

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



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KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.  
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.  
ONLINE AT [www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca)

## FROM THE EDITORS

**As the Journal moves into its second decade of publication, we seek to reflect the rich diversity of this third millennium. On the pages we uplift and strengthen our voice by sharing stories and inviting response. We have a newly expressed manifesto, as seen on our back cover. We are eager to engage with you along the many trails that celebrate creative aging. Integral to our belief is trusting that all creators need to feel “community,” to know that we are connected to others on similar journeys, where the vulnerability and tenderness of our heARTS inspires us to reap the wisdom of Sage-ing With Creative Spirit.**

Our suggested theme for this issue was an invitation to consider how your experience of sage-ing with creative spirit connects you more strongly to the issues surrounding us today. Always our suggestion is really meant as a possible springboard for contributors' own thoughts to flow, and it is such a delightful surprise to reap the harvest of ideas that uniquely find a synchronicity in each issue. Perhaps that confluence happens because, as Julie Fowler quotes in NAVIGATING THE NEGATIVE SPACE, “At the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source... a wordless trust of the same mystery is the foundation of your work and its integrity.”

As we sage with creative spirit and trust its energy we sleuth the mysteries of negative space, within and without, that challenge in the context of our times. The joy is in feeling unexpected connections. As editors our joy is in capturing these connections, these butterflies of spirit, in the net of an issue. The ancient Greeks believed that a butterfly was a human soul, loosened from a deceased body, and ready to soar in a new incarnation. They believed that by being authentic the heart comes into the hands – our inner world manifests in the heart flowing through our hands as we creatively express ourselves. As stories

are shared, it is our hope to expand our readers' understanding of creative spirit and its importance for individual and collective healing, harmony and growth.

THE TRIAL LAWYER'S CLUB, by retired lawyer David Ringwood, shares the realization that creativity was his guide in his career and now in retirement. How travel nurtures understanding of creative spirit is shared by Merle Kindred in GRIPPED BY GUYANA, in THE REMARKABLE, CREATIVE WOMEN OF MOROCCO by Katharine Weinmann and by Susan Neilson in ART IS FOR CURIOUS OPTIMISTS. “Learning how to live the adventure of an authentic life is not easy,” observes Dr. Gordon Wallace in AGING MINDFULLY AND CONSCIOUSLY. Stories of creative expression as the navigation tool of authenticity are explored by Ellen B. Ryan in WRITING MY WAY THROUGH DOUBLE VISION, Kara Barkfed in GROWING INTO ME, Devon Muhlert in FOUND OBJECTS HELPED ME FIND ME, Gretchen Staebler in RESTORYING A LIFE, Suzanne Chavarie in MY LAST NIGHT WITH MY MOM, and Christina Knittel in LIFE IN PROCESS.

In this issue, across several stories, we see how change and loss inspire creative expression. **For the autumn 2023 issue we invite you to consider further your experiences on how living creatively helps you navigate with authenticity the challenges of emptiness within and without.** Karen Close and Katharine Weinmann

## HOW TO SUBMIT

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](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com) and Katharine Weinmann at [panache@interbaun.com](mailto: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.**

## WHO WE ARE

**Karen Close, Editor,** taught English and Visual Arts for 30 years. Retirement in 1995 gave her the opportunity to meet vibrant senior



Canadian artists and to hear their stories. Indigenous cultures teach us, "All Elders have medicine—physical, emotional, musical, story. Let's give our unique medicine to the world." In 2011, believing in the medicine inherent in creative expression, Karen began editing the free online arts and aging journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. She is the author of two books. *Unfinished Women: Seeds From My Friendship With Reva Brooks* and *The Spirit of Kelowna: A Celebration of Art and Community* profiles a community art project in Kelowna, BC. In January, 2015 Woodlake Publishing released *Creative Aging: Stories from the Pages of the Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. Karen is the recipient of the 2016 City of Kelowna *Honour In The Arts* award.



**Katharine Weinmann, Co-Editor,** is a writer of poetry and contemplative creative non-fiction. She shares the beauty in her

imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much-loved life in her weekly blog, *A Wabi Sabi Life*, a celebration of life unfolding in all its mess and mystery, grit and grace. [awabisabilife.ca](http://awabisabilife.ca) Katharine has been published in the global online *Abbey of the Arts* blog, *The Poets Corner* in Maine, USA, the online *Canadian Company of Pilgrims*, Edmonton Public Library's *Capital City Press Anthology (V.2)* and Off Topic Publishing's *Wayward & Upward Stories and Poems*. She wrote the poetry and forward for the upcoming anthology, *Weaving a Tapestry of Hope Through Alberta's Educational System*.

**Johanna Beyers, Copy Editor,** is a poet and mixed media artist. She began her career as a marine paleontologist, and holds a PhD in environmental policy



and a Master's of Social Work. She is a certified sandplay therapist. Johanna is the author of *Sandbar Islands* (The Caitlin Press, 1988) and *Wearing my Feathered Hat* (Wind Oak & Dove, 2013). Her work has been published in *The Capilano Review*, *Sage-ing*, *Room of One's Own*, *CV2*, *Waves*, and elsewhere. She has been copy-editor for *Sage-ing* since 2018.



**Robert MacDonald, Designer and Publisher,** 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 *Headwinds*, with more anticipated. He is transcribing several decades of writings from notebook to manuscript, and is otherwise biding his time.

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Cover image: detail from *Juggling Act* by Kara Barkfed

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# NAVIGATING THE NEGATIVE SPACE

## A New Body of Work by Richard Reid

### Julie Fowler

*"I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way – things I had no words for." – Georgia O'Keefe*

Born in 1930 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Richard Reid is a career artist who sees every painting as an exploration, an opportunity to expand his understanding of the materials, himself and the world around him.

He has just wrapped up a three-month-long retrospective exhibition at Gallery 2 in Grand Forks called *Eros in the Landscape*, a survey of work spanning 70 years. This is a monumental feat for any artist and, as he explained, it was immensely gratifying. For Richard this was especially enforced by the fact that he and his late wife, artist Beverley Reid (1936-2019), had founded the Grand Forks Art Gallery back in 1984. However, this is not Richard's only exhibition planned for 2023. The Penticton Art Gallery, headed up by former Grand Forks curator Paul Crawford, will be host to an exhibition this summer that will feature all-new works by Reid, 425 to be exact.

The new work was created, not in his usual studio where he has created many large oil paintings, but in his living room on his coffee table, with a watercolour set and paper that matched the workable size of the table – 18" x 24."

Richard says that he doesn't really think about the making of the art, he is simply compelled to make it, never pre-planning but allowing the image to come forward. In the case of this new work he was often inspired or influenced by the view from his living room window onto a large tree, surrounding mountain and foliage. In this way, many of the works are landscapes, albeit abstract ones. This is not so different from his work of the past; however, there is one striking new theme that emerges throughout many of the paintings, and that is the use of negative space: a space left blank where the tree might have been, but was no longer present.

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*"Great art picks up where nature ends." – Marc Chagall*



Julie with Richard and curator Paul Crawford

Part of the new body of work included as part of the exhibition "Eros in the Landscape" at the Grand Forks Art Gallery





Top: Richard's art table in his living room  
Above: Richard and Paul looking through the many folders of art, with one of his large oil paintings in the background

**Here's a man that's into his nineties having one of the most productive outputs of his lifetime.**

In October of 2019, Richard's wife, Beverly, passed away. They had been friends since their time going to art school at the University of Winnipeg (formerly the Winnipeg School of Art) and married a few years later in 1960 after an incredible art-making journey to San Miguel in Mexico. For their honeymoon they headed to Europe, where they travelled, worked and made art for five years before returning to Canada, finally settling in Christina Lake after a number of years spent in Vancouver.

Beverley's death had an immense impact on Richard, but in addition he was confronted with the added isolation incurred by the Covid pandemic, relegating him to his home alone without his partner of more than 60 years. It was at this time that he turned to his paintbrush, creating a new work of art almost every day.

*"At the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source. When you are an artist, you are a healer; a wordless trust of the same mystery is the foundation of your work and its integrity."* – Rachel Naomi Remen

Richard wouldn't characterize the work as art therapy, or part of the grieving process. For him it was the most natural inclination as a lifelong artist, who is eager to

make art whenever given the time to do it. Between teaching at UBC from 1970 to 1979, then moving to a large rural property in Christina Lake, which included building a house, studio and other infrastructure, and maintaining it till they sold it in 2018; starting the Grand Forks Art Gallery in 1984 with Beverly, running it until 2003 and curating over 500 exhibitions; supporting Beverly in her art career, which blossomed later in her life, and caring for her when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's not long after their move to Grand Forks – there cannot have been much time left for Richard's own artistic practice. "It's about loss and grief; it's about isolation; it's about a passage of time; it's about the culmination of a lifetime's work. It embodies a universal experience that we all have just come through, as well as one that we will all experience in our lives," says curator Paul Crawford.

Paul and Richard have been friends and colleagues for more than 25 years. Paul was also close to Beverly and hosted exhibitions of her work, both in Grand Forks and in Penticton. He mentored under Richard at the Grand Forks Art Gallery and took on the role of Director/Curator after Richard retired in 2003.

"Here's a man that's into his nineties having one of the most productive

**This late burst of work that Richard is creating is a summation of a lifetime's study, contemplation, dedication and consideration of all the things that have driven him as an artist and an individual.**

**Julie Fowler** has helped to start three festivals: the Art Matters Festival at Concordia University in 2001, now the largest student-run arts festival in North America; the ArtsWells Festival in Wells, B.C. (2004-2020); and Ignite the Arts, a new festival in Penticton (2022-present). She currently consults for other festivals, including 2 Rivers Remix, and is on the board of Dream Café, B.C. Music Festival Collective and Folk Music Canada. Also a writer, she completed her MFA in Creative Writing at UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, in 2013 and her BFA in Art History at Concordia University, Montreal, in 2001. She published her first nonfiction book, *The Grande Dames of the Cariboo*, with Caitlin Press in 2013. In 2020 Julie was honoured with two prestigious awards for her work in the arts, the B.C. Achievement Foundation Community Award and the B.C. Museums Association Distinguished Service Award. She is grateful to live and work with her husband Paul Crawford and their 18-year-old cat Cheerio in snpintktn (Penticton) on the unceded ancestral territory of the syilx (Okanagan) Peoples. Email: [juliefowlerwrites@gmail.com](mailto:juliefowlerwrites@gmail.com)

outputs of his lifetime and I think that's an important thing to see. He has put his life towards art, often promoting other artists, while doing his own art on the side. The last time he was probably this productive was when he was in Europe and studying under Oskar Kokoschka in the early 1960s," explains Paul.

Richard agrees and tells me that in 1963, studying with Kokoschka at the Internationale Sommer Akademie für Bildenden Künste in Salzburg, Austria, he worked eight hours a day for four months, creating a new painting every 15 minutes. This resulted in 375 watercolours, 125 of which he has felt worth keeping.

Paul sees Richard's new vigorous output as highly personal and the most honest work he's done. "There was never an expectation these would be shown, he would just paint them and put them in folders. I don't think he ever had any expectation or thought that these would be a body of work, and by showing them all, it's treating the whole thing as a singular artwork, and it will be interesting to see what patterns emerge out of it – to see it in a linear fashion, creating a visual diary of his experience, and the experience of all of us, over the last three years," says Paul.

*"Creating artwork allows your mind to be in a safe place while it contemplates the tougher issues you are dealing with. One can use the tools of brush, paint, pastels, crayons, etc. to expose and even for a short time color those issues in a different light."*  
– George E. Miller (an American physician and a key figure in the development of the field of medical education)

This late burst of work that Richard is creating is a summation of a lifetime's study, contemplation, dedication and consideration of all the things that have driven him as an artist and an individual. It is truly something to celebrate, honour and share with the community. The work is a testament to the value of creativity and art in our lives. We are all creative beings, but not everyone seizes the opportunity to delve into the process so wholeheartedly as Richard does. This is how he navigated through the pain and loneliness of these last three years. As artist Georgia O'Keefe said, "I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way – things I had no words for."

Richard Reid's exhibition at the Penticton Art Gallery opens Friday, June 30, with an evening reception from 7 to 9 p.m. and will run until September 9, 2023.

