spring, and every living thing was enjoying the warmth of the sun. As we marvelled at our surroundings, there was not a breath of

Rosie sketches the meadow





Left: Meadow flowers

Middle: Bee on Indian paintbrush

Right: Sketching colour



wind. We hoped for a light breeze as the temperature began to rise. Heather whistled for the wind and, like magic, we got a gentle breeze that also helped keep the mosquitoes at bay. Heather informed us that when sailing on Lake Winnipeg years ago, her mom used to whistle for wind. Heather smiled, somehow it always worked for her – a beautiful connection with nature passed down to the next generation. Why not try it here?

Rosie and Heather were completely in awe. The more I showed them, the more in awe they were that this heaven on earth was so close to home. We chose to step on rocks that were strewn across the meadow so as to avoid stepping on the flowers. So many flowers, mushrooms, moss and lichen, all beautiful in shape and colour. Nature offers us so many textures.

When you learn to see, it is overwhelming. Where do I begin? My mind is racing; I want to remember it all. Thank goodness we have cameras to help us capture inspiration for later works!

I led them into the multiple vignettes of our surroundings, instructing them how I look at nature's many compositions. "How do you choose what to draw?" "It is all so beautiful!" "I don't know where to look." These are very common comments in such a place. As we drink in the beauty before us, we are challenged to capture something so perfect that you scare yourself into thinking you could never do it justice.

Sit and see. Start with marks of colour from your pencils; just record colour. How freeing this becomes. Free your brain from detail. Let colour bring you into the space you are in. Pick what is before you and start there. Then look. Now what do you see? All of a sudden, the smallest plant appears. You did not see it before. Now you see it everywhere. It is not showy like all the others, but it is part of that carpet on the ground that creates a tapestry like no other. Discoveries are everywhere you look when you learn to see.

The morning was coming to an end. The sun was beating down on us at high noon. Most shadows had been lost. The magic hours of early morning had disappeared. We didn't want to leave. Feverishly we tried to capture as

**Sit and see
... Discoveries are
everywhere you look
when you learn to see.**

much as we could in the last moments in the meadow. I smiled to myself. I had achieved my goal that morning: discovery, peace and creativity in nature.

Being in nature is rejuvenating. You do not need to be in a mountain meadow. A nearby park is just as beneficial. Put nature into your daily routine.

Heather and Rosie have given permission for me to share their feedback:

“I had the privilege of attending the June hike and sketch class with Linda Lovisa. It was actually a dream come true as I have never seen a mountain meadow in its spring glory! Linda is an excellent, knowledgeable (I felt very safe) guide, a gracious host, and of course an excellent teacher! If you are interested in art and the outdoors and you have the ability to do a moderate hike then I highly recommend this bucket list activity.” – Heather

“Thank you so much for setting this up, I had the best day. Not only was the destination absolutely beautiful, but it was somewhere I never would have gone on my own because I wouldn’t have felt comfortable without a knowledgeable and prepared guide (and I had no idea it was there!). The scenery was simply gorgeous: I learned about lots of new flowers and even saw some wildlife. When we stopped to draw, I was completely engrossed in the surroundings and view, and it was the most peaceful drawing experience I’ve had in a long time. I came home completely inspired, and with a ton of reference material that I know I will be using well into the future.

Thanks again Linda, sign me up for the next one!!” – Rosie

Linda Lovisa paints Alla Prima (direct approach). This type of painting keeps the colours fresh and vibrant while 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 presented a Gold Award and an Award of Excellence by The Federation of Canadian Artists.

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.

Artist Statement

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.

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**Discovery, peace and
creativity in nature...
Being in nature is
rejuvenating.**

THE LION MAN

Jacques G. LeBlanc, MD, FRSC



The Löwenmensch figurine, also called the Lion-Human of Hohlenstein-Stadel, is prehistoric mammoth ivory fragments discovered in Hohlenstein-Stadel, a Jura cave in Germany in 1939. Determined by carbon dating, it was found to be between 35,000 and 40,000 years old. The ivory statue was found broken into 200 small fragments, which were then assembled and restored in 1969. The statue is one of the oldest-known examples of an artistic representation.

I learned about this amazing statue a few weeks ago when I attended a lecture given by Dr. Liane Gabora, a psychology professor at the University of British Columbia-Okanagan. The professor focuses her research on how culture evolves, how the creative process works (with an emphasis on concept combination and cross-domain thinking), and how it fuels the evolution of culture. She has used the Lion Man to teach her master's students the concept of cross-domain thinking and its ancient roots.

Cross-domain thinking is using knowledge of an idea from one domain and applying it to another domain. It is a way of thinking that is not constrained by disciplinary boundaries. Cross-domain thought is the ability to see relationships between things that are not immediately obvious. In cross-domain transfer, an inspirational source from one domain (e.g., music) influences a creative work in another (e.g., painting). Creativity is about the recombination of ideas.

“The Lion Man is a masterpiece. Sculpted with great originality, virtuosity and technical skill from mammoth ivory, this 40,000-year-old image is 31 centimetres tall. It has the head of a cave lion with a partly human body. He stands upright, perhaps on tiptoes, legs apart and arms to the sides of a slender, cat-like body with strong shoulders like the hips and thighs of a lion. His gaze, like his stance, is powerful and directed at the viewer. The details of his face show he is attentive, he is watching and he is listening. He is powerful, mysterious and from a world beyond ordinary nature. He is the oldest known representation of a being that does not exist in physical form but symbolizes ideas about the supernatural” (“The Lion Man: an Ice Age masterpiece,” blog.britishmuseum.org). Forty thousand years ago creating this figure “was a lot of time for a small community living in difficult conditions to invest in a sculpture that was useless for their physical survival. Allowing this to be done might suggest that the purpose of the image was about strengthening common bonds and group awareness to overcome dangers and difficulties” (ibid.). Dr. Gabora suggests the creation of Lion Man shows this culture's ability to see relationships between things that are not evident, such as the relationship between the courage of a lion and the courage possible in man.