# THE TRIAL LAWYER'S CLUB



## David K. Ringwood

“We all have stories – the ones we tell often, particularly when meeting new people who haven’t heard them yet. We’ve told them often enough that we get good at telling them. Well into my retirement, I decided I should start writing mine down. For one reason, writing, I’m told, is the kind of creative thinking that can help stave off the deterioration of our brains. My fear of dementia has led to more exercise, learning the guitar and writing. I’ve heard that all of these things – especially those that challenge you and make you use a different part of your brain – can help forge new neural pathways to take the place of the ones you’ve destroyed with bad lifestyle choices. And, boy, do I ever have a lot of replacing to do! And should dementia arrive, despite my best efforts, these written versions of my stories may help me remember them better, and those who look through my stuff after I’m gone might get a chuckle or two out of them.

It was early in my tenure as an associate lawyer at our small, boutique law firm in Los Angeles that I was given the opportunity – for the first time – to put on a witness at a trial. There is no way to overstate this: for lawyers who handle civil lawsuits (and our firm usually handled big ones), jury trials are scary. Many people shy away from any kind of public speaking, and in a jury trial you carry the extra burden of responsibility for the result and thus mountains of pressure. Everything must be prepared to a tee, circumstances need to be managed as they happen (because the unexpected always happens), and you must keep your you-know-what together and present yourself as a smooth, calm, deliberative master of your surroundings. In addition, civil lawsuits routinely settle before trial, so the opportunities for civil jury trials are few. This means that most so-called civil litigators have *no* actual jury trial experience, placing those that do in an exclusive club.

My boss, Don Howarth, one of our firm’s founders, was not just a member of this club, but was a master of the art. Don was managing this trial, using me – a relatively new lawyer – as his “second chair” assistant. The plaintiff was someone who years ago had worked with asbestos and now had lung cancer; he also was a life-long cigarette smoker – hence, the dispute. We were defending the manufacturers of the asbestos-containing products to which the plaintiff had been exposed. In putting on our defence, Don had listed as a witness Dr. Elliott Hinkes, a prominent pulmonary oncologist and experienced court expert, and I was to conduct Dr. Hinkes’ direct examination. This was the perfect witness for a novice like me; Dr. Hinkes knew the subject, was articulate and engaging, and all I had to do was let him tell his story. What could go wrong?

**These written versions of my stories may help me remember them better, and those who look through my stuff after I’m gone might get a chuckle or two out of them.**

**I had Dr. Hinkes explain these cancer risks and, as he spoke, I used a marker to draw a chart on the top layer of butcher paper to illustrate his testimony – Jeff rose from his chair to begin his cross-examination ... as he talked about one number on the chart, he would draw a line from that number to the next one he referred to – and back and forth and up and down... my little chart was largely obliterated.**

Part of our script was having Dr. Hinkes tell the jury about the comparative risks of contracting lung cancer inherent in exposure to asbestos on the one hand and cigarette smoking on the other. As in many courtrooms, near the witness stand we had available a bulletin board for use by the lawyers and witnesses with sheets of blank butcher paper tacked onto it and a tray at waist level holding Magic Markers. I had Dr. Hinkes explain these cancer risks and, as he spoke, I used a marker to draw a chart on the top layer of butcher paper to illustrate his testimony on the comparative risks of smoking by itself, asbestos exposure by itself, and the risk of exposure to both. Using this chart to explain his reasoning, Dr. Hinkes concluded for the jury that the plaintiff's lung cancer was far more likely to have been caused by smoking. I then sat down. The entire direct exam took about 30 minutes and was as smooth as silk, as Don knew it would be. A trained monkey could have put Dr. Hinkes on!

Coincidentally, the plaintiff's lawyer, Jeff Harrison, was someone I knew from my court reporting days – my career before and during law school. For a court reporting agency in town, I did deposition work as a stenographer, and Jeff was one of our agency's clients; he was one of the nicest and one of the best lawyers I had worked with, and was a tall, good looking and charming presence in the courtroom. Jeff rose from his chair to begin his cross-examination of Dr. Hinkes.

"Now, Dr. Hinkes," he began, "Let me see if I can clarify your testimony." He began by going over the risk figures on my hand-drawn, butcher-paper chart and asking questions about them. But as he did so, he had a Magic Marker in hand, and as he talked about one number on the chart, he would draw a line from that number to the next one he referred to – and back and forth and up and down. After some minutes of this, my little chart was largely obliterated. I realized I had made a rookie mistake; I could have had my butcher-paper chart marked for identification and prevented Jeff from making spaghetti out of it, but now it was too late to complain, as I'd call attention to my mistake and make it worse.

Jeff then ripped my now-spaghetti chart off the board and let it drop and curl to the floor and, as he continued his cross, began to draw his own words and numbers on the next layer to make his own point. Then he ripped his own paper off the board and dropped it to the floor on top of mine – and so on – until, by the time he was done, he had mine buried under a pile of butcher paper on the floor! I remember sitting there and thinking myself an idiot – until I got an idea.

Don, you should know, was something of a control freak. My direct examination had gone according to plan, but that's as far as the plan went. When Jeff finished his cross-examination and sat down, the judge asked if I had any questions on redirect. When I said yes and rose to my feet, I could detect the slightest note of panic creeping across Don's face. Don liked nothing less than something at trial out of his control, but there was nothing he could do – Dr. Hinkes was my witness.



**I hope this very small pat on my own back illustrates for those unfamiliar with lawyering the role creativity (and a little humour) can have in the courtroom.**

**David Ringwood** took six years to obtain his four-year degree from Colgate University in Hamilton, N.Y., in 1975, because, in his words, “it was the ‘60s.” Failing to find anything attractive to do with a degree in mathematics, he wandered to California and fell into court-reporting school, where one learns to operate that little gizmo you see in courtrooms and depositions. Some years later, wagering \$75 with a friend at 3-to-1 odds that he could score well on the LSAT exam (for prospective law students), he tested well enough to win the bet and get into a law school despite his humbling undergraduate record. Over the ensuing decades, from small measures of hard work and talent (and large amounts of pure, dumb luck), he fashioned a successful career as a trial lawyer in California. Having written extensively for work, he has turned to the more recreational kind in retirement. Good luck has been a recurring theme in Mr. Ringwood’s life. Some years before retiring and moving to Kelowna, B.C., he met and married Canadian Colleen P. Kill, thus cementing his status as the Luckiest Man on Earth. His application to the Guinness Book of World Records to make this official is pending.

I walked around the counsel table and approached the bulletin board, squatted down, waded through the pile of butcher paper on the floor, resurrected my chart and re-tacked it to the board, mess that it was. I then returned to the podium and faced the witness. “Dr. Hinkes,” I began, pointing to the resurrected chart, “I believe *this* is the result of Mr. Harrison trying to *clarify* your testimony!” The jury all laughed heartily. I asked just a few questions to confirm that nothing in Jeff’s cross-exam had changed any of Dr. Hinkes’ opinions and sat down. The witness was excused, the judge called his usual mid-afternoon recess and we all rose as the judge departed the courtroom.

Amid the mumbling hubbub of the courtroom clearing, Don leaned over to me and whispered, “Careful – you might learn to like this!” — a precious compliment from a mentor. And as we were leaving, Jeff came over to me and whispered, “Nice redirect!” It’s a measure of how good a guy he was; in my career, there would be precious few such compliments from an opponent.

That was the moment when I thought, for the first time, that maybe I *could* be a trial lawyer – a member of that exclusive club. Eventually, I did handle a jury trial on my own and then many others after that over a nearly 30-year career, and I look back from the vantage point that retirement affords with a great deal of pride for inclusion in that club and even greater appreciation that I had a mentor like Don to show me the way in.

And even though one should indulge in a self-congratulatory memoir with great caution, I hope this very small pat on my own back illustrates for those unfamiliar with lawyering the role creativity (and a little humour) can have in the courtroom. In my legal career, what I disliked most were the many, many hours of anxious and grinding preparation for trial; what I liked best were moments like these when the unscripted and unforeseen forced me to think on my feet and create a solution – *in the moment*. Most trial lawyers would agree with me that preparing for trial is necessary drudgery, but once the trial finally begins – and you’re in front of a judge and jury and under the spotlight – *that’s* the best part. Win or lose, that’s where the real fun is.

# GRIPPED BY GUYANA

## An Epiphany



### Merle Kindred

I heard “carrot snake” and could see a bright green reptile – the width of a thumb and at least a metre long – coiled on the path’s warm, white sand.

“Carrot snake?” I asked.

“No, parrot snake,” said a member of our venture. Of course. It was green. Someone like me from the Global North was more familiar with carrots than parrots.

Life’s great epiphanies can often be counted on a single hand. I’m up to two fingers, with the second flash occurring in Guyana. I’d signed up for a six-month posting with Canada’s Cuso International. I wanted to ground myself again by deep involvement in what’s now called the Global South instead of the Third World. I was returning to the space between ways of living where I could reconsider priorities. I felt relief and a lightening of spirit to be back on a bridge spanning the shifting sandbars of home and life abroad.

My initial assignment in Guyana was straightforward. I was to help update a strategic plan for a local group in Georgetown offering after-school programs for youth at risk in rough neighbourhoods.

I enjoyed a return to an English-speaking Caribbean culture with its bountiful and bustling markets. Each of my former postings in the US Virgin Islands, the Bahamas and Jamaica provided variations in dialects, foodways and general lifestyles. All assignments shared placement in the warm turquoise waters of the Caribbean with people of primarily



Top: Author with Indigenous guide.

Above: Author with calabash dinner bowl

African descent.

Here the Afro-Guyanese shared the country with Indo-Guyanese from the days of nineteenth-century indentured labour. What made Guyana unique was its nine Indigenous peoples scattered in various remote territories.

With its mixed heritages, the country was a homecoming for me. I’d worked in India as a volunteer independent consultant for over a decade. Guyanese Cookup was Caribbean rice-n-peas with the flavoursome spicing of India. I enjoyed creating combinations of ingredients that I knew with those that were local, such as the eddo root with its tangy flavour.

The beauty of the Caribbean Sea was replaced in Guyana by a rocky



Rustic rainforest resort

**Suddenly, one of my two greatest lifetime epiphanies emerged: birding here was more accessible and affordable and could help meet the local desire to offer ecotourism.**

coastline and coffee-with-cream waters. However, as a continental country, it boasted lush rainforests, vast savannahs and abundant natural resources: gold, diamonds, bauxite and timber.

Guyana is rated as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots with over 900 species of birds. I was a birder and packed my binoculars, camera and birding book. The unwelcome news was that Guyana was also rated a dangerous country with often illegal and hazardous extraction of its resources, including trade in its birds and other wildlife. I envisioned many evenings at home and decided to resume a handcraft of my

youth – embroidery – to compensate for not going out. Flosses, needles and hoops were easy to pack.

Whenever I had free time, I was off birding around Georgetown or finding ways to access Indigenous territories for spotting birds in more natural surroundings. Flying into the interior was expensive, but I'd heard about a rustic resort in the northwest coastal region that could be reached in about four hours by road and river travel.

I was near the end of my posting, with my work for the youth group completed and the organization happy with the results. One long weekend I made the trip, finishing in a small wooden water taxi that deposited me at a collection of charming timber buildings. I wandered the grounds watching for birds and chatting with my host and other guests. We were boated up several waterways, and I happily sampled a range of Guyana's multi-hued and melodic birds.

At one point, our Indigenous boatman slowed and then backed the craft into a flooded rainforest area. There we spotted two birds – bright red with black and white markings. One flew, but I photographed the other. "Did you get it? Did you get it?" shouted my fellow passengers.

"Yes!" I cried as I passed my camera around. Later I learned that it was the reclusive and rarely seen Crimson-hooded Manakin and, when posted, my photo went viral.

The Indigenous villagers were gracious and eager to share the wonders of their world. I learned that the Harpy Eagle – with its six-foot wingspan – was the world's second largest of the eagles and lived in this area.

Suddenly, one of my two greatest lifetime epiphanies emerged: birding here was more accessible and affordable and could help meet the local desire to offer ecotourism. The road and river journey was part of the overall experience. Would Cuso accept a new placement position for an ecological and economic development advisor for the region?

The idea passed through channels. Yes! I was posted for a second six months where I travelled regularly between Georgetown and Indigenous territories. I used embroidery as both a communication strategy and to fulfill



Indigenous family

our Cuso mandate about empowering women and youth.

As I grew to know more villagers and the communities' dreams, projects grew beyond preparations for training youth in ecotourism to include agriculture and improved telecommunications. My epiphany was creating tangible results as we developed strategies and tactics together.