This 40,000-year-old image is 31 centimetres tall. It has the head of a cave lion with a partly human body.



Left: statue of The Lion Man front view
Right: The Lion Man side view



Dr. Gabora conducted a study in which six master's student creators generated music, prose, poetry and visual art inspired by the Lion man and then answered questions about their process. The data revealed that the four alternative art forms by which the students expressed the Lion Man spontaneously derived through lines that formed a cultural lineage from Lion Man to artist to contemporary audiences.

Cross-domain thinking and transfer have been integral to cultural development and evolution by moving steps forward when creative thought creates stimulation in individual learning and social learning. The definition of culture is information, which is acquired from other members of their species through teaching, imitation and other forms of social transmission

and is capable of affecting an individual's behaviour. Cultural evolution is the change of this information over time. Creative thought is central to human life in shaping everyday activities as simple as putting together an outfit or holding a conversation. More importantly, while it fosters a sense of personal and cultural identity, creative thought fuels cultural evolution, giving us technology, music, media and art. While creativity is perhaps our most defining human trait, it is one of the most elusive aspects of human cognition.

Dr. Gabora's master's students used the Lion Man and cross-domain thinking and inspiration to create a relationship with a music piece, with writing a poem and with dancing. For example, the student musician used the roar of the lion, divided the roar in multiple sounds, removed some sounds and used others to compose a piece for cello: a primary example of cross-domain thinking and creativity.

Dr. Gabora used the resulting information to model the cross-domain transfer from inspirational source (sculpted figurine) to creative product (music, poetry, prose, visual art). These four spontaneously-generated threads of cultural continuity formed the backbone of this Lion Man inspired cultural lineage, enabling culture to evolve even in the face of discontinuity at the level of conventional categories or domains. We know of no other theory of cultural evolution that accommodates cross-domain transfer or other forms of discontinuity. The approach suggested by Dr. Gabora paves the way for a broad scientific framework for the origins of evolutionary processes.

One might ask, to what extent are creative processes in one domain (e.g.,

Creativity may be facilitated by interdisciplinary courses and by activities that foster connections between different domains

technology) affected by information from other domains (e.g., music)? While some studies suggest that creative abilities are domain-specific, others indicate that domain-specific ideas stimulate creativity. Even if individuals primarily express their creativity in a single domain, they are often employing cross-domain thinking when they create.

The finding that cross-domain influences inspired most creative outputs has implications for developing practices that promote creativity in education, the workplace and personal life. There is an international trend towards streamlining classwork and content to the basics and reducing or eliminating classes in the arts. Educational systems are increasingly geared towards providing much in the way of information, but little in the form of examples or opportunities to cultivate creative thinking skills. Dr. Gabora's studies using the Lion Man show that creativity may be facilitated by interdisciplinary courses and by activities that foster connections between different domains.

Human culture evolves, but creativity is central to cognition and one of our human traits. It plays a vital role in planning, problem solving and storytelling, and has given rise to art, science and technology. The state of a world view can be affected by information assimilated in one domain, and this change-of-state can be expressed in another domain. The impact of cross-domain transfer refers to applying knowledge or skills learned in one environment to another field. This transfer can be a powerful tool for learning since it allows individuals to build on existing knowledge and skills to learn new information more easily. Creativity has a positive impact on the world leading to the development of innovative ideas. Being a man trained in science I embrace cross-domain transfer and where it will take us.

Jacques LeBlanc retired after being a paediatric and adult cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon at B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver. Realizing that he had a lot to give back to his profession in the way of experience as a doctor, a teacher, a student of life, a husband and a human being seeking wellness in this rapidly changing world, he created leblancwellness.com. For the last few years he has been a regular contributor to The Journal, sharing a belief in recovering the connections we have lost and engaging the new skills we have gained to mitigate loneliness and create wellness.

FROM PICTURES TO POEMS



Patricia Keeney

As a writer I have always been an imagist. In my poems, my fiction and even my critical essays I am wedded to the visual. The world comes to me in pictures and patterns.

Nature does. Her art is everywhere.

Some of my favourite poems have been inspired by paintings. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" takes its cue from Breughel's rendition of *The Fall of Icarus*. The poet muses on a humanity that ignores suffering and calamity because it is thoughtlessly preoccupied with other trifling things. Here is the second stanza:

In Breughel's Icarus for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to go and sailed calmly on.

Google the painting and you see immediately how moments are reproduced verbally: the ploughman, the sun, the expensive delicate ship, white legs and green water. Other senses are imagined from the visual: the splash, the cry.

Maud Lewis is a Canadian folk artist who lived most of her life in poverty in a small house in Nova Scotia. Despite being born with birth defects that reduced her mobility, Lewis, encouraged by her mother, cultivated her art from a young age making and selling hand-drawn Christmas cards to sell. These early efforts developed into a body of work now nationally acclaimed.

The clarity and brightness of her paintings speak strongly to me. It is as though she sees through our world to another, distinctively her own, a bright place she is happy to inhabit, a light-filled place full of rich colour and clear line into which she smilingly invites us.

Here is my poem, inspired by various viewings of her work and most intensely by a visit to the Halifax museum that houses her small Nova Scotia house, bringing her brilliant outside world inside for us all to know intimately.

The second and third stanzas follow quite closely the interior visuals on display in the museum. I want to bring the reader in to experience the colours and shapes I found

Inside Maud's cabin





Above: *Fauns*, by Maud Lewis
 Right top: *Deer Crossing Stream*
 Right below: *Footprints in the Snow*

so vivid, so extraordinary, to understand how she created a living space that matched her imaginative space, so much of it drawn from nature, the two becoming one.

Lewis’s painting of two fauns standing in the trees took me straight to the fourth stanza of the poem and Debussy’s “L’Après Midi d’un Faun” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLLOXvamfZw> with all its mysterious, fragile delicacy. Lewis spotlights these appealing creatures, dazzling and shy, in

Maud Lewis

makes a world
 of colour
 a palette place
 she lives in

a tiny house inside a large museum
 green and white, painted trees on some
 tiles, deep burgundy eavestrough
 interior space a garden of flowers
 all painted or stitched: breadbox
 rugs, blankets and walls
 blossoming

a staircase of vases
 crisp petals over
 the whole stove

people peer through her lens
 to bloom and shine, become
 Debussy’s fauns, peep shyly
 before a pale blue pond
 around pine, careful black branches,
 scoring immaculate snow

become the leaping stag
 aqua foam churning up
 almond eye an arrow through
 gold leaves, watched
 by a little red figure
 in a little red boat

become the woodland
 gaze that looks at us
 from their bright world
 inside the frame

buttery evening sun
 footprints tracking snow
 from everywhere they’ve come
 there is a photograph of Maude
 outside her little house
 against her petalled walls
 in crimson coat and jaunty toque

her shy smile ribbons the gift:
 a horse drawn sleigh
 across mounds of cottony snow
 by powdery firs, round red barns
 and airy winter clouds
 on a road full of bells
 her life without shadow

summer in a snow globe
 the planet’s magic eye



Maud Lewis in front of her cabin

a moment of endless presence.

With stanza 5, we splash from water into air, the energy of the stag aimed through its body beyond the frame. We leap with the force of the animal but we also watch with the little red figure in the little red boat. Maud Lewis bringing the outside in ... where it continues.

It was those delicate unforgettable footprints in snow as depicted by Lewis that crept into my sixth stanza. Maud Lewis extends our world in such a gentle, artistically perfect, irresistible way.

Stanzas 7 and 8, inspired by the photo we have of the painter before her painted house holding up her painting gift, led me to the last three lines, which try to catch the magic of her bright transformations and how we might continue it in our appreciation of her art and care for the planet.

Another recent poem of mine takes its cue from a visit with my daughter to Paris, where some iconic sights, culminating in the Musée d'Orsay, lift us out of our everyday selves and into rejuvenating in new ways. My daughter's excitement, after an exhausting year of teaching and graduate work, re-ignited my own love of this sensual city. The poem follows.

The Eiffel Tower pierces a pink sunset; up close in daylight though it seems floral. These images came from photos I took, a mother basking in her daughter's love of life and thrilled that the future so entices her with this experience.

Notre Dame begins some thoughts about time, who we are becoming as we sail past her in a Bateau-Mouche, shimmering over water at night.

Arriving at the Musée d'Orsay and stanza 6 of the poem we are lifted into another realm of possibility, up close and personal with the face of time, a giant clock at the museum that was once a train station. Life on the move.

Musée d'Orsay

We're in Paris, my daughter and I
two women of a certain age.

La tour Eiffel follows us
sprouting from our heads.

Up close it's beige lace
graced by sunny forsythia
and you beaming
beneath arches.

Your lustrous tresses
reach into future, pink sky
pouring day onto water.

On the dark lit Seine
our needle of light

points us past
Notre Dame, ageless lady
ours and not ours, winking
behind winter trees.

At d'Orsay the giant clock
that used to push trains
gives us time
and space
its airy architecture
allowing years
to breathe both ways

allowing us to be
petals and parasols
delicate dancers
straining in white
Renoir's *Femme Sauvage*.

Mother and daughter.

Finally civilized
we lose ourselves
in feathery hues
pastels caressing
our happy creature
selves in gentle seas
of satisfaction

dance with une veille
vrai Parisienne
outside the museum
as she curls the air
with her little jazz band.



Then come the paintings themselves. Tutus and petals and parasols. The gentle pastels of Renoir's *Ravin de la Femme Sauvage* invite us to bask in comfort and affection, abandon ourselves to the sweet mother-daughter love that had been there all along, rediscovered in Paris together and celebrated as we emerged onto the street exactly as the last stanza depicts, impromptu dancing and all, joined by the little old woman who moved to the rhythms of her life as though everyone were watching.

Enraptured we all were!