Now that I'm home in Penticton, B.C., I sometimes find myself drifting back to an idyllic scenario of an extended, simpler life in the hinterland. Guyana's bounty of birds has taught me to take flights of fancy. I envision myself gliding on the waterways in a dugout

canoe to my home in a custom-made treehouse. Birds live in trees, so why not me? I imagine both a *benab* – a dwelling of wood, bamboo, and thatch – and an eagle's aerie.

As I settle into building my fantasy home I find design and construction services for a borewell, a composting toilet and rainwater harvesting. There's a small-scale solar grid and wind turbine. I hang my hammock with its mosquito net and employ local talent to build basic furniture. My nest contains locally woven cloth and basketwork. I craft an East Indian *chula* or small clay oven heated with charcoal. I've seen it used in the interior as well as a larger outdoor oven of mud and local block and brick. There's a small shade house with waist-high gardening boxes irrigated by a gravity-fed irrigation pump with water from nearby creeks and wetlands. I've found a twenty-first century treadle sewing machine and teach sewing skills. And, yes, I hold out hope for cell service and internet connectivity in the villages. I'm akin to the Eastern elder retreating to a mountaintop living out life in a more barebones, contemplative manner. Elder? Guru? Crone?

This yearned for life I'm imagining would be a life that splices aspects of what I cherish of my Global North ways with the natural beauty and bounty, the wisdom and cordiality of the Global South. A dream? Of course. It's a scheme for existing between worlds and cross-pollinating values and skills, and for the sheer joy of living at peace in natural surroundings with touches of modernity. In focusing on the small, perhaps there would be a continuing glow of satisfaction and peace.

How does this daydreaming pertain to the life that I experienced in Guyana and am now sharing in my recently published book *Gripped by Guyana: A Memoir of Purpose and Adventure*? Perhaps I'm following the habits of the Crimson-hooded Manakin nestled in the comfort of the rainforest. I'm also remembering the rare Crested Eagle that I photographed perched in the high country scanning the rainforest and wetlands below. The eagle's purpose was to secure prey. Mine is to pray in prose, to draw attention and

**It's a scheme for existing between worlds and cross-pollinating values and skills, and for the sheer joy of living at peace in natural surroundings with touches of modernity.**



Author with batik, book and vest

**For *Gripped by Guyana*, I chose to include the words of Lilla Watson, an Australian Aboriginal activist, academic and artist: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”**

perhaps even achieve response to other ways of being, doing and having.

With *Gripped by Guyana* now winging its way out into the world, I’m returning to my first epiphany nearly twenty years ago in India. I’d been sitting on the shore of the Arabian Sea in the state of Goa. Suddenly I knew that I needed to expand the scope of my doctoral dissertation. The topic was alternative communication strategies for reducing energy use in the built environment. I had had personal experience of the topic working with my late husband, an architect, in the Global North. Now I had to discover, research and write about the same subject in India as part of the Global South, which a series of synchronicities made possible.

This initial epiphany in India will be shared in my second memoir, now underway, with intimate focus on life in the state of Kerala with the Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development. The value of my topic grows in intensity with climate and societal issues escalating globally.

For *Gripped by Guyana*, I chose to include the words of Lilla Watson, an Australian Aboriginal activist, academic and artist: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

**Merle Kindred’s** experience in international development spans over fifty years with five placements on three continents. Her formal background is in English language and literature, drama, administration and technical communications. Born in Canada and raised in the U.S., Merle has shared her skills and experience in the Caribbean, India and Guyana. She has also presented and published internationally throughout her career. Walking the tightrope between cultures and seeking balance and betterment for all has been her prime directive.

Raised in the Detroit area – the Motor City – Merle sold her last gas-powered vehicle in 2008 and walks, cycles in the warmer months and rides local buses in the winter.

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# THE CREATIVE WOMEN OF MOROCCO

**Katharine Weinmann**



Katharine – Sahara's sands of time

This past March found me touring Morocco, a country I had first visited in 2019. Enthralled then with its magnificently diverse landscapes, its medinas and souks abundant with texture, colour, scent and sound, the unique cuisine, and beautiful architecture, I had booked a return for 2020, postponed as were so many of our travel plans due to the world-stopping Covid-19. So, to return to this sensory-rich country in the weeks preceding Ramadan, the Islamic world's holy month of fasting, was a dream realized.

I have several creative practices when I travel, journalizing being one. In the early days and on the early pages of this trip's volume I posed the question, "So how am I different here, this time?" assuming that with four years passed, I would be. Given I was travelling with the same small group women's touring company, there was both enough familiarity – allowing me to settle into and beyond that awe-inspiring initial visit – and different to pique my curiosity and my senses, keeping my taste buds and photographer's eye fresh. In hindsight, in response to my question was the extent to which I had paid attention to Moroccan women I encountered.

As co-editor of this journal, I'm committed to finding and writing stories that give both depth and breadth to our ideas of creative expression – stories that invite us to think beyond a painter's canvas, the potter's wheel, a weaver's loom, the poet's page, a photographer's lens. I want to uplift stories that describe how, by tapping into one's creative energies, a life is made anew, obstacles are overcome and enlivening opportunities are presented for others to thrive. I need stories that depict our vulnerability and courage in the face of loss and struggle, that when finding ourselves in the paradoxical space of the "no choice choice," by surrendering to our creative force, we find a way through. These were the stories I witnessed, time and again, in the women I met in Morocco.

First, our Moroccan tour leader. A woman in her early thirties, raised in a small village in the High Atlas Mountains, who now makes urban Marrakech home, Mariam quite simply shatters any preconceived ideas we might have about Islamic women. As one of Morocco's increasing number of female tour guides (I'd meet several others guiding us in Fes, Errachidia, Essaouira and Marrakech), this astute, fashion forward, wine sipping professional shone with confidence and competence as she shared her country's history, culture and traditions, spiced with anecdote and humour. Open to any of our questions and with a cell phone full of contacts for the perfect rest stop, lunch

Sensory-rich Morocco





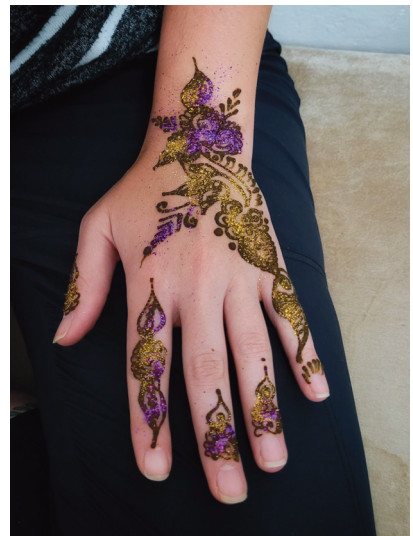
Top: Mariam with Hakima, our guide in Fes  
Above: Nomadic Amazigh family

reservations and best shopping spots, each punctuated with her savvy code – “Good,” *not so much so*, “Very good,” *go ahead and buy* – and fluency in English, French, Arabic and Amazigh (Morocco’s indigenous language, often called “Berber”), Mariam’s expert guiding made for a delightfully rich, educational and comfortable touring experience. Watching her unabashedly challenge dubious police officers at various check stops, citing legal line and verse, brought applause for her chutzpah. As Morocco’s scorching pre-Covid tourism rates have exploded post, surpassing within months its forecasted five-year recovery, Mariam juggles her flourishing free-lance guiding career with a commitment to English university studies and family. Yes, making a living, and with genuine skill in hosting others with enthusiasm, clarity and generosity. Time and again going beyond to ensure everyone has the best experience. Turning around after four days’ rest to do it all again. And again. And again.

Then there was the twenty-something Amazigh woman, living, as she has her entire life, nomad-style with her husband and two children in a camp enroute to the palmeraie of Errachidia. While not unusual for tours to stop for a “meet and greet” cultural experience, to be served tea and learn about their lifestyle, to be entertained by this lovely woman and her husband, making music on hand made instruments, was a glimpse into the creative spark that brings joy and relief from a way of living few of us would know.

The traditional guest house in the Ziz Valley, one of Morocco’s largest areas of date production and the source of the famous medjool variety, is owned by three sisters, each a talent in her own right. One a famous weaver; another one of the region’s first politicians sitting on local councils and advocating for women’s rights; while the third brings a fine culinary touch to the best tasting and most beautifully plated salads, tagines and breakfasts, all featuring local, hand-harvested fruits and vegetables. To think they own and run a three-story, multi-room guest house, with the only male support from a young nephew and an older “jack of all trades.” Having survived near-economic collapse with Covid, and now holding their own while also strengthening their community by engaging guests with the local family businesses and cultural experiences is a testament to how harnessing their collective creative spirit benefits all.

It was during one such cultural engagement that I met the woman responsible for establishing an organic couscous co-operative, thereby saving herself, her children and her mother-in-law from destitution when her husband suddenly vanished several years ago. Hers is a story of the “no choice” choice but to open her home – now legally reverting to her mother-in-law as she has been unable to declare her husband dead – to undertake the laborious process of grinding, hand rolling and firing couscous made from the grains hand-harvested in the adjacent fields. She invited other women, also in need of income, to assist and then began hosting couscous dinners for tourists to showcase and sell their products. A humble pride shone in her face when, with Mariam’s translation, she understood that I understood the



Top left: Famous weaving sisters  
Top right: Three Sisters' Guest House  
Middle left: Marrakech henna artist  
Middle right: Making Beauty  
Bottom left: Artist at work  
Bottom right: Because It Makes Me Feel Good





Left: Founder of the Couscous Co-operative  
Right: Couscous Co-operative



**Women using their ingenuity— being clever, inventive and original – leveraging cultural traditions, art forms and the world’s growing fascination – and becoming effective leaders and established entrepreneurs at the most basic level.**

significance of her choices and leadership for the sake of family and community.

The final vignette is probably the most “obvious” description of one’s creative expression. Our final night in Marrakech, we were hosted for dinner at the home of a local woman who invited her friend, a well-known henna artist, to come and paint our hands. A traditional art form among women, it is performed in celebration of wed-

dings, and, as I learned earlier in Fes, simply to help one feel better, like a good haircut might for us. From my journal: “...*she creates in moments beauty on palms, hands, arms and lower legs, every pattern unique, embellished with glitter.*” An art form mastered over twenty plus years, she has earned the reputation of being one of Marrakech’s finest among brides, while earning a livelihood for her family.

While Morocco boasts a king who has done much to address women’s rights, opening doors of opportunity for education, health care, career, and marital and property settlements, it is still a developing country with years of religious tradition dictating cultural and gender norms, often stacking the odds of success against women. To encounter women using their ingenuity – being clever, inventive and original – leveraging cultural traditions, art forms and the world’s growing fascination – and becoming effective leaders and established entrepreneurs at the most basic level, creating a livelihood for themselves and their families was inspiring.

I thought that by returning to Morocco I’d scratched the itch, so to speak, but I now realize with these encounters, of which I have barely scratched the surface, that the remarkable, creative women of Morocco are another essential dimension of its beauty, vibrancy and soul...that visiting three times might be the charm!

# AGING MINDFULLY AND CONSCIOUSLY

**Gordon Wallace, Ph.D.**



*AGING: You can run from it, but you can't hide, so the inevitable question is HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MEET IT?*

Will you meet aging with avoidance, rigidity or resignation on a mournful protest through your remaining years? Or will you enhance the quality of your remaining lifetime, no matter how long it may be, meeting aging with acceptance, curiosity, resilience and gratitude?

This is a critical question to ponder as there is no denying that aging brings challenges – many of which you would rather not experience. During my career as a psychologist specializing in treating mid-life and older clients, everyone who arrived at my consulting room shared a path of determined pursuit of the magic beans that would inoculate them from the pains and sorrows of life, only to experience continual disappointment.

The reality is that there is no way to transcend this human existence, a life that Buddhism accurately characterizes as comprising 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows. But, be clear that aging is not all bad news, for advancing years bring not only *memento mori* as a reminder of our mortality but also offer *memento vivere* as a remembrance that we must fully live the time that is still available.

Aging, therefore, can be a gift – a gift of conscious engagement with time, providing the opportunity for personal growth and development to become whole and authentic. However, what is needed to realize this potential are practices that unwrap the gift of agency, the understanding that you can impact your day-to-day, moment-to-moment experiences in ways you may never have thought possible.