Patricia Keeney is an award-winning poet, novelist, theatre and literary critic. The author of ten books of poetry and two novels, Keeney's books have been translated and published in French, Spanish, Bulgarian, Chinese and Hindi, while her *Selected Poems* (Oberon) carries an introduction by the distinguished Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Keeney continues her critical work for national and international journals. Her latest poetry volume, *Orpheus in Our World* (NeoPoiesis), is an exercise in poetic archeology connecting the earliest and rarely translated Greek hymns with a postmodern theatrical dialogue. Keeney's latest novel brings her longstanding theatre knowledge into play. Based on the life of a Ugandan actor with Africa's most experimental theatre company, Abafumi, *One Man Dancing* (Inanna) is a story of politics and art set on the world stage. Her novel-in-progress, *Emptiness and Angels*, is a feminist satire, a Biblical mystery and a spiritual search involving a modern female academic, a nineteenth-century nun and Mary the mother of Jesus who all meet in a time-travelling tale of mystery, adventure and quest. A longtime professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Toronto's York University, Keeney has also taught and lectured extensively in Europe, Africa and Asia. See Patricia Keeney's website: <http://www.Wapitiwords.ca>

Top left My daughter by the Eiffel Tower
 Top middle: Clock face in Musée d'Orsay
 Top right: *The Ballet Rehearsal* by Degas
 Above: Renoir's *Ravin de la Femme Sauvage*

GIFTS FROM THE UNCONSCIOUS



Brenda Weinberg

Over many years, I have learned the value of images as they insert themselves into my outer and dreamworld lives. Often related to past events and in anticipation of new happenings, this knowledge has helped me both personally and professionally in making sense of my life and in relationships with others and myself. Images have helped me learn about things I did not wholly understand. They have expanded my perspectives and emotional range, prompting an unexpected smile or grimace. At times, they have even scared me. Knowing what Jung said about dreams has helped me alleviate fear I've felt about dream images and look instead for the learning implicit in those dreams.

Some weeks ago, an image of a red torii spontaneously entered my mind. A torii is a traditional Japanese gate most commonly found at the entrance of or within a Shinto shrine, where it symbolically marks the transition from the mundane to the sacred. This torii in my mind resembled the simplest version of the structure that I previously had in my sandplay collection of miniature figures. I was intrigued where my mind was taking me with this image.

I knew that using pastels or creating collages was not the way I wished to reproduce the torii in a personal creative manner, although in the distant past these forms of expression were my familiar and comfortable ways of

manifesting dream images that guided me for certain periods of my life, such as the spirit of the green moon and the water buffalo in my images below suggest.

For me, dreaming them both brought the ancient sacred masculine images of Osiris and Dionysus to the fore, with their roots in Egyptian and Greco-Roman mythologies. For me, these images established a connection to the Great Feminine. The water buffalo is considered a sacred image within the Lakotan and Hindu cultures. I do not yet know what form my red torii image will take, although I may have honoured it sufficiently for my psyche by writing this article with the torii as the initiating energy.

Torii of various designs are found in different countries in Asia, although they

Red torii in sandtray





Top: Spirit of the green moon
Above: Water buffalo



all have a purpose of demarcating the entrance to a sacred space from the mundane world.

When I wrote in an earlier article for *Sage-ing*, Issue 39, about “arriving at my own new door,” I thought in terms of the material everyday world. I imagined a realistic condo apartment door, rather than a torii. However, since that writing the unconscious appearance of the torii in my mind and then a more conscious event have caused me to revise my concept of ‘arriving at my own new door.’ While aware of my worsening vision over the past year or two, I had neglected to go for my usual check-up during the Covid-19 crisis. Then, after I had finally moved out of my previous long-term home, I realized that, although I could see clear images out of the outer half of my right eye, out of the inner half of that eye I could see only light, dark and motion. Within three weeks, I could see only light, dark and motion out of the entire right eye. Emergency appointments informed me of the complexity of my eye problem and my immediate need for cataract surgery.

Previously, I had not surmised that ‘arriving at my new door’ in the new year would begin with two surgical processes early on. Now, the thought of my impending medical procedures left me with the anticipation of arriving at my own new door literally with vision that would allow me to see the colours of the world in a renewed way.

Since that operation, while temporarily residing at my daughter’s home on Vancouver Island, before my new apartment was completed, I tried to connect with a different dimension of nature from what I had known in my Ontario home. Now, I heard the murmuring of sea birds and the lashing, rhythmic ocean waves. I saw the sandy beach, expanding and diminishing with the tides. One day, I saw a blue heron, standing in the water, waiting for a fish to unknowingly meet its end. I learned that such was the drama of living by the sea, with my sensation, perception and imagination functions all at play. Then, as I turned to go in, I imagined my daughter’s outer balcony door fading as my inner red torii emerged. Because the actual delay of my apartment’s completion had left me with no realistic image of my actual door, I welcomed again and was surprised by the persistence of the unexpected image of the torii. Later, searching on-line for information about the torii, I came across a photo of the sacred gates – the *torana* – of the monastery at Sanchi, which Kukai, a Japanese monk and scholar who lived from 774 to 835, had adopted to demarcate a sacred space used for the *homa* ceremony. This fire ritual eliminates darkness from the home and psyche. Meant to burn up that darkness through an upsurging flame, people get rid of negative karma or, in Jung’s words, shadow elements that must become conscious. Part of that process is the owning or taking back of unacknowledged or undesirable personal aspects during one’s process of individuation. I welcomed the gift of my unconscious image, my inner red torii to be reflected upon as I continue to individuate in my new chosen surroundings with my new eyesight. “Burning darkness” seems an apt metaphor for the cataract surgeries I experienced.



Youthful image of Kukai,
sitting on a lotus

Kukai represents new and creative energy that has a potential to heal and lead us further on a never-ending path to wholeness as a unique person.

I later learned that this fire ritual includes a sacrifice of edible or drinkable items that symbolize a link between the sacred and profane. I feel excited to have this new knowledge, deepened by my realization that I can bless the space that lies beyond my own new door by practising this ritual with food, drink and fire. By doing so, I can make my new home a sacred place in which I live my everyday life.

Always moved by connections and images that appear without conscious bidding, I remember that I have a history with Kukai. The image (Fig. 4) below was painted in the 15th century. It shows Kukai as a young child sitting on a lotus. From a Jungian perspective, his youthful androgynous image symbolizes Divine Child energy, a theme for a sandplay conference I organized when I was president of our Canadian sandplay association a couple of decades ago. For me, Kukai represents new and creative energy that has a potential to heal and lead us further on a never-ending path to wholeness as a unique person. I imagine that he will guide me in creating the sacred space that is now my home behind my own new door manifested first by the image of the red torii that my unconscious presented.

Brenda Weinberg is retired from a career as a psychotherapist/sandplay therapist in private practice and for the North York (now Toronto) Board of Education in schools for children with developmental delays. Brenda is a teaching member and final case reader for the International Society for Sandplay Therapy (ISST) and, until her retirement from the Ontario Society for Psychotherapists, was also a teaching member and supervisor for the Canadian Association for Sandplay Therapy (CAST). Now 83, with limited mobility, Brenda has recently moved from her long-lived-in townhouse in Toronto to a strata apartment in Victoria, B.C., where she has an amazing view of the ocean. Before she saw the apartment and its literal door from the common corridor, her unconscious presented her with an image of a torii, which was her impetus for this article.

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A SENSE OF PLACE

Antoinette Voûte Roeder



I have a friend who recently moved into an area replete with walking trails, with a deep ravine and a creek running through it, where wildlife abounds in all seasons. Deer, even moose, and certainly coyotes are visitors, as are the ubiquitous hare, the occasional weasel and the usual squirrels and rabbits. During spring migration, ducks and geese find the creek, the kingfisher makes his home in the trees, and birdsong fills the air.

My friend was talking about her mother, in her nineties, who had had to move first into a seniors' residence, then into assisted living. At each stage she had to get rid of more goods and chattels. At the end stage, her possessions were reduced to a few photographs, some clothes.

The idea of having to give up so many things with which we identify over the years touched me deeply. Things themselves, though perhaps beautiful, may not be that significant, but it's the memories and people associated with them that count. In any case, I was prompted to ask my friend what it is *she* would want to take with her, what would she find most difficult to leave behind?

She looked thoughtful and indeed I wondered if she might have forgotten the question altogether, when she answered with one word. *Place*. Place? As in location? Of all things, that is obviously the one thing we cannot take with us. A move is a move. Upon my gentle prodding, she elaborated.

During the pandemic and because of our inability to do much of anything or get together with anybody, she had made a daily pilgrimage to explore her new place. In every season and in every weather she walked the trails and mindfully so, noticing her surroundings, paying attention to what grew above the ravines: the high bush cranberries turning peachy, then deep red, chokecherries, saskatoons, larches, aspens, balsam poplars and their spicy scent. In spring, first to show were the early blue violets and the Canada white violet, and later bunchberry and strawberry flowers, all ground-hugging and not easily seen unless one were looking deeply into the undergrowth. Soon these were succeeded by the wild roses that are so abundant in Alberta. By mid-August, when the sun's rays were lower and autumn hints were emerging, the asters and tansies and goldenrod flourished. Fall brought its own beauty, golden trees, the crunch of fallen leaves underfoot, and eventually the nakedness of trunks and branches, when birds finally became more visible once again. Winter snows did not stop her but made it possible for her to track the footprints of animals. And all this abundance was experienced almost as if for the first time.

Her pilgrimage had become something sacred, and what was even more sacred was the *place* of pilgrimage, in all its detail, in all its freshness, in all its daily-ness. It gave me a bit of a heart ache. Because I too feel very attached to my natural environment. I always say I shall leave this place in a box. I live by a pond that attracts waterfowl every spring: the red-necked grebes that nest here year after

Aspens





Pelicans

You need not be a theist to recognize the preciousness and precariousness of the gift we have been given, life on this earth.

Antoinette Voûte Roeder, M. Mus., is the author of six volumes of poetry; her latest, *The Space Between*, is available on Amazon. She has a Master of Music degree and a Certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Pacific Jubilee Program. She has been offering spiritual accompaniment for three decades and is a poet and writer in Edmonton, Alberta. Long an environmentalist, Antoinette is passionate about the earth, music, poetry and people. Her piece, "The Earth is Sacred," can be read on the Jubilee website: <http://www.canadianjubilee.ca/blog/the-earth-is-sacred>

year, the red-winged blackbird that perches in the reeds, ducks and geese galore and their tiny fluffy progeny, scooting on the lake surface or waddling up the grass. Lately we have even had big and gawky pelicans visit once in a while, and I especially love the great blue heron and his cousin the night heron. We feel utterly blessed with our surroundings.

I was reminded of the biblical tenet, "Give us eyes to see [and ears to hear]" (Deut. 29, v. 4). My friend's sense of place could not help but make me wonder about my own. What would I have to part with were I to go into care? After place, what popped into my mind was my grand piano, a trusted friend and one I visit pretty faithfully every day and have done most of my life. But even if I had to part from my instrument, I would hope never to have to part from music itself. I would need something that would convey music to me, but, other than that, music is immaterial, weightless; it is surely the most abstract of all the arts. Music heard is completely momentary, one note succeeding another. It can't be held, it's here and it's gone.