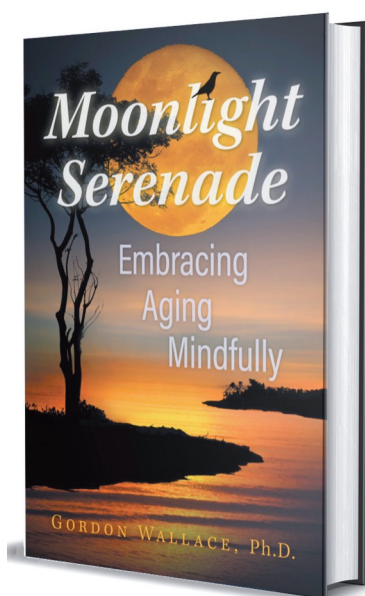
Mindfulness and Jungian psychology are two such complementary health practices; Jungian psychology unmasks our unconscious, while mindfulness hones our skills to focus and experience life consciously. In essence, the goals of both practices are bold – they invite you to expand your consciousness to be aware, experience, and accept whatever is occurring in the present moment. Both approaches offer the potential to meet and embrace the aging tasks – to remain aware of your limited existence while fully living each moment of your life.

Over 35 years ago, I stumbled upon Jungian psychology and mindfulness following a mid-life crisis. After establishing a successful psychological consulting company, with offices in five cities across Canada, I fell into a depression. My personal and career life achievements felt empty and barren. While this felt shocking at the time, it should not have been surprising as a dream I had several years earlier uncannily foreshadowed this crisis:

*I am with a group of followers in a large wood-frame building that is empty of furnishings*

**Aging, therefore, can be a gift – a gift of conscious engagement with time, providing the opportunity for personal growth and development to become whole and authentic.**

**Through a lengthy course of Jungian analysis, which illuminated how much we function through unconscious processes, I disentangled myself from a life barren of connection with my true self.**



*except for a glass display case. The male leader of the group, unable to continue living his life as he had, sweeps his arm through the case, smashing his trophies and icons of achievement to the ground. Weeping deeply, he buries his head in his hands and falls to his knees. With no awareness or sense of control over where his life will now lead, feelings of despair, as well as resignation, fill him as the building explodes into flames.*

Through a lengthy course of Jungian analysis, which illuminated how much we function through unconscious processes, I disentangled myself from a life barren of connection with my true self. My newly attuned capacity to hear what my authentic life offered led to a ten-day silent mindfulness retreat. High in the Sangre de Cristo mountains outside Taos, New Mexico, I learned to embrace the gifts of compassionate present-moment awareness. From these beginnings and through the ensuing years, I have faced the mysteries of everyday existence enhanced through the twin lenses of Jungian psychology and mindfulness meditation.

My personal journey later morphed into my professional life as I completed a doctorate in clinical psychology with a specialization in Jungian psychology as well as further training in mindfulness through the University of Massachusetts Medical School. My clinical work transformed into a novel practice marrying Jungian psychology with mindfulness, addressing complex issues mid-life and older clients presented.

Since retiring from my clinical practice in 2017, I volunteered to develop and continue to teach a mindfulness program specifically addressing concerns of hospice bereavement and palliative care patients. Most patients are between fifty and eighty-nine years old, with many having never heard of mindfulness before enrolment. The benefits expressed by participants have been very gratifying. Despite their considerable personal losses, these aging individuals have found ways to meet their sorrow and pain while experiencing life courageously and wholeheartedly. Common evaluative comments include feeling “grounded; more peaceful; confident; kinder to myself; settled; appreciative and accepting of life.” Many observed that they “gained valuable new tools for not only my grief but my life in general.”

Just as in my personal journey, what hospice patients found so powerful in applying mindfulness to life’s experiences is that it invites you to consciously live this life, **your precious life**, in the most healthy, satisfying and meaningful way possible. Mindfulness offers the possibility of a compassionate way of being during your mid-life and aging years by inviting you to create an engaged and vibrant personal connection to three aspects of time’s inescapable presence:

**Awareness** - The first invitation is to maintain your understanding that there is no stopping time – our life clocks are ticking! Mindfulness does not claim magically to create or extend time since that is impossible.

**Experience** - The second invitation concerns your experience of time – figuratively and literally to wake up to the unfolding nature of each moment. A 2010 Harvard study found that, on average, we are NOT paying attention to what we are experiencing 47% of the time! The study’s frank conclusion is aptly summarized in its title, “*A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind.*” We end up missing our life, missing it moment by moment, leaving us feeling dissatisfied and unhappy!

**Relationship** – The third invitation involves establishing a new relationship with time. Being aware and present during pleasurable moments is not likely difficult for

**Gordon Wallace** holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology specializing in depth (Jungian) psychology. Over his career as a psychologist with offices in Kelowna and Vancouver, he specialized in assessment and psychotherapy treatment to primarily mid-life and older clients. He also has maintained a mindfulness meditation practice for over 30 years and developed and taught workshops on Jungian psychology and mindfulness meditation to mental health professionals and the public. Since retiring from his clinical practice in 2017, he has continued as a volunteer developing and teaching mindfulness meditation courses addressing complex issues presented by hospice bereavement and palliative care patients. In addition, he volunteers for bedside vigils with hospice patients nearing the end of life. His recently published book titled *Moonlight Serenade: Embracing Aging Mindfully* (2022), has been well-received by aging readers and recognized in book competitions. It was awarded Silver in the 'Aging Consciously' category at the 2023 Nautilus Book Awards and the Silver Medal in the 'Relaxation/Mindfulness' category at the 2022 Living Now Book Awards. In addition, it was recognized as the Award-Winning Finalist in the 'Health: Aging/50+' category at the 2022 International Book Awards and the 2022 American Book Fest Book Awards. For more information, visit [www.embracingagingmindfully.com](http://www.embracingagingmindfully.com)

most people. However, the task becomes learning how to be in a relationship with **all** of life, including the more complex and challenging experiences that often accompany the aging years. Knowing how to meet these inevitable provocative events will, in no small measure, determine the overall quality of your aging life.

Mindfulness recognizes and honours these three invitations through its definition of **paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, to all you experience with an attitude of acceptance and non-judging**. It is a simple concept to understand but requires training to enjoy benefits.

Mindfulness and Jungian psychology do not promise to **transcend** human existence. Instead, they offer a proven learning process to **transform** your awareness, experience and relationship of moment-to-moment events and encounters, especially those of a more challenging, sorrowful or painful nature.

COVID-19 brought the reality of life's fragility and time-limited nature into glaring focus. During the pandemic, I elected to share with a broader audience what I had gleaned from my personal and professional experiences by writing a book titled *Moonlight Serenade: Embracing Aging Mindfully*.

Weaving together the benefits of mindfulness meditation and Jungian psychology, I articulate a path to meet aging years **boldly, confidently and wholeheartedly**. Through an unflinchingly honest but compassionate tone, I guide the reader in developing and cultivating a personal practice of mindfulness awareness. In addition, through Jungian psychology exercises, I advocate for the reader to explore and experience an attitudinal transformation of their relationship to aging life.

The title of my book envisions moonlight as an archetypal motif representing and illuminating the aging years. Mindfulness meditation and Jungian psychology practices are self-sung serenades, encouraging you to court and support yourself lovingly through this natural, inevitable, often trying but potentially rewarding process beginning in this present moment. But remember, as Napoleon reminds us, "You can ask for anything you want except time." Therefore, to acknowledge the limited time available in your aging life, the pressing question becomes, "If not now, when?"

Learning how to live the adventure of an authentic life is not easy and, in truth, I have found it to be a formidable process. However, based on my life explorations, as I enter my eighth decade, I believe this is a way of being that facilitates meeting advancing years in a healthy, resilient and more satisfying manner. To this claim, I offer the wise words of an unknown Tibetan poet whose suggestion for a good life mirrors the gifts of mindfulness and Jungian psychology. In each moment, all we have and what proves to be all we need is:

"One hand on the beauty of the world  
One hand on the suffering of all beings  
And two feet grounded in the present moment."

# WRITING MY WAY THROUGH DOUBLE VISION

(with a little help from my dream)

**Ellen B. Ryan**



“Did we get hit?” My seat is almost horizontal, and a strange silence fills the sunny day. I have lost track of time, but I remember that we were driving on a side road towards Sunday lunch at my brother-in-law’s farm in southern Ontario’s Glenelg Township.

“Rear-ended,” my husband Patrick says. “That lady’s airbag released. She didn’t even slow down for the stop sign here. We were pushed into the intersection – the boys and I are OK. Are you?”

“Not sure. My neck hurts – hurts a lot.”

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Six years after this lightning strike, I was still in rehab for double vision and vertigo – both conditions made walking and reading difficult.

Like a tree struck by lightning  
I am dizzy as I bend and sway  
with snarled messages for how to see  
and stand. My branches tingle  
*severed from my roots*

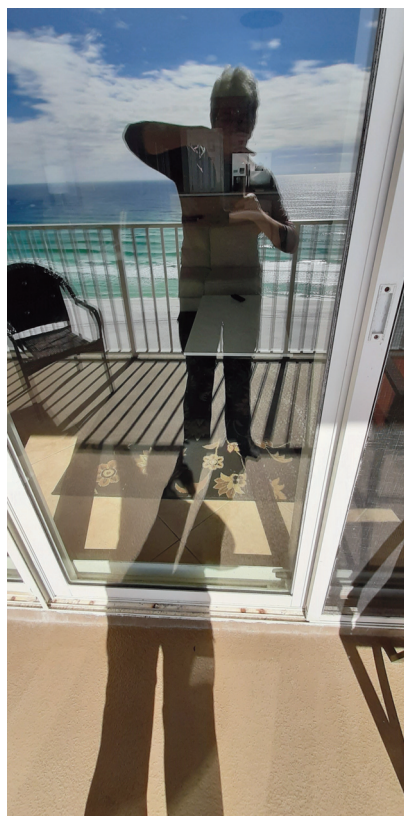
My double vision overlapped letters vertically, so reading lines on a page was often difficult. At the time of the dream that will change my future, I could read a page or three at good times in the day before the lines blurred into each other. My coping strategies included read-alouds with friends, scanning and text-to-speech software, large Arial font and audio books to supplement my reading from printed books. I was able to work, but only part-time with a competent assistant.

\*\*\*

*One night before dawn, I half awaken from a lucid dream:*

I am walking in a cornfield, tasselled stalks shoulder high. Ankle weights keep track of where my feet are, as they did after the accident. Even with my walking stick, it is all I can do to walk upright. I scan the scene for landmarks, spot only an occasional towering sunflower. Nothing unusual about dizzy walking in my dreams. But in this dream, I can see how my confused walking

**Six years after this lightning strike, I was still in rehab for double vision and vertigo – both conditions made walking and reading difficult.**



*I See Me In Reflection 1*

**It is only in the dream that I notice that the chosen poems are in first person, each creating an I-Thou moment.**

relates to my vision: the cornfields are the lines of text confusing me, the far-off sunflowers are hard-to-grasp words, the ones I am supposed to say or write.

“Write poems,” a resonant voice demands. “The white space around short lines will make it easier for you to read and write words. You will be able to write poems.”

In my dream I watch my hands tremble as I shove cornstalks aside, “How can this be?” I ask. “I haven’t studied poems since high school. Where does such an idea come from?” The voice guides my scramble through the field.

Continuing in the dream, I see myself at the podium closing a recent talk on dementia by reading three poems. First time I have ever included poems in an academic presentation. These poems drew loving attention to the rich emotional life of people losing their short-term memory and ability to communicate. Afterwards I told our adult daughter about the audience being so moved that I omitted my summary comments. Lori went on to tell our family at supper, “Mom recited poetry in her speech today.”

“But I did not recite poetry; I only read poems. Who am I to recite or write poetry?” I wonder, my eyebrows lifting with surprise and curiosity while I walk in the cornfield. It is only in the dream that I notice that the chosen poems are in first person, each creating an I-Thou moment.

Next, my cornfield dream journey takes me to an image from the previous Christmas Day when our son Kevin was kneeling on the floor scribbling on the piano bench. At age 24, he was playing guitar much of the time during our family holiday. I saw how words to a new song are flowing from his pencil like water from a hose. I felt a pang of envy for Kevin’s gift of song, recognizing that composing songs was beyond my tuneless voice. Now, in the dream, I imagine that perhaps I too can compose the words – though the melody will have to wait until I live among the angels. I trudge farther into the cornfield, shoving my way through the path narrowed by hefty mature cobs.