Which takes me to interior place. Music is received via the ears into the heart and soul of us, isn't it? Music can move us, thrill us, give us goosebumps like nothing else can. Our deep interior is a place of vast dimensions, not physical, but space that can take in everything and also be the source of everything, such as the music of Mozart, or the poetry of Dylan Thomas, or the art of Rembrandt, or the theorems of Einstein. I like to think that that source, that well, is a place in which we connect with and interweave with something greater than ourselves.

I mentioned the word "sacred" in regards to place, even to the practice of noticing place in all its fine detail. I have a very strong sense of the "given-ness" of place and in particular of our planet Earth. Now that we have our first images produced by the James Webb Space Telescope, we are faced with thousands of distant galaxies, containing hundreds of *billions* of stars, *millions* of black holes and *trillions* of planets. It is impossible to wrap the mind around those numbers, let alone that we are actually looking back in time and that things might look very different today, were we able to detect today. However, regardless of numbers innumerable, I think of the possibility of life in its variety here on *this* planet and see abundance, congruence, network, things working together to promote life and wellness.

Earth is a place we cannot take with us when we depart. It is the cradle of everything we know and love, it is our milieu, our context, it has formed us, we are made of its elements, and we are completely dependent upon it. Unless you are really looking forward to Mars, *this is it*. In the book of Genesis, Jacob finds himself sleeping in the wilderness and dreaming of a ladder on which angels ascend and descend, and God addresses him. When he awakes he builds an altar to commemorate the dream and the message, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place ... and I did not know it" (Gen. 28, v. 16). Another sacred place.

The earth will likely survive us for a long, long time. You need not be a theist to recognize the preciousness and precariousness of the gift we have been given, life on this earth. This life is under siege on all sides, and we are the only ones who can rescue it. Let us live to celebrate this place, this life.

HARVESTING THE WHIRLWIND



Penn Kemp

September is such a time of harvest, the theme for this issue of *Sage-ing*, so appropriate with all the glorious bounty on hand from farmers' fields, and the new burst of energy from cooler breezes, and that old back-to-school buzz. But a sense of harvest in my personal life was trickier. The theme touched an all too raw nerve. What to reveal? Okay, be brave. Go for it. Here goes. My beloved husband, Gavin Stairs, died last Fall unexpectedly, so of necessity I've been pondering his life and such loss, after twenty-four years together.

What can be harvested from such grief? Is there a limit to the subjectivity of expressing feelings and experience in poetry? When does self-expression become narcissistic, given the difficulties in the world we inhabit? What would be worthwhile to communicate? I have had a year to ponder.

What consoles, what is solace?

Only the long view, wider than self.
Only your voice alive
at the back of my head. Only
presence, yours, with a tower
of gurus rising above you.

How can I be other than grateful,
when you so generously left in
timing that confounds me?

No, not lonely, with you still
here, memories of decades to
keep me company, hovering a-
round back of mind, at nape
of neck.

Although you are now dead and
your ashes rest in the hall outside
our bedroom door, you are closer
to me now than you've ever been.

Because you live inside my head.
Sometimes I hear you speaking.
More often you nod approval or
shake your head to comment, no.

Do you live in my occipital lobe?
I don't know the brain's mechanism
well enough to tell. You live on in
replay, in dream,

**But a sense of harvest
in my personal life was
trickier.**



Penn and Gavin

Of course you're apart from me, in
some dimension I cannot
fathom until I too am gone –
more a part of me than ever
you could be in flesh.

Grieving, gift bereft. Leaving
left. Well enough
alone, an intimate
presence
sent

Eighteen months hunkered down in cozy comfort, sometimes too close companionship, and a year since my husband's death, months figuring out the mobius strip of grief, bureaucracy spiralling back on itself. The harvest has been a whirlwind: 32 vanloads of stuff out the door. The details of death consigned to the archives, to the taxman. Done. And now? A new solitude in living alone. The greatest intimacy is with oneself, finding the freedom in full expression, on one's own. For me, this new solitude is literal in the isolation, aloneness that the poem requires

Die Verse

Our beloved dead are more intimate
now than ever they could be in flesh.

Only poetry can convey their message,
intimations of immortality, sly slips

we grasp as truth, not knowing for sure
what is real, what is fantasy and false,
what lies somewhere in between as true.
Only poems can transcribe, translate into

lines of verse as *mysterium tremendum* –
reality felt embodied. For me. For you.

'How does a poem like the one above, at its roots so personal, become universal? How can poetry, this most private art, interact in the public domain, once published? An introvert is comfortable sharing because she is writing to herself, speaking to that part of the listener who is attuned and responds. Recognizing the other, the reader out there, the poem calls out, "— hypocrite lecteur! – *mon semblable*, – *mon frère!*"

Tutoyer. I'm writing to you, *toi*, the reader whom I love even if I don't know you. The poem is always addressing the lover, the listener, whoever can hear. The poem itself emerges from the depth of heart/soul/being. Once it has found its community, as a piece published or performed, the poem begins to intimate. Not intimidate (what a difference that 'id' makes!).

The language signifies the shift. The poem suggests; it intimates. When we switch from intimate as adjective to the verb or present participle,

How can poetry, this most private art, interact in the public domain

**Tentatively, I negotiate
new rules of
communication, new
challenges in the face
of all that is happening
in the world.**

intimating, we switch from the poem as written to the performance of that poem. In delivering her piece aloud, the poet embodies the poem. The performing introvert is no oxymoron. She considers the audience to be a plurality of intimates, so that she is addressing the respective soul in each person, separately and together.