In the cornfield, I see my journals, upright soldiers. Since the accident, I have not been able to read anything written with my mechanical pencil or even a ballpoint pen. I needed large, bold print to cope with double vision. It took a long time to find suitable markers. Some have blunt tips, some give off a stink that turns my stomach, others dry up while I pause to think. Once I discovered children’s Crayola markers, I was able to journalize again. Tossing the invisible yellow marker, I wrote every other line with brown, then blue, then green. Now the parade of ten journals seems to press the question, *Where is all this journalizing headed?*

Coming out of my reverie of pages written when I got to the red and purple markers, I notice my path is opening out and taking me closer to clusters of sunflowers. I see those hard-to-grasp word-flowers facing towards the light. Pushing my face into a giant sunflower, I am tickled by its balm as I breathe in hope.



*I See Me In Reflection 2*

**Trees console by their erect presence and with the space surrounding them. So, like the trees, with more white space and shorter lines, I will reconnect with ideas and creativity.**

Now the golden flower clusters shift into whimsical sections among the scrawled lines in my journals while something stirs deep inside – these few word-flowers glow with summer possibility.

It strikes me that I can take colour-filled flower clusters – these words from my journal – and arrange them on a page – lift them out of the thicket of cornrows, nurture them and set them off in a meadow of white space.

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I wake from my dream full of energy and resolve to write poetry, although I have no idea how to begin. I can well identify with mental confusion/darkness due to bouts of unsettling dizziness and lack of balance. But after the dream, I feel like a maple tree in spring, sap rising, buds about to burst. I ponder: how do trees stand strong through dark nights, winter storms? Trees console by their erect presence and with the space surrounding them. So, like the trees, with more white space and shorter lines, I will reconnect with ideas and creativity.

A few words per line, a few lines per stanza and the brevity of poetry offer a chance to read more naturally, with less brain stress. Also, use of a few words pointing to powerful images allows me to take full advantage of my newly acquired ‘read-a-little-think-a-lot’ skills.

Weeks after the dream, my husband spots a notice for an adult-education course on poetry, entitled Call of the Spirit. Patrick does not normally pass along notices from his alumni newsletter, but here I am, like the ‘Energizer Bunny,’ repeating, “I need to write poems. How do I learn to write poems?” The sound of the course title catapults me back into the dream. I accept Pat’s offer to drive me to Toronto every other Saturday morning for the course. I anticipate lectures on the nature and techniques of poetry and a selection of great poems to analyze.

I walk up the curved staircase to the classroom with legs shaking more than usual. Middle-aged women fill the room, chatting easily with each other. I soon hear from them that many take this course over and over again to keep writing poetry. “Oh, yes,” they answer to my query about the teacher. “Al Moritz is a great poet and an attentive listener. But, no, he does not do any direct teaching.”

Indeed, Al announces, “For each session, you will be prepared to distribute 20 copies of your own new poem for critique by the group. I will comment last.”

*No traditional instruction, I think. How will I be able to manage?* The class veterans did assure me of their support. Before I can bolt out the door, the campus chimes root my feet, breathe through me and bless my resolve. *How could I give up this best chance to learn poetry?* I repeat the course for three seasons.



*I See Me In Reflection 3*

**Ellen B. Ryan** is professor emeritus at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. She is a member of Tower Poetry Society, co-editor of *Celebrating Poets over 70* and *Second Journeys: The Dance of the Spirit in Later Life*, and author of the book *Ability Speaks: Talking with a Person with Disability*. She hosts the Writing, Aging and Spirit and the Hamilton Aging in Community websites. Along with talented colleagues, she fosters writing of life stories and poetry among older adults. Ellen also practises mindfulness in nature with her camera. Her specialty is selfie/unsselfie shadow images. She held her first gallery showing in 2022, "My Pilgrim Shadows." The photographs included here are reflections capturing the sense of self through double vision.

In time  
I am a lightning survivor  
pain-pruned  
toes planted in fertile ground  
I listen to wind whispers  
reach for the sky

My beguiling dream has lured me into the creative life. My resilience grows as I dig deep and risk sharing my spirit via my words. Soon after my first poetry course, I am fortunate to join a writing group, which continues to inspire me twenty years later.

#### Rehab on Jerseyville Trail

Cadence of daily steps  
balances dizzy legs

Into my reverie breaks  
an ancient leafy oak

Tugged toward the sky  
by upturned branches

first time  
I'm standing free

Weight of earth  
roots one leg

my healing  
yoga tree

I pay attention to the moment and set words within white space. I still wonder about the meaning of white space. Of course, it focuses the mind on the light within a few words, but it also holds the mystery of the unattainable brightness of all colours working together.

#### White Space

words pared  
white space invites  
open to light  
sound-sprouts for green  
unbirthed seeds

Writing and my continuing journey with photography fill my days.



# GROWING INTO ME

## Kara Barkfed



The first time I remember being enthralled by art was probably kindergarten. I was put before a child's easel with a row of yellow, blue and red paint tins, brushes and paper. Who knew that over sixty years later I would still be painting! Art was a constant in my life through the years; growing up in Montreal, art and culture was everywhere. My favourite pastime as a youth was going to galleries, watching other artists paint; at home I drew constantly.

Looking back now, art was all I ever really wanted to do, but of course, as you grow into an adult, the message is clear, you can't make money as an artist. As a teenager, I was given oil painting lessons by my aunt who further nurtured my love of all things art. After graduation from high school, off I went to Europe to seek out all the artists I had grown up admiring in books. Close-up looks at artists like Van Gogh, Picasso, Monet further inspired me to pursue art nonetheless, and, upon returning to Canada, I enrolled in a fine arts program at what was then Capilano College, finishing a two-year program that included pottery, art history, weaving, illustration and life drawing, to name a few. Weaving was of particular interest to me, and I pursued that for a few years, until I realized that nope, you can't make a sustainable living doing that. Fast forward a few years, and you would find me at the University of Victoria pursuing a BFA. In 1983 two of my paintings from the graduating class exhibit were chosen for the annual Helen Pitt exhibition at Vancouver's Robson Square. Post-graduate Art Therapy school was my next choice for 2 years, which was then followed by an MA in art therapy/counselling.

Once I married and had children, my attention turned to caring for them. Soon enough, they were all able to hold a paintbrush, or crayon, pencil, etc.; then we made art together at the kitchen table. My purpose was twofold: I got to be creative and also nurture my children's creativity, because I have always believed nurturing creativity is vital to a child's education.

Fast forward again to 1999. I had burned out in my counselling career and needed a different path for my life, a creative path. Apart from making art with my children, I really hadn't picked up a paint brush seriously since 1983 when I graduated. I didn't know what I wanted to paint, but I knew instinctively that I must. A creative person needs to create or their soul shrinks and becomes dissatisfied, and that was where I found myself. Art can be a healing journey as well as a creative one. I looked to my surroundings for inspiration and began to pursue art seriously again, finding that my painting nourished me through some difficult years and helped me find

**Once I married and had children, my attention turned to caring for them. Soon enough, they were all able to hold a paintbrush, or crayon, pencil, etc.; then we made art together at the kitchen table.**



Top: *Long Distance Love*

Above: *Please Don't Pick the Flowers*

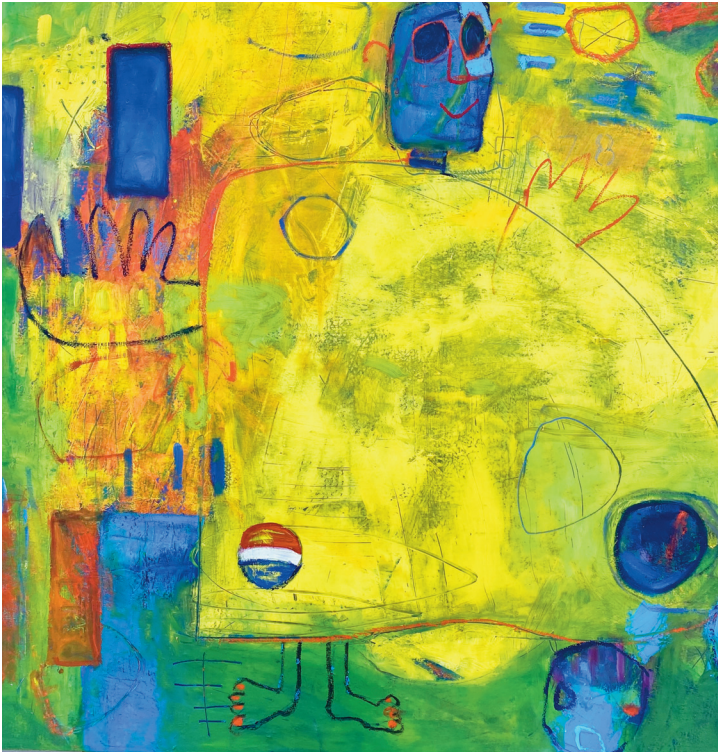
myself again. I was thrilled to find that my paintings sold! Each year I give myself a new challenge to explore, because it helps me grow artistically (the more you know, the more you realize what you don't know!). It might be a year of exploring flowers, or dreams, or then again it might be about making friends with a particular colour, green for instance. To this end, I will spend time experimenting and using all the different ways one can use green.

Since that time of reconnection, I have not looked back or regretted making this choice.

By 2010, when we moved back to the Okanagan, I decided that I wanted to try abstract art. In my mind, I could see wonderful colourful abstracts. However, putting my ideas on canvas was another story. It was hard! People often say about abstract art, "my child could do that!" This is true, kids don't hesitate to put down on paper anything they want to express, with total enthusiasm and trust in self; as an adult it is much much harder. Abstract art is full of complications and strategies. As adults, it is difficult to be as fearlessly creative as children are. We tend to think things should look like what they are supposed to look like in reality, or at least have some resemblance to a reality we are familiar with. I set up my studio in my garage and worked hard at painting for four to six hours a day, because I knew that was what was needed to grow. And I did. By 2013, I had caught the attention of a few local galleries and art lovers and began to grow an online presence, selling my work on a regular basis.

Where do I find inspiration for abstract art? Nature. I tend to look at the world around me with a quantum physics lens and try to understand that all is not as it seems. Looking at it from

this perspective, the world is very abstract and unique. Anything visibly solid is actually not solid at all, so endlessly inspirational and open to my interpretation. I have been involved in abstract art-making now for many years, but I still love art-making in any form. I embrace all, I love to play with line, form and colour. I love to lose myself for hours in the studio pursuing, experimenting and exploring new ideas, and each painting created is for me a journey of wonder, a part of my soul, a map of my personal world and viewpoint. My



*Juggling Act*

**In *Juggling Act*, a red white and blue ball represents my childhood but also my newfound enthusiasm for relearning how to play.**

paintings are an intuitive journey, reflecting my environment, my mood, the world around me, my inner world of thoughts, memories and feelings, or commentary on world events. A painting may begin with a scrap of paper found serendipitously, as in the painting *Long Distance Love*, or a beach rock with unique patterns; things that capture my attention provoke a thought process, a feeling and a series of paintings. I try to imagine things as a child would and then express the joy and curiosity a child might feel, because I enjoy that act of simple enthusiasm with no hesitation.

I have very early memories from even before five years old. I absolutely loved flowers, and still do. Peonies, lilacs, the honeysuckle blossom that my grandmother showed me how to suck the nectar out of. I pull on those memories for my inspiration. A few years back I created a painting from an early memory. *Please Don't Pick*

*the Flowers* recalls an incident where I wanted to give my mom a bouquet of these incredible beautiful red tulips from her carefully planned red tulip garden. As an unsupervised 5-year-old, I found and used the kitchen scissors to cut all the tulips in our front yard, with about two-inch stems. I got in a lot of trouble for that. Memory of this experience resulted in the painting that was sold to a U.S. collector.

In *Juggling Act*, a red white and blue ball represents my childhood but also my newfound enthusiasm for relearning how to play. The juggling motion is about all the different roles I have played in my life. It began as almost all my abstract paintings do, with the idea of joyous colour and energetic mark making. As I continued to feel my way along, a form presented itself. It felt very free and childlike and, in its essence, I could see a head and a hand, perhaps having fun with a ball. The tricolour red, white and blue ball, just like the one I had played with as a youngster, was added after I recently found and purchased a similar one in a dollar store. For me that ball represented my childhood, and my painting *Juggling Act* came to represent all that I loved from my youth. In my painting those memories mixed with memories of and also the enthusiasm that I brought to motherhood as I raised a blended family of six kids. As I painted I enjoyed being reminded that, even as a senior, there is still fun to be had in childlike enjoyment of play, with something as simple as a ball, hopscotch or a skipping rope. I actually do play with that little ball daily. Now, with an empty nest, I can focus on figuring out who I am now, at this stage of my life, and I can do what I always wanted to do: make art. If you had asked me at 13, What do you want to do when you grow up, I would have said "Artist." And that is exactly what I am doing now. Sometimes in my

**Sometimes in my daily studio hours I am just playing intuitively, and other times I am intent on excavating my life experiences for creative expression. – I am happiest when hanging out with my art tribe, which is anyone who enjoys making art.**

daily studio hours I am just playing intuitively, and other times I am intent on excavating my life experiences for creative expression. At times I use numbers, letters and symbols that represent a purpose and experience known only to myself, yet integral to my painting experience.

For instance, at one time I was a dancer and the number sequence "...5678..." is the count as you prepare for a dance sequence, so as to stay with the beat of the music as you move into the sequence of steps or movements. I have always liked to journalize and I have kept journals for many years. I am glad I did, because now they are fodder, both for collage and as inspiration for my paintings. Xs are about retaining privacy, my own form of censorship over words that I may have drawn or painted in underneath.

I have learned a few different languages since I was a youth: French, Spanish, German and Latin. I have always been fascinated by the written word in any language. The written word was a theme from my final year of university in my BFA program, and I am revisiting it in my paintings. The other letters that show up in my paintings that do not form words are debris from daily life, words that are buried, secrets, news, disasters, or the random cacophony of an assortment of words coming at us daily from every direction: TV, radio, print. I still create landscapes and still lifes, as well as abstract non-objective art. I am happiest when hanging out with my art tribe, which is anyone who enjoys making art. These days I am either creating art or teaching what I know to a new generation of painters at the local community art centre.

# FOUND OBJECTS HELPED ME FIND ME



## Devon Muhlert

The beauty of found objects is the surprise and delight when we see them and they speak to some aspect of ourselves. Something seen and desired for some future use. In some ways, we are all found objects. We wait to be discovered and may be disappointed when we're not. I waited, then decided to discover myself in mid-life. No fame ensued, but being active in the arts scratched my creative itch. Frequently, I would repurpose some found objects in my creative play.

"You can't teach creativity!" a skeptic told me when I began facilitating creativity classes. They were playful workshops, and participants had fun. Some serious people believed that fun was for children. Out of that lighthearted approach came serious benefits – a new job, a new relationship, better dealings with co-workers. Perhaps creativity isn't teachable, but collectively we found new ideas, new self-worth and thoughts to kick around and ignite.

My son played soccer, and his team was invited to a game in a nearby community where I was music director for a church, so I was not expected to be there on a weekday. I overheard a woman talking about me. "She's okay, but a little eccentric."

Huh? How? I was just an average mother of three, trying to get kids to their activities on time and supper on the table at 5:00. Someone later told me, "Her remark – That's a compliment!" The remark made me think, Is that what it means to be creative? We don't conform to other people's expecta-

tions; we have a tolerance for waiting for patterns to emerge and create something new.

When I put my piece together for the *Mother(load) Exhibition* at Lake Country Art Gallery, many memories popped up as I explored my collection of saved objects. One was a shirt emblazoned with Annie Oakley's saying, "Well-behaved women seldom make the history books." I had bought that shirt because Annie Oakley shaped my childhood. Adults stumbled over my unpronounceable ethnic name. School kids adapted it and called me Annie Oakley. I had no idea who she was, and my immigrant parents had no clue. There was no Google, and encyclopedias held antiquated information. Later I dis-

*The Archeology of Motherhood*





Top: Tami, Devon's daughter with her 2-year-old outfit

Above: *Maritime Memories*. A wall-hanging made using some found quilted blocks, enhanced, and commercial patches

covered Annie Oakley had become a sharp-shooter by long practice of providing meat for her siblings. A young, attractive woman, she embarrassed men by beating them at their own skills, and because they didn't believe a woman could excel at their craft. After she had gained fame, or at least notoriety, William Randolph Hearst published a story about her that was derogatory and false. Fifty-five other newspapers reprinted it. She sued them all and won. I welcomed my nickname.

I've often joked in my column, called *Devon's Delusions*, that motherhood is one long archaeological dig, the layers of last month – clothes, papers, homework, household bills – lie hidden well below yesterday's. So, in *The Archeology of Motherhood* I purloined my own column's title and considered what mothers really need. Sturdy housing for their younglings, warm quilts, a diaper pail (yes, I had one), lots of patience and many other things. So I moved around 'artifacts' from those that I had loved to collect to see if a pattern could materialize to reflect my views on motherhood.

I thought about children as teenagers, trying to find their own way, and the little leather jacket with tiny detail came to hand. Other symbols joined. Mothers want to add beauty to function, and that's where artistic quilts and photos come in. When I was a family and wedding photographer, I shot mothers and babies in gauzy, pastel, soft-focus scenes, or women that were made up for glamour shots. We all know that motherhood is less about gauzy glamour than about calming down situations, drudgery or quieting screaming infants. Continually mothers are interrupted if working on their own projects; even if making something for the family, a mother can be jolted out of her 'reverie' (as her concentration is viewed) to deal with the situation. My piece shows the beginnings of quilts and other projects, all held in place by pins. This speaks to the frustrations of not achieving completion, or even to be allowed fully to enjoy creating a piece.

We learn from Myers-Briggs personality typing that only about 10% of the population are artsy – maybe dreamers or more introspective. No wonder the other 90% don't get us. Through the years I have heard the stories of other misunderstood artists. A woman in my community had to wait twenty-five years before she could even contemplate her artistic career. A child of royal Italian heritage, her family settled in Vernon, but after her father's death, Sveva Caetani was entombed in their home by her mother, who disapproved vehemently of her daughter's artistic leanings, even disposing of some works in the fireplace. Her story is told in my book *Cadence of Colour: Sveva Caetani and her Mothers*.

When I finished my shadow box, *The Archeology of Motherhood*, with all its precious little components, it felt like a life memoir in a minute. As we age, we ponder the parallel lives we may have wished for ourselves. After university and a degree in music, I had thought I would undertake a performance career with my flute. I had performed at the provincial centennial competition and won silver, second best in B.C. The piece was by a French composer, known for his esoteric and difficult works. The whole



Sea-Vivors, a sculptural bucket list, made from beach-combed arches of lobster traps

**I created my own career, pieced together patchwork, like the quilts I so admire.**

school gave me a standing ovation in the auditorium when I played it for them after the competition. So all in all, I thought I had a good chance of finishing my music degree and going on to glory. Teenage dreams! I'd even invested in performance clothes. I was committed. Much later, as a mother, I ran into one of my dorm-mates who'd studied opera. Travelling the globe, she sang her heart out in New York and Milan and points in between. Her thriving career dazzled me. She said quietly (for an opera star), "Yes, I love it, but it's very lonely. I don't have time for a husband or children." That caught me up short. No, I wouldn't have given up my husband or children – my mother(load) - for a dream. As

I made *The Archeology of Motherhood* I journeyed through the life I have enjoyed. We grab opportunities as they arise. I planned concerts as they became possible, wrote stories when ideas erupted, served as music director for drama clubs and churches as positions occurred. In short, I created my own career, pieced together patchwork, like the quilts I so admire.

My September 2022 art show, *Reclaimed*, at the Armstrong Gallery, showed a lifetime of my work, and many objects that mirror me, such as the little toddler's outfit I'd hand-sewn while we lived in the Northwest Territories. Both this exhibition and the recent creation of my shadow box, *The Archaeology of Motherhood*, have made me consider how found objects have inspired me to find me.

I sum up my life with some of my lyrics:

*Try to hold back time or the tide, try to hold back wind or the wild,  
Try to go back home in the summer sun, and try to stay there awhile. Try to  
cool the fires of the sun, try to love and please everyone.....Try to capture God in a  
song, try to find and right every wrong, Try to call out loud in the darkest night, and  
try to follow the light.*

**Devon L. Muhlert**, B.Ed (Music), Certified Music Practitioner (CMP), has always been a dreamer. A photo-journalist, columnist, songwriter, musician and private music teacher, she enjoys crossing artistic disciplines. She continues to find her way among limited opportunities and loves to share creativity with four grandchildren, now almost all in their teens. website: devoncity.ca e-mail: devonelle@telus.net

# RESTORYING A LIFE

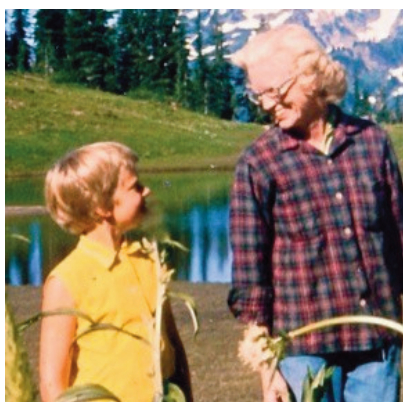
## I Can See Clearly Now

### Gretchen Staebler



Below: The author and her mother at Mt. Rainier, c. 1959

Bottom: The author and her mother at the Million Mom March in Washington, D.C., 2000



My north star as I became an adult was conflicted. I grew up in the fifties and sixties with my mother's gender-typical role model, along with those I saw in *Father Knows Best*, *Donna Reed* and *Leave It to Beaver*. But as I came of age I also witnessed Marlo Thomas's "working girl" Ann Marie in *That Girl*, along with Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and bra burning.

I went to college – an expectation of me and my two sisters – but I had been left on my own to uncover passion and develop gifts, and I hadn't done it. With no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up, I chose a major by process of elimination. Post-graduation, I got married and became a full-time wife and mother, if not choosing my mother's path, falling into it.

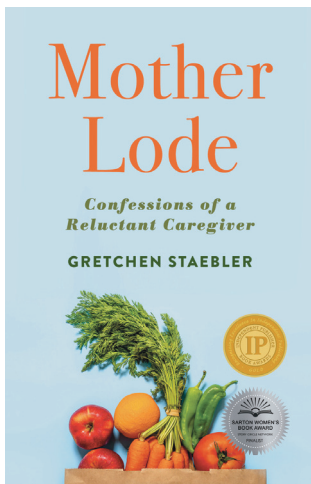
Everything changed when, at forty, my marriage ended. I went to graduate school, but, degree in hand, I still didn't know how to be a career woman. I floundered as I looked for my niche. I wish I could say I began watching my mother more closely, but the looking glass I kept her in remained clouded by my obstinate refusal to see her beyond my childhood years, or across the 2500 miles that physically separated us in my adulthood.

In my growing up years, my mother had been the action behind the face, hiding behind her introversion and in her understanding of women's and men's roles. She was the elected PTA president and did the work, but my father led the meetings. She did the work at our church, but declined to be on a leadership board. She was a Girl Scout leader and Sunday school teacher, mingling with children where she felt more confident and competent.

When my father retired from his illustrious career, she seemingly decided it was her time. She threw herself into activism, changing the persona of the person I thought I knew. She jumped into peace initiatives and gun control, speaking passionately to church and civic groups. She led a charge to save the second-growth forest adjacent to our home, defying her "trees are a natural resource" husband before bringing him along with her. Slowly I began to see her in a new light as she discovered creative ways to express her long-buried (or undiscovered) passions and overcome her fears.

After the end of my marriage, as I struggled to put together a life and a living, I took my first writing class and started a blog about restoring the garden at the house I had bought on my own. I honed in on my love of writing. I found a job I could shine in. I re-storied my life. I was thriving. I was busy when my father died, and still not watching my mother courageously continue living on her own. (Later she would say her eighties were her favourite decade. She was seventy-nine when she became a widow.)





Top: The author and her mother at home in 2014

Above: Cover *Mother Lode: Confessions of a Reluctant Caregiver* is the author's memoir of accompanying her mother in her end years..

Award-winning author **Gretchen Staebler** is a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother and wandering adventurer who, at age sixty, left decades of grown-up life on the East Coast to return to the mountains, beaches, and rain of her soul's home in the American Pacific Northwest. She blogs about her adventures from coffee shops, her father's desk, national park lodges, her tent – wherever she feels cozy. She lives with her cat Lena in her childhood home in a small town in Washington State. Gretchen can be found adventuring at [www.WritingDownTheStory.com](http://www.WritingDownTheStory.com)

For information and stories about her memoir and resources for family caregivers, she hopes you will visit [www.gretchenstaebler.com](http://www.gretchenstaebler.com).