Would that English had an equivalent for the Spanish word for the expanded you: “vosotros.” With Spanish, you have two choices of saying “you all.” You can use “vosotros” or you can choose, more formally, “ustedes.” “Vosotros” is the personal plural form of tú. “Ustedes” is the plural form of “usted.” Such fine distinctions would be useful as the poet addresses different audiences.

As pandemic restrictions lift, I emerge, blinking like a mole in September sun, expectant, whether hopeful or cautious. My tentacles inch out to community, to the suffering and strife beyond the hearth and intruding on the heart. The televised terror, two-dimensional on the screen, takes on new aspects, homing in. Tentatively, I negotiate new rules of communication, new challenges in the face of all that is happening in the world, all that encroaches, all that calls out.

When last spring a publisher in Ukraine asked writers for moral support, I did what I’m good at, the only thing I could think might help: I edited and published an anthology, *POEMS IN RESPONSE TO PERIL*, with co-editor Richard-Yves Sitoski and 48 Canadian poets committed to activism as best we can. A harvest, a garland, a gathering of poems meant as solace and comfort. And yes, a displacement for personal sorrow.

The Internet brought the poets together, first on a three-hour Zoom of readers in April 2022, then an active collection of readings for #poetsinresponsetoperil, ongoing on Richard’s https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_kkBci0wJNSFDCORtiRvZw. The anthology was successfully launched at Blackfriars Bistro in London, Ontario. We have launches scheduled for Owen Sound, Ont., and on October 11 at Art Bar in Toronto. Details will be up on www.pennkemp.wordpress.com. And the anthology can be ordered from Richard, r_sitoski@yahoo.ca.

This is a project my husband and I would have taken on together, as we did with so many poetry publications over the years. And so I celebrate this season’s harvest, in unexpected ways, despite the whirlwind.

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 in 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.

SEED TIME AND HARVEST

WITHIN CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Susan McCaslin



“Imagination is the seed of the power of creation. Exercise it.”

– Mary Olga Park

“In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.”

– William Blake

When I was very young my maternal grandmother with her Irish roots would read me fairy tales, improvise stories about the wee people who lived in trees, sing to me, read to me, and recite nursery rhymes. She bought me a victrola record player and vinyl records of sung versions of Mother Goose rhymes to which we would sing along. I didn’t know it at the time, but Grandma Myrtle was planting seeds within my psyche, seeds that later developed into a lifelong passion for poetry.

Later, my Grade 7 English teacher told me I had a gift for poetry and invited me to edit a poetry column in the school newspaper. In university as an English major, one of my professors was also a poet who inspired me to write. When I was 21, I met a mystic, Olga Park, who became my spiritual mentor for sixteen years and encouraged my writing. At Simon Fraser University, my thesis advisor, poet Robin Blaser, not only steered me through my academic writing, but responded to my poetry. Looking back, I realize all these influences set and sustained me on the poetry path. Poetry gradually became for me a union of evocative language, storytelling, musicality and mysterious silences. I would call these places of unified consciousness playfields of the creative imagination in which the mysteries of planet Earth and the larger cosmos cohere.

After retiring from twenty-three years of teaching English and Creative Writing at Douglas College, I focussed my attention on poetry, as well as the writing of essays, reflections and scholarly articles. Yet also in “retirement” I came to discover the importance of uniting contemplation and action, art and activism.

From the time I first got to know him, my husband Mark, a nature lover and environmentalist, inspired me to attend more directly to Mother Earth, to give an old-growth cedar tree, the spiralling notes of a Swainson’s thrush or a cluster of white mountain heather my full attention. When a local forest near our home in Glen Valley, Langley, was threatened by imminent development in 2011, Mark supported me in conjoining poetry and environmental activism by means of a project I named The Han Shan Poetry Initiative. I invited poets from Canada and beyond to contribute poems on

Victrola





Galaxy whirlpool

I continue to write poetry, but also sense when my own fields need to lie fallow. Sometimes out of these resting places underground streams surprise me

the value of trees. The group WOLF (Watchers of Langley Forests) helped us string the poems to the trees for a month in December. The event helped draw media attention to the issue. It was one of many such efforts, culminating in Mrs. Ann Blaauw's generous purchase of the forest, that led to the preservation of the sensitive ecosystem that is now the Blaauw Eco Forest.

Currently an elder of seventy-five, I find myself stepping back from some forms of engagement while deepening others. For instance, I have long seen myself as a poet-scholar, foregrounding the word "poet." Yet in my seventies I find my desire to write scholarly articles diminishing and being replaced by a need to focus mainly on poetry, poetic prose and creative non-fiction. I used to write reviews for literary magazines and journals, edit the work of others and edit anthologies. Now, due to family obligations and my desire for a slower pace, I find myself declining such requests.

For instance, after the horrific news about the war in Ukraine first came to our collective attention, I suggested to my friend and fellow poet Penn Kemp, former Poet Laureate of London, Ont., that I would like to post a few poems by some Canadian poets who had written on Ukraine on my Facebook page and give the posts the heading, "Poems in Times of Peril." Penn got excited at the prospect of doing much more than featuring only a few poets on Facebook and asked if I might consider coordinating a Canadian Zoom reading for Ukraine and later co-editing with her an anthology emerging from these readings titled *Poems in Response to Peril*.