And then, at the apex of my own newly discovered confidence and creative living, I moved.

Leaving the garden I had created and returning to my childhood home – and my mother's garden – on the other side of the country was an act of courage. My mother's grit as she re-storied her own life after my father died had begun to seep into my consciousness. At ninety-six, though, she was in need of a companion traveler – not that she would admit it. It was a move I had longed for since leaving the Pacific Northwest nearly four decades earlier, but I hadn't envisioned it like this.

Watching her up close for the next six years was an education I could not have received in a classroom. As I read the letters she and my father wrote to one another from opposite sides of the ocean during World War II, her intrepidness and creativity in putting together an unexpected life as a young woman moved her out from behind my mirror. All these years I had been seeing only my own image in the glass, and yet she was there all along. Through the years we had together until her death, we battled to hold onto the independence we had each come to in the fullness of maturity, unwilling to cede it to the other. They were hard years.

Writing down the story in a new blog was my life-saving outlet. It was where I intersected with the world beyond a stifling existence. As in the garden blog, it was a sharing of my hands-in-the-dirt education with readers.

Following my mother's death, I finished transforming my blog posts and journal into a memoir. It was published as autumn morphed towards winter in 2022. Now, for the first time, I am engaging in volunteerism and social activism as I support family caregivers and educate others about the unsung world of family caregiving. Readers of my memoir are finding the courage to take control of their own self-care, even as they care for another. They are giving themselves permission not to do "all the things" alone, to ask for help. They are talking more openly about the struggle that is family caregiving. Perhaps they are writing down their own stories.

In celebration of my 70th birthday in 2022, I turned my passion for hiking – and my newest blog about my outdoor adventures – into a volunteer position at Mt. Rainier National Park, helping others discover and protect the beauty of the natural world. And who modelled that re-storying for me? My mother. She has become my clear and shining north star.

When I returned to my mother's garden at age sixty, I thought maybe in whatever time we were to have together, I could find the mother I had always wished for: one who would cheer me on with praise, admiration, celebration – pompoms even. Instead, she just kept being who she always had been: the unflinching woman I hadn't seen clearly any more than I felt seen by her. I began shaking those pompoms for myself, cheering myself on, just as she had quietly championed herself. I look in the mirror now and I see her smiling back. Maybe even a hint of pompom cheering me on.

My mother thought I had returned to my childhood home so she could take care of me, rather than vice versa. And maybe she did. Even now, five years after her death, as I continue living in the home she created, I am still learning from her.

# MY LAST NIGHT WITH MY MOM

**Suzanne Chavarie**



As tears streamed from her soft blue eyes, my mom said, “You’ll miss me, Sue, when I’m gone. What will you do?” I felt my tears well up too, but more than ever, I felt the need to be the strong one. For I was my mom’s ‘Person,’ the one to hold space for her. I’m a trained Death Doula and have supported many others. But this night, *tonight*, I was a daughter, her daughter, holding my mom tighter than ever as we shared our last night together, hugging and sharing stories. We were in her shared hospital room at Saint Paul’s in Vancouver, B.C., on December 18th, the week before Christmas 2022.

As night fell, and we settled in together, Mom whispered and asked, “What else do you need to know? You have a lot of stuff, my stuff, to take care of once I’m gone, and it’s quite a job!”

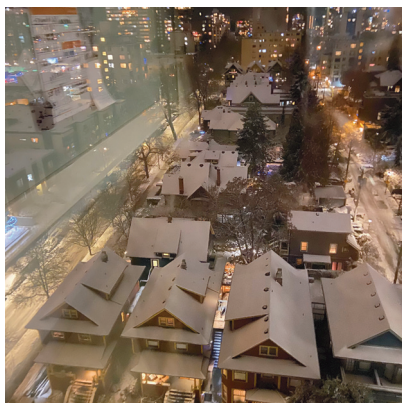
As I witnessed her pain medication affecting her ability to stay awake, I replied, “It’s all good, Mom. But tell me the story again of when I was little, and the two of us were on your bike, with you pedalling fast, with the wind blowing and you trying really to balance us both and the laundry!” And then we both laughed as she drifted off to sleep. My mother had requested MAID for 1:00 PM the next day. It was our final night together, and I lay there listening to the sounds from the movement of equipment, nurses and hospital staff voices filtering into the room with only a soft white curtain between us and the patient in the bed next to us.

As I glanced at the window on Mom’s side, I saw the snow was falling softly upon the rooftops and streets below. This made me think, “Will it be possible to move her tomorrow?” Vancouver doesn’t usually get this amount of snow. Then I heard footsteps of a nurse coming in. Earlier, she had offered a fold-up chair for me to use and she came in and placed it by Mom’s bed. I glanced at my watch, and I saw it was late as I moved onto the chair, and then my mom slid down her hospital bed, tangled in her blue gown next to me.

My mom awoke again. “Where are you, Sue?” and I answered, “Right here, Mom.” Then she asked, “How do you feel about me dying tomorrow?” Of course, I had many feelings, but they were too huge to share with her honestly because all I was wishing and wanting was for time to slow down, so we could share more time and more stories.

Art has a mysterious way of soothing grief. So once home safely, I knew what to do. I picked up a paintbrush and found comfort in the process of creating a piece, which became a *Tribute to My Mom the Artist*. Once it was completed, it was accepted into the *Mother (load) Exhibition* at Lake Country Public Art Gallery. This show gave me an opportunity to share my grief and feel supported.

The view from the window on our last night together





Top: Celebrating the *Mother (load)* exhibition with friends (Left, Peterina McNeil, middle, Suzanne Chavarie, right, Sheila Grace Tansey)

Above: *Tribute to My Mom the Artist*

My mom, whom many knew as an author, artist, playwright, poet and mentor, was the first writer to receive the *Van City Book Prize* for the best book pertaining to women's issues by a British Columbian. She was the founder of Vancouver's *Chez Doris*, a team of skilled individuals working together to bring comfort and care to women in need. She was awarded the Governor-General Sovereign Medal Award, for exceptional volunteer achievements by Canadians from across the country in a wide range of fields. To be eligible, volunteers need to have made significant, sustained and unpaid contributions to their community in Canada or abroad. My mother remained humble regarding her accomplishments. Sheila Baxter's intent wasn't recognition; it was to be a catalyst for change and a platform for spreading awareness. But I knew her firstly as 'Mom,' 'my mom,' and will cherish the memories I have with her.

"Life opens opportunities to you, and you either take them or you stay afraid of taking them"

– Jim Carrey.

As I stood by my mom's side minutes before her death, I cannot describe what I saw. It felt as if calmness were taking her over as she let go of everything that was not needed. After returning home, I picked up a paint brush and created a layered abstract painting on canvas to reflect my experience. The energy once flowing through our bodies does not disappear, it is simply rearranged.

My mom had always been a role model for me when it came to creating art. She believed that art had the power to change the world, and, more importantly, your life. Art is your medium and it's your choice to create what you want as "Life opens opportunities to you." In December, surrounded by family, I held my mom's hand while she enjoyed a café latte and singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." She chose to die with dignity, and I was there to support her. I went home and painted. My piece reflects the energy leaving my mom's body as the minutes passed and she was no longer alive. The Zinc White paint in this piece represents her pure love for her family. The Metallic Gold reflects the confusion and pain in my heart. The Iridescent Blue represents the family members and medical team who were also present. The Iridescent Lavender, Metallic Silver and Iridescent Teal represent my mom's energy rearranging itself as it left her body and I sat by her side. I believe that after death, the energy contained in us simply disperses into the surrounding environment. As our bodies cool, the excess heat and energy we possess in life are distributed to the surrounding air, liquid or objects our bodies are in contact with. My mom believed in the power; now I felt its mysterious way of soothing grief.

**Suzanne Chavarie** is an Okanagan resident who enjoys being part of the fabric of her community as an educator, an artist and a volunteer with the Central Okanagan Hospice Association. Her passion for running takes her 'racing' into many communities.

# LIFE IN PROCESS

## Christina Knittel



My very first university drawing class set me on the path to becoming the artist I am today. The assignment that day was to make 50 different marks with our drawing tools. No two marks could be made the same way, so we had to explore the possibilities, experimenting with pressure, speed and ways of holding a pencil to create something new. I instantly connected to this assignment and, twenty years later, mark-making and exploration continue to be important parts of my practice.

When I step inside my studio, I leave all expectations behind and paint in the moment. I connect to this process of painting the most. It's an exploration of the unexpected and, coincidentally, an exploration of my inner self. Through painting I uncover who I am, my personal tendencies, my voice. The colours I reach for, the marks I like to make, these lead me into knowing. By letting go of the result, I free myself to play.

My method begins when I put on my apron and scrape my palette. These two simple acts shift my mind and body into work mode. Sometimes I have an idea of where I'm going to start, but most of the time I let the moment decide, and I always end up somewhere unexpected. I allow for spontaneity, leaving room for things to change on a whim. Even in the ugly stages, I know it works out in the end. Before I make the first mark, I rummage through unfinished artwork and piles of art supplies to see what's calling out to play. There's a moment where I feel excitement about a particular colour or unfinished piece, and that's when I will begin. Through painting, I've learned to pay close attention to that excitement. It is my instinctual inner sense, my voice, and I know then that what I'm doing is true to myself. I call it looking for Yesses.

Preparing to work

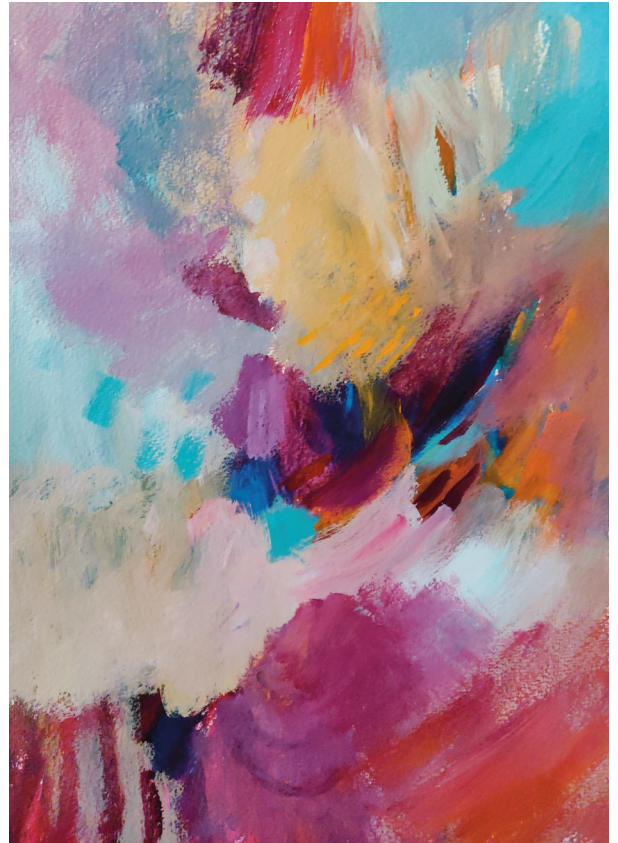


"Yes" is my guide when I create. When I feel it, I stop, look at the work and ask, "Does everything say yes in this piece?" If everything does, then I know the painting is finished. If not, I rummage again, pulling out things I think might work, looking for the next Yes. If I can't find one, I set the work aside for another time. I will not continue with a piece until a Yes presents itself. Following Yesses helps me express how I feel about the world, sharing my joy and wonder with others. The excitement is there to see.

One painting that embodies this process is *High Winds*. It is a piece filled with strength and movement and is about the power of the unseen. In this painting, I feel a wind that



Left: Waiting for the next yes  
Right: *High Winds*



**In painting I have become closer to myself, finding a deep connection to the calm centre within. It is a powerful thing, that centre.**

whips your hair around, blustering out of nowhere, threatening to topple you over, and yet you remain solid and still within it. There is calm within the chaos, expressing the power of being self-assured and confident.

I love the in-between stages in my work. The semi-unfinished with those rough bits, unpolished and raw. And my paintings usually have evidence of earlier stages of work peeking through. Life is rarely so neat and tidy; we can never keep living in a perfect moment. Things must change. We must grow. And I wouldn't want it any other way. We can't recognize and cherish the good moments without having the awful ones. Whole-heartedly embrace the mess of living.

In comparison, *Dream State* projects a calm energy. Awake and alive, but also serene. There is boldness in the softness, a grounding in the vibrancy of this painting. I think about sitting at the edge of the pond near my house – the sun hitting the trees first thing in the morning, steam rising off the water and the sound of birds calling through the rushes. It is a moment of connecting with nature, recalling a Yes found in my day-to-day.

In painting I have become closer to myself, finding a deep connection to the calm centre within. It is a powerful thing, that centre. It is a sure and steadfast guide to all moments in my life, not just in painting. It tells me when to say yes to things that serve me. I act, try different things, see what happens. I enjoy my mistakes, embracing the opportunity to learn from them.

My everyday experiences influence what happens in my studio. As a daydreamer and intensely curious person, I want to know how the world



*Dream State*

**My work is about those brief moments where we notice the wonder around us and pause to enjoy.**

works and seek ways to understand it, imagining possibilities and finding new connections. I pay attention and observe throughout my day. A new colour combination might spark a Yes. The way grass moves in the wind might influence a line I draw, or the sparkle of dew may suggest a pattern of dots I could use. There is evidence that things are happening whether we witness them or not, and I am fascinated with the things we miss out on as we go about our busy days.

I process life through the colour and marks I make on a canvas, pulling memories and emotions, observations of movement in nature, and following my inner voice. I tune into excitement and find joy in all of it. My work is about those brief moments where we notice the wonder around us and pause to enjoy.

**Christina Knittel** is an artist living in Kelowna, B.C., who creates abstract paintings using mixed media. She graduated from UBC Okanagan with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, where she majored in drawing and digital media. During her studies at UBC she developed an interest in process-based art-making and gesture-drawing.

While working at Opus Art Supplies, she learned the technical side of art materials, picture framing and digital printing. She began to explore mixed media and colour in her artwork. Opus also provided a place to connect with the art community through opportunities for running workshops, demonstrations and classes. Colour and mark-making are distinctive elements in Christina's work, and her intuitive process produces a vibrant and gestural style. By working this way, allowing the moment to determine what happens next, Christina makes room for the unexpected. Her paintings reflect the ebb and flow of everyday moments, their transitions and our emotions in them. Her work has been on display at many local venues, including the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art and the Innovation Centre. She has taught classes through the Kelowna Art Gallery and the City of Kelowna.

# ART FOR CURIOUS OPTIMISTS

## Susan Burnham Neilson



“I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” This was written by Albert Einstein, who also said:

“Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality.”

This morning, I am sitting at a desk with my computer to write this short article, watching a tiny hummingbird flitting from flower to flower on the shrub outside the window right in front of me. The shrub is scruffy and thorny like so many outside the casita where I am staying on the grounds of the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum this month. Sharp spiky thorns are everywhere in this hot dry climate, but so are the vividly coloured flowers. This morning’s bird is a tiny female, but yesterday I saw only her partner. I love having time in one place, so I actually begin to recognize wild neighbours.

The Sonoran Desert is full of life, and changing every moment of every day. A spectacular blossom that is open in the morning, may have completely disappeared by the end of the day, so when I can, I sit and draw what I see, just to enjoy the colours and the intricately balanced perfect shapes, while the bees and other insects come and go.

For the month of May, I have had the very good fortune to be a guest here, with the artist-in-residence program for the ASDM Art Institute, whose motto is “Conservation through Art Education” and “Conservation is the Gift of Life.” In fact, the mission of the entire desert museum is to “inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation and understanding of the Sonoran Desert.” I am fascinated by the wild surroundings in this place, but I am equally intrigued by the way that nature conservation is a collaboration here, involving absolutely everyone! There are scientists, birders, botanists, artists, filmmakers and a lot of volunteer docents who are professionals from all walks of life. People here are passionate about conservation issues and simply about sharing their understanding about the beauty of the desert and its inhabitants. Around every corner, I hear people speaking with intelligence and familiarity about the plants, the insects and the history of this place. They are constantly asking questions and sharing ideas. I love it here.

A workshop I taught last week in Arizona was called “Art for Curious Optimists.” It was about the creative process, starting with wonder, and

**“Conservation through Art Education” and “Conservation is the Gift of Life.”**



Top left: *Costa Hummingbird*

Top right: *Torch Cactus*

Above: *Desert Iguana*

personal art explorations using sketchbooks and simple art experiments on paper. I wanted it to focus on joy in making art, while sharing our interests in nature conservation.

“Part of being optimistic is keeping one’s head pointed toward the sun, one’s feet moving forward.” (Nelson Mandela)

My goal for this workshop was to suggest starting points for ways to experience nature through art, which could include observational drawing, but also to go beyond representing a visual likeness. . . art as experience.

We played with ink floating on water to see how natural patterns move. We made quick and simple wedges for a collaborative circle composition, inspired at first by tiny cropped image samples showing Fibonacci spirals in nature. We also had boxes with art institute collections of shells, insects and seed pods, so we paid attention to what it is that inspires us each individually. Most importantly, we considered starting with empathy and letting one thing lead to another.

To find our own style and our own priorities we followed curiosity, asked questions and experimented with possibilities for building up from simple starting points to transformations for compelling personal compositions. In one day, we could barely scratch the surface of this topic, but we had a lot of fun trying a few examples. Then I gave them some prompts and resources to kickstart other explorations for other days.

At the time of writing this, I have only seven days left in this art residency, so I am putting away my computer, and heading out the door. My goal this spring has been for the teacher to teach herself. I am sketching, paying attention to creative process and joy in the experience, and telling stories with my camera as well. By engaging in conversations along the way, I am learning something new each day from people who are striving to make a difference for nature conservation.

With today’s sketch, and today’s conversations, I am learning about





Top left: *Workshop Student*

Top right: Neilson's Sketchbook –  
*Prickly Pear*

Above: Ink Drawing – *Mexican Gray Wolf*

efforts to bring Mexican Gray Wolves back from near-extinction and to begin a return of wolves to the mountains of the Southwest.

“Wolves are hunters; they are adaptable with eyes that absorb their landscape. Be like the wolf. Fascinating and alive with curiosity.” (Michael Duncan)

It is so wonderful that the ASDM Art Institute is supportive of this type of personal study for artists in the residency (AIR) program. The institute plays a central role in positive change, starting ‘the butterfly effect’ that happens when people have time to really learn and share creative experiences connected to appreciation of nature.

My hope is that I can take what I have learned here and share the enthusiasm with others even long after I return to the Okanagan, where we also have an active, engaged community, interested in art, science and nature connections.

In her studio at the edge of Woodhaven Nature Conservancy in Kelowna, **Susan Burnham Neilson** creates figurative, botanical and lyrical paintings integrating precise realism in detail with abstraction, calm energy and symbolism. Neilson's art is inspired by connections with nature, thanks to parks that help to protect wildlife corridors in British Columbia. She is a signature member of Artists for Conservation International (AFC).

# NO WHIMPERING

## Ute Carson



When clouds darken  
after a life of sunshine  
I have no right to whimper.  
Still, tears well up  
remembering losses,  
regretting missed opportunities,  
mourning mistakes,  
and sensing sadness at the rush of time.  
Gratitude is the antidote to affliction.  
Even recalling the smallest delight  
can ease distress.  
A grateful disposition puts things in perspective,  
gathering fond memories from the past.

There are always bumps along the road of life, potholes in relationships. But if we acknowledge them and put our hearts and hands together in repairing the pavement, it can become solid, even smooth. The inspiration for my poem “No Whimpering” comes from praising long-term relationships, the ones that have outlasted difficulties. There is a poem dedicated to my husband of 61 years titled “Folding Washing” which was published by the Willet Press in 2013. The metaphor points to shared tasks that love requires like tugging, pulling, straightening washing. It takes mutual effort. This relationship is a balancing act based on giving and receiving. It is rooted in reciprocity. It praises “working things out,” continuity and permanence. The poem goes like this:

### ... Grow Old With Me ... The Best is Still To Be ...

It's hard to believe that promise  
when aging's afflictions begin to weigh on us,  
the failing body, the forgetful mind.  
But if we are lucky  
we'll have someone to fold washing with,  
long sheets needing two pairs of hands,  
tugging, straightening,  
stretch right, pull to the left.  
The heart will not be deterred,  
forever yearning for a companion  
to share the ordinary  
with lightness as dusk descends.

**When life is difficult,  
bringing pleasant  
memories to mind can  
ease the body and  
comfort the soul.**

This ode to gratitude signifies more than appreciation. It also evokes consolation. It can provide emotional support. When life is difficult, bringing pleasant memories to mind can ease the body and comfort the soul. Calling gratitude to our aid helps us refocus our thoughts, and lets us momentarily set aside present troubles. There are times when I sorely miss my grand-



Ute and her husband celebrate the moments

**Writing poetry allows me to cultivate and deepen my gratitude.**

mother and my mother. It consoles me to recall something I especially enjoyed when I was with them. I am suddenly thankful for what we shared.

All through life we long for lasting relationships and, especially in dark times, we need the assistance of gratitude no matter how old we are. But because advanced age can present us with unusual and more frequent frailties, we have to cultivate gratitude more often than before. Writing poetry allows me to cultivate and deepen my gratitude. My writing has been my life-time friend, intensifying and enriching the moments of my life.

**Ute Carson**, a German-born writer from youth and an MA graduate in Comparative Literature from the University of Rochester, published her first prose piece in 1977. *Colt Tailing*, a 2004 novel, was a finalist for the Peter Taylor Book Award. Ute's story "The Fall" won Outrider Press's Grand Prize and appeared in its short story and poetry anthology, *A Walk through My Garden*, in 2007. Her second novel *In Transit* was published in 2008.

Ute's poetry was televised on the Spoken Word Showcase 2009-2011, Channel Austin.

A poetry collection *Just a Few Feathers* was published in 2011. The poem "A Tangled Nest of Moments" placed second in the Eleventh International Poetry Competition 2012. Her chapbook, *Folding Washing*, was published in 2013 and her collection of poems, *My Gift to Life*, was nominated for the 2015 Pushcart Prize. *Save the Last Kiss*, a novella, was published in 2016. Her poetry collection, *Reflections*, came out in 2018.

Ute received the Ovidu- Bektore Literary Award 2018 from the Anticus Multicultural Association in Constanta, Romania. In 2018, she was nominated a second time for the Pushcart Prize by the Plain View Press.

*Gypsy Spirit* was published in 2020 as was her essay, *Even a Gloved Touch*. Yellow Arrow Press issued *Listen* in 2021, and once again, Ute was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her essay, *Deep in the Heart of Texas*, was published by the Bullock Texas State History Museum in February 2023.

The author resides in Austin, Texas with her husband. They have three daughters, six grandchildren, and a clowder of cats.

Connect with her at [www.utecarson.com](http://www.utecarson.com)

# The Journal of Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,  
GRACE & GRATITUDE

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## Our Manifesto

This journal (and our associated website) is about you, and the possibility of you creating the next chapter in the book of your life.

You're familiar with how the other chapters worked: early, childhood, teenage, tempest, tragedy, trial, temptation, partnering, breaking, birthing, making, solving, earning, learning, building, growing, mentoring, celebrating, wising up, and ending up here after all that.

The road of life goes on from where you now find yourself, you're still on it, and the vistas that open before you promise more and maybe better rewards, but only if you engage in the possibilities.

You now get to decide if this next chapter will be a rich and fulfilling one for you, or only the last.

Rather than fading into that good night, might we offer an alternative?

Creative aging is a powerful social and cultural movement that has stirred the imaginations of many communities and people. Also referred to as sage-ing, creative aging takes many forms, and elevates people in many ways.

Most importantly, creative aging encourages and facilitates individual and collective creative pursuits, including writing, crafting, painting, dancing, and an almost unlimited number of other ways to express your creative energy.

It encourages you to find your inner artist, to discover the opportunity to celebrate and elevate, to make the most of the wisdom you've accumulated through the lessons of your life. It pleads for you to speak the truths you've learned, to share your wisdom, to be wise, to sage.

Creative aging helps you discover the source of wellness, which is in your spirit, your will to be, to be well, to share your gift, to explore, to create, to be whole.

Creative aging encourages you to engage with your inner life, to experience the grace of knowledge, to express gratitude for your gifts, and to share them with others on the same journey. By doing so, you open the door to the creative person that lives inside you, the insights you possess, the lessons you can learn through your experience, the discoveries you can share with fellow creators, and the wisdom you can gift to future generations.

**Sage-ing:** The Journal of Creative Aging exists to help you document your creative pursuits with care and integrity, to honour your truth. It's time for you to join us. Tell your story, make your next chapter.