When Penn's invitation arrived, my husband and I were preoccupied with care of his elderly mother who is struggling with dementia. Additionally, I don't have a blog and am not very media savvy. Fortunately, Penn's friend, Poet Laureate of Owen Sound Richard-Yves Sitoski, stepped up to the plate as co-organizer of both the Zoom readings and the subsequent anthology. I was happy to remain in the background, suggesting other poets who might be included in the Zoom readings and anthology. I invited Ukrainian-Canadian poet Svetlana Ischenko and her husband, poet Russell Thornton, to lead off the readings with poems by the Ukrainian poet Dmytro Kremin, whose selected poems, *Poems from the Scythian Wild Field*, they had translated (Ekstasis Editions, 2016).

While stepping back from scholarly and editorial activities, I realized I am now being drawn to the kind of roles my grandmother and Olga played in my early life. It is now my turn to plant and water seeds. I continue to write poetry, but also sense when my own fields need to lie fallow. Sometimes out of these resting places underground streams surprise me with their timing. I have come to realize that poetry and other art forms are not merely individual enterprises and achievements. Like the ecosystems of planet Earth in its relation to the larger cosmos, we are all interconnected. Contributing to community efforts is much more powerful than simply focussing on one's own legacy.

Meanwhile, aging with wisdom for me means opening to other ways of



English mystic Julian of Norwich

I have come to know intuitively that small can be large, that simple acts of caring and doing can have long trajectories.

serving community. Here are some undertakings I engaged in during Covid:

- writing occasional endorsements for younger writers and attending their Zoom launches
- when asked to write reviews, suggesting younger writers who might need to have a successful review included in their resumes
- declining to offer poetry-writing workshops, but when asked, suggesting a younger writer who might value the opportunity
- helping out poets who are attempting to preserve endangered ecosystems by offering advice, if asked, reading at their events, and purchasing their books.

I also try to help other writers realize the intrinsic value of their work. Though I have been prolific, I have come to the place where it doesn't matter if my work reaches a large audience or a smaller one. I believe that each reader who interacts with a poem essentially creates it anew by opening imaginative space forged through their participation in the words, rhythms and images.

I have come to know intuitively that small can be large, that simple acts of caring and doing can have long trajectories. For example, decades ago I received a letter from a woman in Australia who discovered my volume of poetry, *Flying Wounded*. She indicated that my poems spoke directly to her depression and helped her survive a serious health crisis. Though sometimes we hear back, most of the time writers don't know where their words go, as poems have invisible lives unbeknownst to their authors.

As an eco-poet I feel privileged to find myself working in a large field where others are sowing seeds, watering, pruning and harvesting. A meaningful role can arise at every stage of life if we remain open to possibilities and the desire to serve the common good.

I rejoice in knowing that, despite anxieties and a few health issues common to my stage in life, I am ontologically grounded in an evolving universe filled not only with suffering but also with a superabundance of meaning and beauty. Something deep within me senses that out of apparent darkness or nothingness magic can flourish, having the capacity to work its spells, birthing a continual newness in which each of us is invited to play an active part.

As I try to encourage other writers, I continue to receive gifts from them as well. For instance, Nova Scotian poet Brian Bartlett quotes in his recent book *Daystart Songflight: A Morning Journal* (Pottersfield Press, 2022) from the late Don Domanski. These lines helped me let go of fretting over whether my work might have lasting value and embrace the intrinsic value of the creative process:

In an interview poet Don Domanski once said that if someone wrote poems on pieces of paper, threw them in a drawer and left them unread, the acts would 'make a difference in the universe.' (p. 237)

I'd like to conclude with a poem from my volume *Heart Work*, inspired by the English mystic Julian of Norwich, whose words on the hazelnut

The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said to them: It is like a grain of mustard-seed

Susan McCaslin is a B.C. poet residing outside Fort Langley, B.C. who has published sixteen volumes of poetry, including her most recent, *Heart Work* (Ekstasis Editions, 2020). A chapbook, *Cosmic Egg*, came out through the Alfred Gustav Press in 2021. When not writing, reading and being with family, Susan can be found practising yoga or walking with her dog Rosie along the Fraser River, better known to the Kwantlen First Nations as the Stó:lo̓.

(which contains a seed) may have been inspired by Jesus' parable of the mustard seed recorded in the gospels, and here in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas:

The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said to them: It is like a grain of mustard-seed, the smallest of all seeds; but when it falls on tilled ground, it puts forth a great branch and becomes shelter for the birds of heaven. (Saying 20)

Small is Large

And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus, 'It is all that is made.'

– Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

Black plague 14th century
recluse Julian is self-anchored in her anchorage
on the side of the church

Cupped in her palm –
a single hazelnut

round world, all and nothing world,
nothing and all venture

vanishingly small,

beginning and ending
continuous in all things

made, loved, kept,
evolving in dark ground,

sleeping beyond sight, sound,

dreaming its yellow-brown coat
its life-out-of-death nutrients:

generosity

Pilgrims will walk or ride
to the grate of Julian's window
seeking soul guidance

which the little affable saint
gladly provides out of her ample stores:

a harvest of hazelnuts

More seekers sprouting,
maturing, self-generating
from their own hidden depths

new seeds

The Voices of Creative Aging

CREATIVE AGING is a powerful new social and cultural movement that is stirring the imaginations of communities and people everywhere.

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Often called Sage-ing, Creative Aging takes many forms: academic, social and personal. It includes festivals, conferences, classes, group sessions and individual creative pursuits. The Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude was founded by the Okanagan Institute in 2011 to honour the transformational power of creativity. Intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing, the Journal presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement.

Sage-ing is about seeking – satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging 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 wellbeing

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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 emerging and established. It is an easel for any form of artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination.