

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE  
NUMBER 46, FALL 2023

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*.**

Telecommunications are redefining community and the means by which we come together. *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* is part of a branch of technology that has created an energetic field attracting storytellers and readers, and hosting a growing community of individuals aware of and sharing the benefits of embracing creative expression as foundational to their way of being. When we first introduced *The Journal* in 2011, we called it a new *Facebook* for the discerning, and with every issue we grow into that capacity.

Across the pages of our current issue, we're impressed and delighted with the depths to which our writers have risked to describe their continual learning about themselves and their place in the world, regardless of their chosen form of expression. We are pleased to introduce our readers to ELLIPSIS THINKING, a podcast dedicated to inviting insights from people living life through a creative lens. Founder Greg Dowler-Coltman wisely acknowledges how “Those two years [of the pandemic] had thrust us all into an ellipsis of sorts – bound together and held apart simultaneously.” Emerging, we have discovered more within ourselves that needs exploring. On a personal note our founder, Karen Close, shares her fascination with Jung's ACTIVE IMAGINATION and how it informs her painting process and self-inquiry. As submissions came in, we were pleased to hear from others discovering in their own ways how creating and engaging with their imaginations was opening them to themselves.

In MY VIEW FROM HERE Nancy L. Agneberg notes, “becoming acquainted with my collage... portrayed the approach of darkness—an accurate depiction of this season of life.” MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH DANCE, by Lolla Devindisch,

richly describes how “the joy of movement continues to nourish and inspire me”... now “waiting for the music of poetry to fill me with a choreography of words.” In INSPIRED OR RETIRED? Jan Fraser shares that joining The Edmonton Art Club brought a new sense of learning and collegiality. In FINGER PAINTING Gail Plecash, retired physician, explains, “I was left with a need to hear my own heart” when she “again started to play with paint and canvas...I could feel my heart going to a peaceful place as I experimented with texture and colour.”

Author Theresa Leinemann, in WRITING ENHANCES THE JOY OF AGING, celebrates her journeys with imagination: “My goal in life is to keep learning and growing, to make the most of the time I have left to gain self-awareness and wisdom that I can pass to future generations.” In CREATING WITH THE VOID Angelina Rosa shares how “Creativity is my tool for exploring thoughts that are recurring within me and emotions that I want to release.” Antoinette Voûte Roeder, in NOT A PIANO LESSON, explains the richness of “what we hear in that music that wants to express itself through us. It is a co-creative act.” In CREATING A SERIES Linda Lovisa realizes “my creative process is what I have to offer. Like the old tree nurturing the young plants, I am nurturing creativity.” From her perspective Brenda Weinberg, in UNPACKING: BIRDSONG FROM THE TREE OF LIFE, shares “a deep inner creative urge that persists in its whispering to “follow me” and to rebirth the explorer's life force.” Jacques G. LeBlanc in AN UNCONDITIONAL GIFT shares his experience of life force, “This heart-based connection helped us not only to connect with our dog, but also to connect with the energy of our surroundings, to our subconscious and our hearts.” In RHYTHMIC WEAVING WITH THE PAST Ute Carson explains how “Poems rhythmically weave stories and pictures together by reconnecting through creative reflection and bringing fresh perception.”

**As you read through this issue's stories, we invite you to consider how creating and engaging with your imagination opens you more deeply, more thoroughly to yourself. Perhaps consider what comes up when you look at an old photograph or piece of writing. Then maybe you, too, have a story to share.**

– 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, some-

times 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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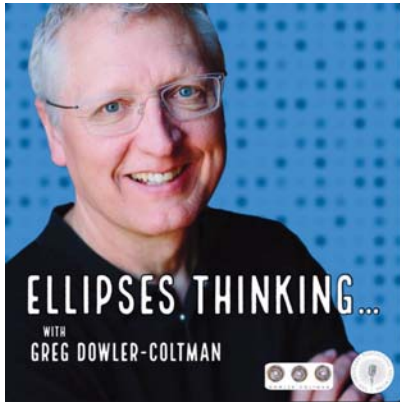
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Cover image: detail from *Guardian One* by Angelina Rosa

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# ELLIPSIS THINKING ...



## Greg Dowler-Coltman

“You love to talk to people, Dad.”

That was the pebble my eldest son dropped gently into the pool a few months after I stepped away from a much-loved career as an arts educator, landing me inside my ellipsis. Encouragement followed from my other two sons; resonant ripples echoing out from the pebble’s initial impact. “But what am I going to talk about?” and “Who is going to listen?” I defended. My wife responded with the gentle tack. “You don’t have to talk about anything... You just get to be curious and listen.” My second concern she more easily disarmed—“Who cares who listens? Let that take care of itself.” And so, *Ellipsis Thinking*, a podcast dedicated to exploring the nature of the creative process in process, came into being.

My first guest helped to frame each new undertaking as an ‘experiment,’ which, when boldly titled as such, paved the path of possibility. She reminded me that because an experiment begins with a simple ‘what if?,’ the stakes feel lighter and the whole experience will invite endless surprise and discovery. When we say yes to not knowing, we free ourselves from the anxiety of perfection and, subsequently, the fear of judgment that we may perceive we and others will place on the outcome.

The podcast gave space to host curious conversations inviting insight from people living life through a creative lens. The show’s title, *Ellipsis Thinking...*, is a nod to the liminal in-between when we stop to reflect on where we are, have been and might hope next to be. Knowing when to move from point to point, to advance, retreat, rest or risk ... all live within this notion of *Ellipsis Thinking ...*, and, as my guests continually teach me, it might be more on point to say *Ellipsis Being ...*, acknowledging the full embodiment of living in, on and between those three tiny dots.

Originally seeded before 2020, a clear focus for the podcast crystallized during the pandemic. Those two years had thrust us all into an ellipsis of sorts—bound together and held apart simultaneously. As an arts educator and father of three professional artists, I was acutely aware of the significance of the moment. It was fast becoming evident that even as the bricks and mortar institutions of creativity – the theatres, galleries and concert halls were shuttered, that the creative spirit, perhaps more aptly the human spirit, refused to be locked down. As I found myself ever more curious about what inspires and ignites creative expression, questions arose.

- What might I learn by hosting conversations with creatively engaged people; choosing to define creative people beyond those who identify as

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professionals and who make their living through the active expression of a creative skill or art form?

- How many of us felt held back by our own belief that we lack creativity?
- How many of us were longing for time, space and permission, failing to see that we were the only ones with the ability to grant it – to be our most imaginative and creative selves?
- What might we hear in the stories of those committed to the vulnerable, reflective and ultimately human work of creative living replete with joys and heartaches?
- Through their experiences of being amidst an ellipsis moment, what might we learn about our own capacity to trust ourselves, the process and the inspiration to take our first steps?

Among many joys has been the overwhelming “YES!” that I’ve received by virtually every person I have invited to sit with me; another reminder that the space for those who wish to join in the wings is endless.

My hope is that the podcast might bring into my listeners’ spaces thinking voices with whom they might resonate and then be inspired on their own paths; to design their narratives, embrace vulnerability, park judgment and drive curiosity as they begin to play in the imaginative place of

Podcast headshots



possibility. I’ve been taken by how often I sense how alone people feel while creating yet also at the same time how they could easily be in a group dialogue given the universal themes running across all episodes. Confidence and capacity, identity and success and the questions of definition, ownership and control are all terrifying and exhilarating, yet absolutely essential. One guest remarked that these conversations provided her comfort as an “affinity space.”

One surprising theme tied to feeling creative is the restorative power of walking, wandering and wondering. In a way, the very structure of these conversations owes much to this idea of a slow and wakeful walk, allowing for an agenda to find its way. For some of my guests, an actual walk was very much at the heart of their *Ellipses Thinking*, while others embraced a more metaphorical journey.

For me, this idea of walking together in a ‘thought land’ is very personal. A little over a year ago, a new friend reached out with an invitation to create something together. As our friendship was still new, we were not sure what might come of the partnership or of what



**I have learned that the conversation that needs to happen will happen when I stay true to the idea of being in a conversation rather than an interview.**

we were being drawn to write, but we were resolved that something would come. Rather than force a destination, and living three provinces apart, we proposed a regular phone conversation, in which we would walk, wander and wonder. We agreed to begin on paths familiar to one or the other, while we both relished the likelihood of our getting lost on paths unfamiliar to us both. We leaped at the chance to go into the woods with a mission but no map, and affectionately coined these conversations ‘Walks in the Woods.’

Trusting my love of talking to people has provided the opportunity to learn from each of these remarkable conversations and the importance of engaging in life with a vulnerable stance. Guests have led with “I’m an open book” and then honoured it by showing up fully. One shared how friends, family and colleagues identified her as “the creative one,” and, in truth, I always feel inspired by her expression of creativity as a love language. In our conversation, she shared her struggle with the pressures of being labelled creative and how her discomfort around her own creativity and artistic inclinations has been stymied by her own success criteria based on a tangible finished product. A pair of singer/songwriter siblings spoke of the often uncomfortable journey to discover the power of vulnerability in shaping their artistic voices while navigating the complicated relationships demanded of artists and their art, as well as the expected courage, resilience and ton of imagination. Others, while echoing my own original hesitation by wondering what they had to offer and who might care to listen, proceeded to draw me into their insightful journeys.

I have learned that the conversation that needs to happen will happen when I stay true to the idea of being in a conversation rather than an interview.

I have learned to trust the power of following my intuition as I widen the affinity circle. Before I began, I drafted a list of over 100 potential guests and, while many of my guests were on that first list, others happened into my field of curiosity by chance, and I chose to trust chance and reach out. This is how I met Lolla Devindisch and learned how the process of her writing her autobiography allowed her finally to bring long-sought-after closure, understanding and serenity to family-related trauma. I discovered that Lena MacKenzie, through her own words, “inherited a fabric of beliefs, woven by generations of women, a fabric that tells the stories of not just one family line, but a constellation of them.” I trusted myself and Instagram to introduce myself to Jeremy Schonfeld, whose music reveals the heart of a man on an intimate journey, vulnerably seeking to understand himself, his family, friends and community.

From every guest I continue to learn humility, the importance of listening to and between the words. And perhaps most of all, how much I love to celebrate the inspirational impact that others bring to the world when they choose to live, in the words of guest Lance Cardinal, with “deep integration of past and present, as we dream forward and design our collective future.”

## Ellipsis

a period ends a thought.  
an exclamation mark pumps up its volume!  
a question mark invites a response, right?

... but the ellipsis,  
of all punctuators, remains open for  
interpretation  
... those three dots,  
open time and space to  
invite a way across the expanse  
from there ... to here ... to there  
from then ... to now ... to then

no full stop here ...  
the ellipsis is the dancer ...  
born to keep moving on  
only ever one step or gesture away from  
inspiration and invention,  
colourful,

energized,  
often messy,  
while in the creation of its own design  
appearing chaotic in the discovery of  
control  
and always on the edge of yes and?  
those three steps,  
the last of which suspends in mid-air ...  
forever leading us somewhere new.

no coda yet ...  
the ellipsis is the music...  
its three notes and unique time signature  
...  
where in the spaces in between  
a promise that  
"anything's possible"  
resonates within us and moves us forward  
towards the next verse ...

this is the way of the ellipsis  
as it simultaneously reminds us

that we have come from somewhere,  
are going somewhere else  
and that in this immediate moment,  
this place we are right now,  
we're home  
and free  
to take a breath,  
stand on the edge,  
scan the horizon  
to see  
to listen  
and  
to reflect  
in order that we might  
elevate our next dream,  
gather our superpowers,  
and ready ourselves to leap  
into our best future  
with the simplest of questions ...

What's next?



D O W L E R - C O L T M A N

Website logo

**When I trust myself to seek out people who intrigue me and who invite me in return to be in their presence, we can listen together and perhaps others will join us.**

The gifts I most cherish have arrived in the tiniest packages of wisdom, finding a *sit spot* for reflection, welcoming the *seasons of creativity*, the power of *walking softly*. Very often I move to closure with the question, "What inspires you?" The most common response is the simplest I could have imagined, and is usually spoken after a long, silent breath in the single word: *LOVE!*

It's true! I do love to talk to people. It's still an experiment and might always be. While I've yet to know who is listening, I do know that, when I trust myself to seek out people who intrigue me and who invite me in return to be in their presence, we can listen together and perhaps others will join us.

**Greg Dowler-Coltman** is fascinated by how creativity shows up in us all. As a theatre educator, he loved the magical space of exploration that was alive in a rehearsal hall. In 2022, after stepping away from teaching, seeking a place to continue to feel engaged with questions of creativity, he launched the *Ellipsis Thinking* podcast. Through conversations about the creative process, he hopes to shed light on vital relationships with creativity that shape and inspire us to meet the challenges, discoveries and learnings we make when we courageously invite our imaginative spirit to the playground.

For over 30 years, Greg worked professionally in leadership roles in live theatre and arts education before establishing a coaching and leadership development business [www.dowlercoltman.com](http://www.dowlercoltman.com) alongside his wife and partner, Tami. Greg firmly believes that curiosity opens eyes (and our other senses) to potential and can turn a landscape of impossibility to a limitless horizon where anything's possible. Greg holds a BFA in Acting and a BEd from the University of Alberta as well as a Graduate Certificate as an Executive Coach through Royal Roads University. He is a Professional Certified Coach and Mentor and member of the International Coaching Federation.

*Ellipsis Thinking* is produced by The Ordinary Podcasting Network ([www.ordinarypodcasts.com](http://www.ordinarypodcasts.com)) and can be found on Apple Music, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts.

# ACTIVE IMAGINATION

## ART AND UNDERSTANDING SELF

**Karen Close**

**As I've aged I became absorbed by reading how Jung's personal journey in the second half of life became directed by his creative energy.**

*"To paint what we see before us is a different art from painting what we see within."*

– Carl Jung

*"Logic will take you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."*

– Albert Einstein

Art critic Harold Rosenberg coined the term "action painting" in 1952 to describe the work of artists who painted using bold gestures that engaged more of the body, working instinctively and quickly, using intuitive gestures to make bold marks on the canvas. It is a process that has spoken to me most of my life in my works and now more strongly in my seventies. Weekly for a decade I shared my discoveries with others in a gathering I called heART Fit where I encouraged relaxing into the painting process, feeling your body and letting the brush lead. I would often describe the process as dreaming on canvas. Together we got to know ourselves and each other better.

Although I was first exposed to Carl Jung at university in the late 60s, only shortly after his death in 1961, his theories have continued to call to me. As I've aged I became absorbed by reading how Jung's personal journey in the second half of life became directed by his creative energy. Around 1920, Jung was a middle-aged man in crisis when a memory floated up of a time when he was a 10- or 11-year-old boy, deeply engrossed in building-games. The memory was filled with a rush of emotion. He recognized that he had lost touch with this lively childlike spirit within himself, and he set out to rekindle the relationship. Over time, as he played more, he realized that when he managed to translate his emotions into visual form he was inwardly calmed

and reassured. He determined that his life task would be to explore the fantasy images that are concealed in the body and in the emotions. Realizing this new territory would be in conflict with the scientific rigor of his colleagues he left his teaching position and devoted himself to the study of what he eventually termed Active Imagination.

Both from what he observed in his own creative play and in work with patients he determined that

"... a person in the second half of life no

*The Yearning to Create A Universal Impulse*  
(photographer unknown)





longer needs to educate his conscious will, but needs to understand the meaning of his individual life, needs to experience his own inner being... There is no analyst for you under the changing moon except the one that is in your own heart...It is almost impossible to define this effect in rational terms; it is a sort of magic.”

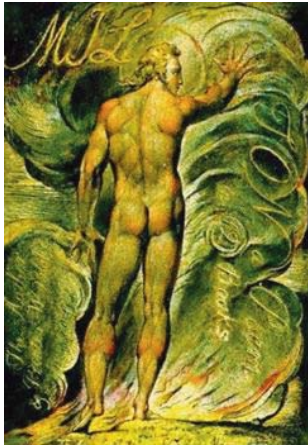
That one day we may have the science to explain this form of magic awaits our rational minds.

Jung explains Active Imagination as a natural, inborn process, waiting to be called into action, particularly as one ages. Active Imagination is accomplished by inviting different inner voices to speak, then to listen to them with respect, and to absorb them into your conscious mind. He put forth that, if we can distract and silence our conscious mind by patiently engaging with an expressive medium or movement, images arise in a completely spontaneous way of their own accord. Sooner or later, the imagination, the unconscious, will emerge in expressions unique to each individual. Respecting what emerges and then engaging our conscious thoughts to interact with what we see in what has been expressed fosters the development of a self-reflective, fuller understanding of self, independent from what we have assimilated from the external environment with its rules and mores. Jung explains the primary task is to gain access to the contents of the unconscious by discovering an approach that works for oneself to open the imagination. In the second part of Active Imagination, after liberating the unconscious, consciousness can take the lead as one considers what is perceived within a work—but never as a critic, only as a partnership of the conscious with the unconscious. A relationship of healing through wholeness.

When Jung realized his experiment in self-healing was successful, he began to teach the method to some of his patients. He also wrote about his findings describing Active Imagination as “a movement out of the suspension between two opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being...Nothing is unimaginable.” We are put in touch with material that is ordinarily repressed and perhaps has kept us in a state of dis-ease.

How I would have loved to be a direct recipient of Jung’s lessons. Instead I have read voraciously, experimented with a variety of visual media and feel I am opening to the magic he describes. Jung urged followers to engage art for self-knowledge, but also cautioned it doesn’t matter if others don’t see what you see, and frequently they won’t. Experimenting with how best to liberate yourself into Active Imagination becomes a joyous personal adventure both during the creative process and again when one looks at the product afterwards and communes with it. Jung suggests putting the product away if possible and returning to it at another time for further insights. Although Jung’s own work with Active Imagination frequently produced representational symbols, my years of experimentation with Action Painting drew me to letting my symbols freely form. While I experiment I frequently remind myself of a Jungian quote: “Often the hands know how to solve a riddle with which the intellect has wrestled in vain.” I also remind myself that these are

**“There is no analyst for you under the changing moon except the one that is in your own heart...It is almost impossible to define this effect in rational terms; it is a sort of magic.” Carl Jung**



Above: *Liberation*, William Blake, late 18th century.

Right: My painting, "I labour upwards into futurity."



my riddles and what I perceive might only be visible or relevant to me; still my sense of liberation and engagement is totally engaging. I have always believed that an active involvement with writing or an art or craft serves to remind us that we are engaged in the process of our own creation, that in fact we are 'Creators' and searching for a knowing of ourselves. In the words of playwright George Bernard Shaw:

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself... You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use works of art to see your soul."

Choosing the career of teaching English and the Visual Arts was

driven by this conviction and a need to share it with others. Now, with trepidation I share my most recent paintings. As I became more informed about Active Imagination I have felt supported in producing what many might just see as child's play. Sometimes I am inspired by a quote I have encountered and I wish I could converse with the author who is often from another century. Instead, I paint and dialogue with my painting. These words by William Blake sparked the painting below: "I labour upwards into futurity." 1796. Blake, in his own time, was made to feel he was a failure. He couldn't get exhibitions while often mediocre artists were rising to celebrity. Yet, while a majority of these works have vanished, Blake's poetry and paintings have endured. I feel he was a prophet who has spoken across centuries because he was a creator who spoke from his soul, actively projecting his imagination onto the world.

In an effort to silence my conscious mind, I sat with this quote, feeling with my imagined William Blake and his struggle to be heard. I was alone with a blank canvas, water, paper towel, a brush and a palette knife. With minimal thought, I quickly grabbed five tubes of paint and squeezed small amounts of each directly onto the canvas, darkest tones at the bottom, progressing upwards to the lightest (yes, a bit of consciousness there). Directed by a sense of communion with my imaginary Blake, I let my hands, brush and tools engage with the paint. I hung on with faith. Faith and commitment to the process being the integral elements to benefiting from Active Imagination. The act of faith in one's self is powerfully liberating. I did not look at the image emerging. I did look at my hands and tools to keep them from getting too mucky. When I felt the conversation had ended, I looked and felt a deep grin emerge. My scribbles frequently take form for me, as

**As I became more informed about Active Imagination I have felt supported in producing what many might just see as child's play.**



*The Magic of Abandonment*

**I felt no real intention when I began this work, but rather a need to engage with myself through painting and a curiosity about what action painting might say to me in the moment.**

though they were symbols—much as we can see imagery in the clouds or the grains in wood. The more I looked, the more relaxed I became. I saw imagery that comforted me at this stage in my life

I felt no real intention when I began this work, but rather a need to engage with myself through painting and a curiosity about what action painting might say to me in the moment. I had been concerned by decreasing flexibility. I quickly, and randomly, grabbed tubes of paint, squeezed them onto my canvas, closed my eyes and just let my hands and tools work their magic. When I felt finished and looked I felt a kind of fear and a strong tightness in my chest. At first it seemed this truly was just a mess of paint, but I forced myself to calm down, look more carefully and engage my conscious mind, not just my fears, in truly seeing. Emerging from my paint, I saw a bent-over figure in a wheelchair. Looking deeper, I saw she was detached from her backbone, her source of structure, that support that allows us to move about freely and to bend with flexibility. I pondered, stepped back and saw more. As I've lived with this painting it continues to speak to me. I see more and more when I look at it and sometimes thoughts of it just intrude into my

consciousness. I don't fear its messiness, or even the incapacitated figure. Rather I feel guided into seeing what lurks in my unconsciousness to give me confidence to face my fears.

Way back in the late 19th century Oscar Wilde said, "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known. I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of individualism that the world has known." How we understand and appreciate art has taken many turns since the 19th century, but as I age I welcome how Action Painting and Active Imagination lead me to understand me.

Jung's quotes taken from *Jung on Active Imagination*, by C. G. Jung (Author)  
Joan Chodorow (Editor)



# MY VIEW FROM HERE

## CREATING A BIRTHDAY COLLAGE

**Nancy L. Agneberg**



Turning 75 felt daunting.

In the past, milestone birthdays had not bothered me, even the teasing about “being over the hill” when I turned 40 all those decades ago. I had always considered myself an “old soul,” and the pilgrimage through the decades felt more like a privilege than a death march. But 75...

When I turned 70, I made a collage to honour the entry into a new decade and to envision how I hoped to live as I age. Did I need to create a new collage to mark being 75, rather than waiting till the start of the next decade, the 80s? Yes.

I quickly sifted through a stash of pictures I keep in a flowered box; pictures torn out of magazines or outdated calendars, along with greeting cards too pretty to toss. I sorted them into two piles—the “maybe” pile and the “nope, not today” pile. When doing a collage, the main instruction is to select images that appeal or speak to you in some way. No preconceived notion about why or how each one will fit into the whole picture. No judgment. No vacillation. Just a quick “yes” or “no.”

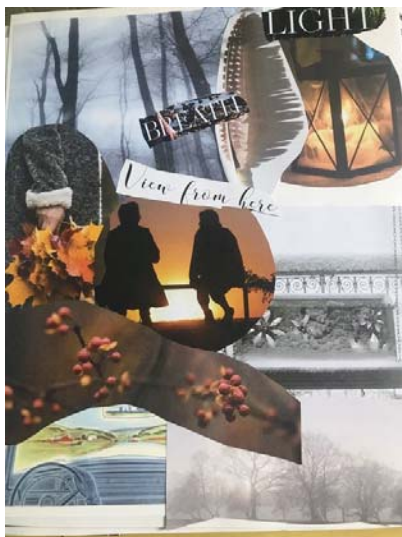
Cutting and pasting, I arranged some, not all, of the images from the “yes” pile on two pages in a large sketchbook. Quickly, not reflectively. After filling the two pages, I sat back, closed my eyes lightly, not tightly, and took a deep breath. What did I notice?

Fall scenes and winter scenes. A branch of bittersweet and an empty porch swing covered with snow. A lit lantern, a feather, two people at sunset.

A view through the windshield of a car. Ah, I said to myself, a sweet reminder of how much my husband and I love to get in the car and wander, meander for a day.

On the opposite page I saw a hazy picture of a person holding an open book, along with shelves of books in a light, comfortable setting that reminded me of my beloved garret where I write and read and meet with my spiritual direction clients. And a sleek fountain pen, like one I use when I write in my journal, a long-ago gift from my husband.

*Being 75 Collage, left page*  
*Being 75 Collage, right page*





Being 70 Collage, left page  
Being 70 Collage, right page



Almost every collage I have made over the years has included at least one open door, and this one was no exception. However, the threshold in this new collage doesn't look so obviously welcoming or hospitable, and even though the hand in the bottom right-hand corner is open, it seems more like a silhouette, the shadow of a hand. I was aware even in those first minutes of becoming acquainted with my collage that this collection of images portrayed the approach of darkness – hazy, cold, and bare – an accurate depiction of this season of life.

### Fall into winter.

A bittersweet time. Although my health remains good, as does my husband's, and we both continue to pursue our interests and to serve in ways that matter to us, we have also experienced major losses during the past five years. The death of my beloved father and the too-soon death of a soul friend. I have sent so many sympathy cards, along with copies of *Healing After Loss*, by Martha W. Hickman, a daily meditation book. And then there were the COVID years – enough said. Yes, sometimes – often – the porch swing seems empty.

How is this new collage, this collage as I settle into being 75, similar or different from the collage I made at age 70?

The earlier collage seems busier, full of activity, greener, lusher with more summer images, but signs of both fall and winter are apparent in that collage, too. Scattered leaves gathered—a handful of memories and experiences and, maybe, even wisdom, to be stored in the large basket.

One of my key spiritual practices is walking a labyrinth, and I was not surprised to see the picture of a labyrinth in a central location. I had no doubt that if I had another picture of a labyrinth in my box of images, I would have included it in my new collage.

The wrapped package reminds me of the many gifts of time and friendship and opportunity I have received over the years, but also symbolizes how this time in my life is a gift, too. Of course, there are books, but also a feather in this collage. The transitory nature of life? A house that looks very much like our garage and a smiling older woman, looking confident and happy and eager. My muse? Guide? Me?

I imagine that woman whispering to me the phrases scattered across the collage. Guidelines for living fully in this stage of life:

Choose simplicity.

Keep growing.

Learn something new.

**Fall into winter.  
A bittersweet time.  
Although my health  
remains good, as does  
my husband's, and we  
both continue to  
pursue our interests  
and to serve.**

**Each day is full all on its own. All you have to do is notice.**

**Nancy L. Agneberg** has been a spiritual director in private practice, a retreat leader and facilitator of spirituality groups for over 25 years. Currently, she chairs the *Third Chapter, Spirituality as We Age* ministry in her congregation, and she leads a weekly writing group, *In Your Own Words: Contemplative Writing as Spiritual Practice*. Her essays have appeared in *Bella Grace*; *Brevity*; *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction and Companionship*; *BookWomen*; and elsewhere. She and her husband, who is a retired hospice physician, live in St Paul, MN, near the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, traditional Dakota land and also sacred to the Ojibwe. Agneberg (nagneberg48@gmail.com) blogs at *Living on Life's Labyrinth* <https://livingonlifeslabyrinth.com>

Make room for what matters.

Breathe deeply.

I note all the “open” images – open gates, open door, open window, and a green path. True, there are occasional rocks along the path, but nothing that couldn’t be avoided or successfully navigated with careful and watchful steps. But what about the large pile of rocks tumbled together in the bottom right-hand corner? Hmmmm. Nor could I ignore, tucked in the upper right-hand corner, a prickly looking plant that seems to taunt, “Beware.”

No, youthful innocence and naivete are no longer my companions. Rather, undesired and unforeseen obstacles and changes demand attention and energy and care.

I return to the new collage.

True, this one is darker, but still I see light and companionship and spaciousness for reading, writing and deepening contemplation.

You don’t always have to try so hard to live each day to the fullest. Each day is full all on its own.

All you have to do is notice.

Here is the encouragement to tend my days wisely, not only not to waste them, but to unfold into the gifts of this time. I’m not done yet, for I am both living and aging, but I respond now more with patience and acceptance than with urgency and a desire for productivity. “Each day is full all on its own. Hold company with yourself so sacred that even when you are alone you are whole.”

I know the deaths of loved ones and my own death are ahead, but I don’t know when or how. The collage doesn’t reveal that. Nor can I predict how the upcoming days, maybe years, will unfold, or even when I will feel the creative urge to create my next collage.

I whisper to myself the words accompanying the images.

Light.

Breath.

Content. I chuckle, wondering if I mean content as in subject matter or materials, or am I referring to the adjective meaning “satisfied”? Or both?

Prayer.

Pause.

These words are invitations. Open to the light. Breathe and expand into the breath of life. Find contentment and calm in solitude and stillness. Receive and share the wisdom of this time. Pause and pray. Be the pray-er and the prayer itself.

Accept the gifts of being 75.

For now, this is my “view from here.”



# MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH DANCE

## Lolla Devindisch



My love affair with dance began long before I can remember. My mother told me I was dancing long before I could walk, hanging onto pieces of furniture, and jigging to the music pouring from the radio. I know this must be true, because even now, though I no longer need a prop, my body will not be still when music begins. That gift has been a refuge and guide throughout my life.

My idyllic childhood in Mexico City, and later in Belize in my father's post-Second World War commune, was shattered when, in 1953 at the age of seven, my mother fled with me and my three sisters back to her home in England, leaving my beloved father behind. His mental health had deteriorated into near collapse, and my mother feared for our well-being in the jungle climate under his obsessive dietary regime. I was haunted for years by the loss of my father, whom I never saw again. At the time I believed that this catastrophe was my fault.

Dealing with the cultural shock of life in England after the freedom of our lives in the tropics took all my attention. It was not until my mother enrolled me in ballet classes that healing from my hidden anxieties began. All the unexplainable emotions of my childhood found a resting place as I discovered a way to move beyond myself into a place of peace.

Perhaps the following portion of my memoir, *A Dancer's Pilgrimage*, describes it best:

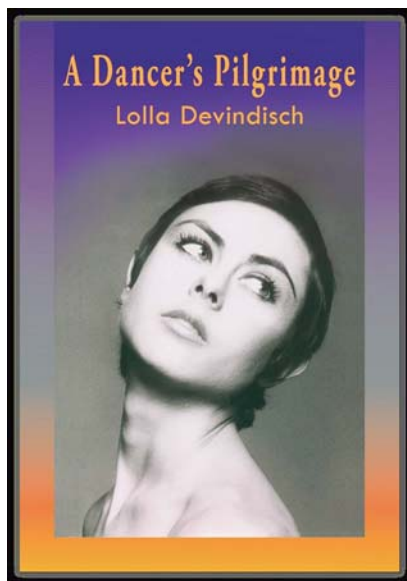
"I place my left hand lightly on the ballet barre, elbow curved. My right hand is close to my thigh, the little finger not quite brushing my skin, elbow curved and upper arm resting on the air between my arm and my ribs, which are lifted above my pelvis as my spine lengthens. My heels touch, toes turned out while the arches of my feet and inner thighs strain to hold open the rotation in my hips and knees over toes. I feel the back of my neck lengthen, the crown of my head rise, while tailbone drops away. The tight belt around my waist reminds me to "pull up."

"I am entirely alone in my body, breathing in the anticipation of those first notes from the piano, the moment when all of me weeps. The pores of my slender flesh, open wide as mouths waiting to be fed. There is a pounding in my ears, beating against the frustrated knowledge this is the closest I can get to being in a holy place. I long to touch something beyond myself that makes everything wrong, right; that purges mind and body; washes away all sins; makes clean; purifies; resolves the unresolvable and allows me to soar upward while resting on earth.

"And then the music and the movement. The slow merging of discipline

1957





Cover of *A Dancer's Pilgrimage*

**Lolla Devindisch** has been a dancer all her life, both professionally and simply for pleasure. She received her training at the Royal Academy of Dance in London and went on to teach and perform in the UK, New York, South Africa and Canada. She has lived on Salt Spring Island, B.C., since 1981 as part of the ever-growing artistic community where she contributes to the island's creative life as a dancer, choreographer, producer and writer of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Lolla's work is greatly influenced by her experience in the dance world and as a spiritual seeker.

Her first collection of poetry, published in 2011, is titled *A Whisper in the Palm of my Hand: Poems in Search of the Sacred*. Her chapbook, *A Dance of Pelicans*, was published in 2016. Her recently published memoir, *A Dancer's Pilgrimage*, tells of her journey as a dancer and world traveller to find her true home. For more information contact [editor@rainbowpublishers.ca](mailto:editor@rainbowpublishers.ca) or visit [www.rainbowpublishers.ca](http://www.rainbowpublishers.ca)

with freedom. The only place where I am in touch with the loneliness my passions embrace.”

The discipline of my training gave me stamina and determination, which accompanied me on my travels to New York to find my father's family. These qualities followed me as I forged a career as a performer in South Africa, England and Canada, and helped me discover my soul's longing as an artist. The need to recall my early childhood took me back to Belize and Mexico. Eventually, I was drawn to Canada and Salt Spring Island. Since 1981, Salt Spring has been my home and place of refuge as a spiritual seeker, where the joy of movement continues to nourish and inspire me.

These days, when horrifying news exudes from the radio, television, in newsprint and other media, when I feel the pressure of my confused emotions and even helplessness, I remember that twelve-year-old dancer. Although my waist is no longer tiny and my feet are no longer gracefully arched, I tell myself to stand tall, to feel the back of my neck lengthen and my tailbone drop away. Alone in my body I walk silently through the forest, or gently move, guided by my breath. Expectantly, I reach, not for the ballet barre, but my pencil, and rest in that holy place beyond myself, waiting for the music of poetry to fill me with a choreography of words.

## EARTH ON WHICH I STAND

Lingering in yesterday  
I turn pages of my secret diary,  
paper made from pulp of broken branches  
pressed and glued together  
by the hands of my heart.

I unfold the crinkled past  
fragile from dry, dormant years  
in this locked box of my body.

The sound of their delicate unveiling  
stops my heart from beating.

Breathless anticipation grips my soul  
already knowing the direction I must travel.  
I gather gleaned years  
and throw them to the wind.

Like dust they fall at my feet,  
not for trampling,  
but to cover and form  
the earth on which I stand.

# FINGER PAINTING

## Gail Plecash



Mrs. Brown's kindergarten class was my first introduction to the freedom of art. What a day! More than 60 years later, I still remember the excitement of being allowed to go into her special art room. We were given bright colours of paint and allowed to dip our fingers, then make our marks on the large sheets of paper. When it was time to go home, I was still engrossed in the experience, and only left after losing a struggle with the adults who told me that it was time to go home. In another world, I would still be there, remaining in that zone of my own.

In grade school, art was taught as reproductions of what the visual world held. "Can you draw a horse or a landscape?" "No, not very well." "Then you are not artistic." The concept of free expression of that 'feeling inside' became a foreign idea. I soon learned that rewards came from academic and sports achievements rather than attempts at creative output. Studying science and math was much more manageable. Although I enjoyed those studies, there was a part of me that still needed to be expressed. In studying piano, the Royal Conservatory taxed the same part of my head as science and math, so unless I was listening to my favourite tunes at the time, there was little room for exploring the heart and creative expression.

Fast forward to a wonderful career in medicine. While a day at work would fulfill the head part and the need for community was met by terrific medical colleagues, I was left with a need to hear my own heart. Without a few dear friends and my close colleagues, this would have been a lonely time. Adding to the career soon came a family, a busy social life, and the teeter-totter weighed heavily on the head side. As family grew, and elderly parents required added attention, there was little time to explore the heart.

Years flew by, and my children found their wings. The house seemed much bigger. With the loss of my husband and both parents, and as my retirement eventually became a reality, I became aware that I needed to take care of myself. Balancing the teeter-totter of head and heart was long overdue.

It occurred to me that, in my medical practice, I had been telling patients to "Listen to your body." When needed, I also encouraged them to "Listen to your heart." When as an adult I again started to play with paint and canvas, I recalled Mrs. Brown's finger painting class but felt anxious and tentative with the initial strokes. After a while I could feel my heart going to a peaceful place as I experimented with texture and colour.

We look at rates of anxiety and depression escalating not only in our youth, but also in our elderly. Much of this is related to social isolation and lack of emotional well-being, that is, heart issues. Prevention is an important area in medicine. Our current medical model focuses on treatment of illness

*Sitting.* This is about allowing curiosity to sit beside me as I became lost in the materials at my fingertips.







Top: *Play*  
Above: *Passion*

rather than prevention. This is particularly true in the case of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Why not look at how we can avoid isolation, how we can connect with each other in a way in which we can express both our heads and our hearts?

In visual art, as in music, there must be room for expression of both. This has great value, as together they reflect the full spectrum of the human experience.

Luckily, I was introduced to a few friends “playing” with art. For them art was not about copying the visual world around us, it was about getting in touch with the heart part of us that still yearned to be expressed. The first exercise we shared was Tunisian Collaborative Painting, led by Karen Close (see the cover of Sage-ing Issue 44, Spring 2023). This process included a shared collection of four canvases and four painters. The only plan was to choose the colour we wished, the tool we needed and to move from canvas to canvas. It was impossible to be self-critical as we all contributed to each canvas. In participating in this experience, I realized that what we were doing was not so much about the end result as it was about being in a shared creative zone. My feelings were strong as I painted, and I let my instincts direct me. My desire to paint from the heart continues.

Opening to creative energy puts me back in Mrs. Brown’s kindergarten class. I am a five-year-old once again and it is wonderful!

**Gail Plecash** was raised in the Okanagan, but could hardly wait to set out on her own adventures. This led her to study ecology, then medicine. She was a student in Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto, but the lake and sagebrush in the hills called her back home. Gail enjoyed an enriching thirty-year plus career in family practice in Kelowna. She attributes her years in family medicine as the basis of her desire to broaden her belief in the importance of compassion and tolerance.

Her favourite sports are skiing, swimming off the back of a boat, tennis, hiking and bike riding. Music and art have always been of interest.

She has two daughters, five stepchildren, and now many grandchildren and grand-dogs whom she loves without limit.

Gail is happily married to a brilliant scientist who continues to inspire her. In her retirement years, she has had time to practise opening the heart space, although her husband challenges her to keep her head space squarely in place as well. However, living in the heart space invites rich friendships, a deep appreciation of art and nature, and many special times with her grandchildren.

# INSPIRED OR RETIRED?



Author with her painting *Tree Party* when humans go to sleep, the trees have a party

## Jan Fraser

I paint at my kitchen table so I can touch up a canvas while dinner is cooking, and walk by the art many times to let it sink in. It's a very ordinary studio.

Artists take pleasure turning ordinary things into unique feelings. The plants in a ditch by the road can become unordinary with the stroke of a paint brush, the tap of the computer, the press of a camera or phone. Art began early in my life with the artists, musicians and poets around me. My late grand-uncle, Murray MacDonald, taught watercolours with The Group of Seven at The

Banff School. He retired from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta with an honorary LLD for his work in art education. His work hangs in the Massey Collection in Ottawa and the Art Gallery of Alberta. He taught my aunt Edythe and me in his home for several years, demonstrating watercolour techniques and then giving a positive critique of our work. In 1981 we had our first three-generation show. His stories about learning art stick with and continue to influence me.

I retired from my work as a teacher and special needs administrator at an elementary school where all students took music, art, drama and dance with the regular curriculum. After the novelty of sleeping in and winters in Arizona wore off, I felt something was missing. Did I feel needed? Was I bored? I was painting in a vacuum by myself. I volunteered as an Artist on the Ward at the University of Alberta Hospital. That helped. Visiting patients and doing art was rewarding. But something was still missing in my retirement journey. Then I met with my friend Betty Dean, a wonderful artist who I first encountered when she was my principal at a needy inner city school. (See Betty's story, "Reflections on Creativity" in Issue 41, Summer 2022.) She gave me "Retirement Lessons" and talked me into joining The Edmonton Art Club. The learning and collegiality of the club continues to be so encouraging, and was the answer to the questions I held.

Soon I was teaching beginner art to seniors' groups. Then, at The Paint Spot art supply store in Edmonton, I taught a variety of courses, something I've done now for several years. I had started a new career. Now I draw or paint every day and show my work. Inspiration comes from prairie atmosphere, trees and roots, and water. My art has evolved from watercolour to textural and sculpture-like bas-relief. Sensations come back to me reminding

**After the novelty of sleeping in and winters in Arizona wore off, I felt something was missing.**



me of those childhood summers at the farm. Time acts like a filter, weeding out what is no longer necessary.

Today, I feel inspired, not retired. Uncle Murray painted every day until he was almost 90 years old. So will I.

Born and raised in Alberta, **Jan Fraser**'s interest in art began in childhood with her family who wrote poems, played the piano and built inventive objects. Mentored by her grand-uncle, Murray MacDonald, a well-known Canadian watercolour artist who worked with the Group of Seven, she returned to painting upon her retirement from public education. Known for her watercolours and bas-relief, textural sculptural acrylics, Jan's work is in private collections in Norway, Hawaii, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and Salt Spring Island. Jan does art every day. She finds joy in the Alberta prairie, trees and roots as symbolism and metaphor, and water. One writer said about her work, "Prairie storms are likened to a dramatic production. The big black cloud curtains begin to form and all of a sudden, the 'play' begins. The art elements are interwoven."

Jan Fraser <[janfraserart@gmail.com](mailto:janfraserart@gmail.com)>

Top left: *Tree*

Top middle: *Sculpted bird's nest*

Top right: *Follow the Path*

Above: *Tree Root Our roots keep us strong feeding us*



# WRITING ENHANCES THE JOY OF AGING

## Theresa Leinemann



Writing has always been a part of my life, especially rambling letters and emails to friends and family as well as writing down my thoughts when my mind was in turmoil. I would tell myself, “If in doubt, write it out.”

When our daughters left home to create their own lives, I began pursuing my interests. I discovered a smorgasbord of online writing courses, which eventually gave me the spark of inspiration to attempt a full-length novel. My first book, *Arcadia Deception*, was published in 2015. I was 54.

We sold our last house in 2016 and bought a 37-foot motorhome. We spent our summers in the Yukon wilderness near Dawson City, our winters in the Okanagan, and travelled in the shoulder seasons. While my husband pursued his dream of working on a gold mine, I tagged along, out of my comfort zone and unsure of my place among hardworking people in the middle of nowhere.

I used the gift of time and solitude to write while the crew worked long hours. I called camp my Exclusive Yukon Wilderness Writing Retreat and wrote the sequel along with a book inspired by Dawson City and the Klondike Gold Rush.

As I approached that magical age of 60, my thoughts turned to aging and mortality, and the anticipation of transformation. I assumed overnight I would gain self-confidence and courage and sail into the sunset stage of life with abandon as I cast off the confines of societal expectations. *Hidden Gems*, my most recent book, was inspired by those thoughts. I delved deeper into the subject of aging and became fascinated with Carl Jung’s theories on how time would slow down as we retire, allowing more time for introspection and observation. As my husband and I continued to live in the motorhome, I contemplated what life would be like growing old together as nomads; however, I envied those who stayed in one place casting their roots deep into their community, connecting to family and friends with futures secure.

In my novel, *Hidden Gems*, ten older strangers win a free house in a luxurious gated community, but no one remembers entering a contest. What could go wrong? *Hidden Gems* took three years to write, but time stood still as I wrote pages and pages, immersed in the task of developing well-rounded characters and an engaging story. I edited and rewrote and then turned it on its head after building a monstrously boring story by changing the main character into a woman. I took great joy in tearing down the sagging saga and bringing my vision back to life from the ashes. The original story idea and

Panning for gold





Writing in the motorhome

**I wanted to incorporate that concept of a caring community into my story along with my personal struggles with belonging and the fear of aging without a support network or a sense of purpose.**

monumental task I had set for myself settled into a heartwarming story that reflected my initial idyllic vision of retirement.

The book *A Man Called Ove*, by Fredrik Backman, also inspired my story. It saddened me. An older man faced a lonely life, grieving the loss of his wife, pushing other people away and retreating into himself, having nothing to live for. Yet there was humour in his attempts at gaining some control over his life by ensuring neighbours in the small housing community followed the rules. Those neighbours didn't give up on him, reminding him he was valued and appreciated. I wanted to incorporate that concept of a caring

community into my story along with my personal struggles with belonging and the fear of aging without a support network or a sense of purpose.

I often imagined having my loved ones around me on a piece of property, to support and care for each other as we got older. I wanted to be able to choose my neighbours instead of being at the mercy of strangers who lived next door. Aging was an adventure I didn't want to face alone. After I got married, we moved a lot. Adjusting to each uprooting, I felt lonely, but I eventually embraced the change and made friends, even though I never quite fit in. That feeling of sitting on the sidelines was a result of my experience at school after moving with my parents and siblings when I was 9 and then again at 17. I envied those kids who had gone to school with the same friends since kindergarten. The social game was an art, and I preferred to withdraw and read a book rather than try to figure it out. As I got older I worried that it might be harder to start over and make friends in a new and unfamiliar town.

I remember our search in 2010 for a house to buy in Kelowna after moving from the West Kootenays. Most of the affordable listings that met our family's needs were in 55+ communities. We weren't in that age group and still had two daughters living with us. Still, those communities stirred my imagination. I wondered what it would be like to live behind a wall in an idyllic little community where neighbours looked out for each other and the grass was lush and green. As I wrote *Hidden Gems*, I began to appreciate my nomadic existence. There was value in welcoming a new cast of characters into my life as I grew older. I was living a full, creative life. Writing gave me purpose, and I was forming a legacy.

*Hidden Gems* was my first choice as a title, but I hesitated to use it. It was a term reserved for secret travel locations that took one's breath away, not a bunch of old people hiding behind a wall. But now I was 60. I trusted myself. After creating this community in my book and personally growing throughout the process, I considered it the perfect title. The concept for this book was focused on a section of society I was about to become a part of. We should honour older people as gems of society, not leave them to become invisible, hidden away to die alone. Western society values youth, fears death and



Terry's books

**Terry Leinemann** lives in Ladysmith, British Columbia. She loves spending time with her granddaughter and seeing the world through a child's eyes. She volunteers her love of baking for the monthly coffee parties in her residential building and has joined a book club.

With four self-published novels since 2015, *Arcadia Deception* and its sequel, *Flight Control*, *Tess*, and *Hidden Gems*, Terry won a gold nugget and books by Yukon writers for her short story, "When Nature Calls." As a passionate reader, Terry is proud to call herself an author alongside those she has admired since childhood.

Terry's books can be found in the Okanagan and Vancouver Island Regional libraries, are available upon request at other Canadian libraries and online at Amazon and Kobo. Locally, Chemainus' Books, Hobbies and More stocks her volumes. Her loyal following of readers eagerly wait for her writings and enjoy her subtle humour, odd characters and imaginative plots, prompting one to question, "How do you come up with these ideas?" Terry is currently compiling a collection of stories written during her time in the Yukon, while allowing other book ideas to simmer on the back burner.

<https://taleinemann.wordpress.com>

regards the older generations as an unnecessary burden on the system. Walls may keep them safe and provide them with a tranquil space to reflect and rediscover who they are beneath the layers of emotional armour, but retreating from the world either by choice or other factors causes stagnation and denies the rest of society the benefit of their wisdom and experience.

Within days of the birth of our first grandchild, Lily, in the fall of 2021, we moved to Vancouver Island thanks to our mobility at the time, free of those roots that may have kept us from the day-to-day joys of grand-parenting. After one final winter in our motorhome, we sold it and found an ocean view apartment in a 55+ building, complete with a common room that invites neighbours to come together for coffee parties, barbecues and a book club. No mysterious benefactors or free housing as in my book, but strangers here are becoming friends, and I am home. Without relationships, we fall deeper into a rabbit hole of our own making, self-absorbed thoughts whirling, memories veering towards melancholy and regret. My goal in life is to keep learning and growing, to make the most of the time I have left to gain self-awareness and wisdom that I can pass to future generations. My inner child re-emerged when Lily was born. I learned how to laugh and play again, dancing as if no one's watching except for this uninhibited toddler giggling beside me.

When I read a book, I learn more about the world or the author's perception of the world, but when I write a book, I learn more about myself and my place in the world. I finally addressed several of my insecurities, airing them out on paper and examining my motivations. The more I write, I realise I am not writing for fame or fortune, or the adulation of readers and attention from critics. I write for my personal growth, to learn more about the craft of writing because of the sense of purpose and satisfaction it brings me. Writing is a solitary activity, but it is a path to connection with my cherished circle. I welcome and appreciate help from my friends and family. I have many talented and gifted people in my life who have contributed their time to help me bring my books into being. Writing is an emotional outlet providing entertainment, enjoyment and a glimpse into my perception of the world.

As an aging creative being, I will continue on this path I have set for myself, contemplating my place in the world outside my window with my fingers hovering above the keyboard ready to record my findings. For me, aging is an ongoing process of discovery, exploring uncharted territory and getting in touch with my authentic self. I love where I've landed and who I continue to become.



# CREATING WITH THE VOID

## Angelina Rosa



How does artistic expression help me manage the challenge of emptiness?

Creativity is my tool for exploring thoughts that are recurring within me and emotions that I want to release.

Oneness with emptiness is a goal of life for me; it is a place of complete peace. It is also a state where ideas and motivation appear and give me direction, if that is what I am needing.

Art for me is an interplay between clearing the mess of my thoughts and emotions through creative expression and the allowing and actualizing of ideas that have come forth from a state of emptiness. I often feel my emptiness and welcome the discomfort of it. I feel particularly held when I do so in nature. When I am successful with my experience of the void within me and without, I arrive at peace.

I welcome quiet, stillness and boredom. The initial discomfort of it can be great. The benefit is clarity and divine direction. Great ideas come, bringing me fulfillment and inner freedom, peace. Sometimes they come in the form of a song, which helps me maintain the emotional state I seek and offers clarity. Sometimes they come in the form of an image, which gives me direction for my next artwork. Sometimes they come in the form of ideas that solve problems I am having in the middle of a creative project (including an aspect of my life) and bring me resolution.

I wonder if it is from a place of not thinking, akin to nothingness, emptiness, the void, that I do my best creative work.

The type of creative work that I gravitate towards varies according to my mental and emotional state. If I am flooded with emotion, I may reflect a lot on the story behind the emotion and produce work that holds the story. I like to use physical remnants of the emotionally charged experience to create collage on canvas, for example.

Painting over and with the collage gives me the opportunity to acknowledge my past story and to transform it into an experience of (self-) compassion, understanding and empowerment. My emotional state is also connected to prayer, as well as states of observation; the intention always being to traverse the experience, to comprehend it and to gain wisdom. Being that prayer and openness to guidance through the void are major elements of my creative process, I discover that messages come through my work.

I allow ideas to flow through me and permit them to manifest without mental questioning. The result is fascinating to me. I am always looking for what is meaningful in my work. I strive to understand the emotion and intention behind human experience and to reproduce them effectively

Overcome





*Guardian One*

**It is my instinctive goal and now my conscious decision to transmute the weight of the human experience, in its various forms, into acceptance awareness.**

through any of my creations. I am even more interested in the transformative potential of the human experience: how do I work with loaded emotions and concepts, then ‘alchemize’ them into an elevated experience leading to acceptance and empowerment? I welcome unseen divinity into my awareness, allowing the void to speak through me. It is a fascinating challenge to represent this process in my work.

***Kaza & Kadr* (short film):**

A man wrestles with the interplay between his humanity and a divine calling. His love enters and exits his life

elusively as he comes to understand that his liberation arrives when he releases his grasp.

It is my instinctive goal and now my conscious decision to transmute the weight of the human experience, in its various forms, into acceptance awareness.

Truth is my ally. Observation of all that is around me and within me is the vehicle that gets me there. Creativity, and its various forms, are tools I feel fulfilled to use in the exploration of this practice. Oneness with emptiness, surrender to the vast nothing, is my destination. Artistic production is the journey that I relish in taking, with the request that my arrival be peace.

**Angelina Rosa was** born in Mexico. Rosa began training there with her godfather, Georg Rauch, an Austrian painter who called Mexico home for 30 years. Rosa received her formal education in Montreal, where she studied painting and drawing at the Visual Arts Centre and Concordia University. Within the stimulating city, Rosa received a Jeunes Volontaires painting grant, was a member of artist studio collective Le Corrid’art, exhibited in both group and solo shows and painted commissioned works, including murals. Rosa began merging visual art with film at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, where she received the James Shavick Award for Excellence in Filmmaking and her BA of Fine Arts.

Rosa has been painting and drawing since she was a child. Visual art has always been an outlet that has brought her mental and emotional peace. Returning to the Okanagan, her home for much of her youth, has brought Rosa many opportunities to share her art. Rosa has exhibited in group shows at the Lake Country Public Art Gallery, she’s been a member of a painting collective based in Armstrong, and she’s painted murals in the area, notably the mural at the House of Armstrong.

Rosa enjoys adaptation and versatility with the mediums she employs. She has a special love for oil on canvas but also works with watercolour and pencil on paper, collage, as well as acrylic on canvas. She paints murals on boards and on building walls and windows. Photography and film are Rosa’s newest tools for expression, where nature, mysticism and the human experience continue to be her predominant inspirations.

# NOT A PIANO LESSON



## Antoinette Vouïte Roeder

It's all about relationship. No, not the obvious one between audience and performer, but the intimate one of the pianist with her music, the keyboard being the embodiment and locus of this liaison.

On a level of consciousness that I tap into but am not specifically aware of, I know what I want to hear, and each note brings back a split-second message that determines how the next note needs to be played. That I constantly miss the mark goes without saying. That is surely why we practise. We practise so that a succession of sounds will form a coherent whole and express what we have to assume the composer had in mind, and equally important, what *we* hear in that music that wants to express itself through *us*. It is a co-creative act. I hope Herr Brahms would agree with me.

It is a continuous process of deep listening on the pianist's part, an almost impossible balance teetering on the now, this note, this chord now, as it relates to the one that came before and the one that follows.

Listening is not to be taken for granted. I'm referring now to the pianist's own listening. Even the fingers seem to be endowed with listening. Our ears extend to our fingers, the fingers obey the ears and the heart. The musician has to be so present, so embedded in the music, otherwise the sense of it is lost.

Listening involves being wholly involved, having paid attention to the previous phrase and anticipating the next one so that the result is a seamless whole. Any distraction can tear the fabric. Professionals don't let distractions bother them, exterior distractions that is. Worse are one's own distractions: straying from the music into never-never land or thinking about that difficult passage that comes up at the bottom of the page, the one you have fouled up so often. Then there are those distractions that have absolutely nothing to do with music at all. These meanderings can be fatal.

That brings us back to the relationship. More than just technical proficiency, real music can only be made when one is in relationship with one's deepest feelings. Those feelings are not expressed on the page or in the score.

Certainly there are rudimentary instructions, some composers offer more than others as to how and when to play more loudly or more softly and what tempo to take. But each pianist will play the same piece differently because of his/her relationship to sound and to heart. I know I often play slow pieces more slowly than most. I need time; I want time to savour, to attend the unfolding, to taste the harmonies, to delight in dissonance. Some music is so voluptuous, so sensuous. Would one want to hurry through the act of making love?

**Even the fingers seem to be endowed with listening. Our ears extend to our fingers, the fingers obey the ears and the heart.**





Antoinette's piano, a Petrof

**A piano is a living creature ... The relationship a pianist has with his instrument is an intimate one.**

What about the embodiment of music? A musician, while playing, will move her body, may sway, incline her head, close her eyes, show all kinds of facial expressions. These are quite unconscious and merely reflect the amazing inner life that is unfolding in the process of making music.

It is difficult to love the music one plays if one can only stumble through it. Technical facility plays an important part. More than that, however, is that ineffable connection that I started with at the beginning of this essay. The music has struck something in the pianist, something that already lives in him/her, and, in the performance of a particular piece of music, like seeks like and is expressed through the co-creative process by way of the pianist's

interpretation.

This love, this joy also depends to a certain extent on the feedback the pianist receives from his instrument. A piano is a living creature, it is made of wood, it breathes, it expands with humidity and dries up for lack of it. The relationship a pianist has with his instrument is an intimate one. Some concert pianists travel with their own pianos, that is how important the instrument is. Each piano is different, and has a slightly different touch, tone, response. When a piano is of poor quality or consistently out of tune, the feedback the pianist gets is unsatisfying, inadequate and uninspiring. A serious musician deserves a good instrument.

Because I play the piano and also write poetry, I was wondering whether one could make a case for another relationship here, the obvious correlation being that poetry is music in words. This is not an original deduction on my part, many poets speak about the music of poetry, of language.

"It is quite simply a mistake to believe that the sense of a poem is only in the words, phrases and sentences on the page; the fact is that it depends equally, or more so, on the sound. A poem is a form of music; it works through nuance, resonance, echoes, and importantly, as much through what is withheld as through what is enunciated (just as music depends on its effect as much as on the rests, the harmonics in the score as it does on the notes played)." [*The Music of Time: Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, by John Burnside]

I would expand on John Burnside's quote. When it comes to a poem, I much prefer the word "unspoken" to the word "withheld." The former indicates a more serene, intuitive process, whereas "withheld" has the connotation of intentionality. And that may certainly be the case sometimes, but surely not always. When something is left unspoken it is because what preceded it indicates what might follow it in one way or another, or it simply spells mystery. This is again a case of relationship—the poet listens over and over to what she has already written in order to find the seed and direction of where the poem wants to go. I suspect a composer of music does the same.

In poetry I look for all those things best expressed in musical terms:

**Whether it's the poet or the musician, both want to express something that lives deep within them, something that responds like a weather vane in the wind to a stirring of soul, of heart.**

rhythm, cadence, assonance, dissonance, pauses, phrasing, climax, crescendo, sound; above all, breath and wonder. (These words are pointers to experience and are worth taking one at a time in order to reflect on what they might mean to you.) Some poets are obviously more aware than others of these qualities. Not all poetry is heart-connected either. Some poetry lives on a high intellectual plane.

The main difference between music and poetry is that music is so abstract and fleeting. Music does not become music until it is played or sung, whereas poetry does not have to be read aloud to send goose bumps up one's spine.

Whether it's the poet or the musician, both want to express something that lives deep within them, something that responds like a weather vane in the wind to a stirring of soul, of heart. And this something seeks relationship and is meaningless without. So long as my 79-year-old arrhythmic heart keeps firing in response to music, you will find me at my writing desk or at the piano.

## Love Affair

I love my piano  
and the ease with which my fingers find  
the keys, their pattern, and the conversation  
that ensues

I love the keys  
their intimacy cool  
beneath my hands  
mapped since childhood  
like others might have mapped  
the stars

I love their black and white  
geography, stair steps long  
more felt than seen, a  
disciplined maze through which  
my fingers weave, in and out and over,  
smoothing sounds or spanking them,  
sparking them or sending them like messages  
into the world and whether there's  
another listening ear or not,  
no matter, that is all  
*I have become.*

(found in *The Space Between*)

**Antoinette Voûte Roeder** (M. Mus.) has been offering the ministry of spiritual accompaniment for more than thirty years after a fulfilling career as piano teacher. Along the way she has had six volumes of poetry published and offers spring and fall poetry writing retreats. Antoinette has played piano since the age of five and still practises an hour a day. She calls herself a "closet pianist," not a performer. Her current repertoire includes the compositions of Bach, Mozart, Brahms and Rachmaninoff. Find Antoinette's books on Amazon.ca.

# CREATING A SERIES



**Linda Lovisa**

There are several reasons why an artist would choose to do a series. Some artists choose a topic to better themselves in that subject, others choose a series for presentation purposes or for gallery exhibitions, and some artists create a series for their clients (that is, commissions). Creating a series does not necessarily mean that they are smaller works of art. Some series in fact can be on huge canvases. An example is Claude Monet's approximately 250 water lily paintings, the first series that comes to my mind. Some series of paintings may be smaller in size too.

The number of paintings in a series is usually a number that the artist sets for him- or herself.

Are you an artist contemplating a series? Ask yourself these questions before you begin:

- Is it for your personal growth?
- What are the end expectations of the series?
- Is it as a means to selling more art?
- Is it to accommodate a certain theme for an exhibition?
- Can you stay focused?

Whatever the reason, make sure that it resonates with your personality and that it has a consistent style, colour palette or theme. The one thing you do need to be sure of as the artist is that it keeps you inspired throughout the entire process. Creating a series can be a big commitment.

Do your homework. Gather your own references. This will take some time depending on the theme of your series. Create a portfolio of inspirations so that it is readily available when you are ready to start. This way, once you start your series you will have everything you need at your fingertips.

I have created several series during my career as an artist and recognise that sometimes they happen almost accidentally. One of these times occurred in a recent series called, *Up Close and Personal*. It is a series of 30 conte pastel paintings. It came about in a very interesting way. I was experimenting with abstraction in nature using tree bark as my reference. I originally planned to do a pastel study-sketch for a larger project in acrylics, which ultimately led to a total of 30 sketches. I was so engaged with the topic that I could not stop looking at tree bark during my hikes! I saw so many textures, colours, movement within the bark, and the effect of lighting on the surface of the bark. A series was born. It became a personal challenge. I was compelled to continue my study once that world became more than just

**I have created several series during my career as an artist and recognise that sometimes they happen almost accidentally.**





Top left: Pastel of bark 1

Top middle: Pastel of bark 2

Top right: Painting, *Gold Runs Through It*

Above: Painting, *Liquid Gold*

**I have always been fascinated by trees; but a study of their bark further enlightened me.**

bark. Sure, I have always been fascinated by trees; but a study of their bark further enlightened me.

The title, *Up Close and Personal*, became just that. It is exactly how I felt about the mission I had embarked on. I noticed after several outings I found myself less interested in younger healthy trees. It was the trees at various stages of aging that I was most interested in. Old wood, tangled old wood, what good? What is their value? It has great value, regenerating the forest floor, giving a home to new plant and animal life. This is nothing new to me, having been a forest dweller. I examined old wood at various stages. What is it that drew me to the lines, scarring, the holes, the torn bark and the layers of deterioration? Abstraction, or did I draw a parallel to myself? I did draw that parallel to myself to some extent. The old tree rejuvenates the forest floor. As I age, will my personal experiences rejuvenate the younger generation? I realise my creative process is what I have to offer. Like the old tree nurturing the young plants, I am nurturing creativity.

This next series of 20 paintings is for a book that I plan to release in the fall of 2023. It is called *Mushroom Memoirs*. The paintings themselves will be shown in two separate shows in October held at The Mary Irwin Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna and at the Peachland Art Gallery, both in B.C.

I have been photographing and painting mushrooms and fungi for years. The different shapes and colours inspire me. They are an important part of the regeneration of the forest floor, breaking down the decaying plant and animal matter while providing nutrients to the soil. Some mushrooms are so tiny that they can easily disappear in a foot print. Tread lightly. Do not touch. Some are very poisonous.

This new collection of work is based on my memories of mushroom searching, the locale, the time of year, as well as what it was about the mushroom that caught my attention. I try to identify them if I can, but there are so many different mushrooms that are similar in appearance that I dare not try to specify the type unless I am sure.

I started with the photograph that I had taken, then I created a sketch. When the day was right, I picked up my paint brush. Sometimes I am so excited to start painting that I don't bother with a sketch. The size of canvas



Top left: Fungi  
 Top right: Painting *Sisters*  
 Above: Sketch of fungi

I chose for this series was 8" x 10" or 10" x 8" (depending on whether the composition required landscape or portrait orientation).

This painting, derived from the reference and the sketch, is titled *Sisters*. For the painting, I chose to do a stylized background of soft autumn colours. It was mid-autumn and there was a fine mist present in the air. My moment in the woods is captured by highlighting different elements of the environment on that day. Unless you are a realist, it is not about just painting

your reference. It is about capturing the mood as well as a particular memory. I am often told that my paintings have much more life in them than my photographs. Perhaps that is because my paintings always have a story to tell. When I take my photographs, they are simply intended to be the inspiration for my paintings. While painting, I may choose to exaggerate an area of the slightest light in order to create more drama or to draw attention to a certain area or feature. It is about the light, the space, the shapes, the movement and the colour combined. With that in mind, I begin to create and I attempt to capture the moment.

I tell my story through colour and personal experiences. I find painting very therapeutic. It is part of my daily routine. My paintings are moments around me of joy, peacefulness, miracles, mystery and sadness. Instead of a written journal, my paintings are a visual journal. If you were to collect my entire collection of work to date it would tell a story the size of a thick novel. It is my way of expressing myself.

I enjoy the interaction I receive with those who view my work. Especially, when my paintings trigger a memory and the viewer shares their story with me. That is when the painted story becomes spoken word.

**Linda Lovisa** paints Alla Prima (direct approach). This type of painting keeps the colours fresh and vibrant while she mixes directly on the canvas. Her techniques include Impressionism, symbolism and abstraction. Linda's paintings have appeared in exhibits across Canada and the United States and can be found in private and public collections nationally and internationally. Linda has been presented a Gold Award and an Award of Excellence by The Federation of Canadian Artists.

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

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# UNPACKING: BIRDSONG FROM THE TREE OF LIFE

**Brenda Weinberg, D.Ed.**



Arriving at my own new door literally and metaphorically (see *Sage-ing*, issues 39 and 42) has brought me the new in different forms. Such a move from a long-lived-in home required me to make decisions about what to keep and what to give away, ditch or sell. We do not always know consciously why we keep certain things. Such was the case with a notebook that seemed unused when I packed it. Its cover and pages were a tawny colour with a couple of human figures, a male deer with antlers, and a female or young deer embossed on the front cover.

An interesting part of a move can be unpacking items tossed into a box and deciding where each item should rest. Much to my surprise, when I opened up the notebook in my new home, I saw a painting and some writings about “Immram One” guided by “the Ever-Living Lady.”

The painting and writings were done on September 5, 1994, almost 30 years ago. Several of my notebook pages were amplifications of the first page, on which I had drawn nine rectangles in a wheel-like formation of eight rectangles (perhaps to illustrate cards) in the circle and one in the centre.

Each rectangle had two categories, one at the top, numbered in Roman numerals, and one at the bottom in Arabic numerals. Roman numeral I was at the top with II to the left of it. Roman numeral III was in the centre, with IV to its left in the circular formation. Numerals V to IX continued around the circle in a counter-clockwise direction.

Each of these rectangles was labelled at the top as follows: I-Harbour; II-Realm of Many Colours; III-Realm of Heart’s Desire; IV-Realm of Terrors; V-Realm of Youth; VI-Realm of Glass; VII-Realm of Fair Women; VIII-Realm of Wonders; and IX-Landfall. At the bottom, rectangles were designated as follows: I-4-Island of Sorrow; II-12-Island of Giant Cattle; III-0-Island of the Cat; IV-6-Island of Trees; V-2-Island of Many Birds; VI-1-Island of Giant Ants; VII-17-Island of Singing Birds; VIII-22-Sea of Mist; and IX-5-Island of Plenteous Salmon.

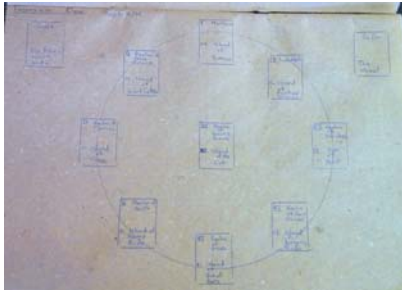
My discovery of this old notebook did not bring back the meaning of “Immram” nor a memory of having done this investigation and written about it. I also did not remember the connection of the Immram with the “Ever-Living Lady,” despite my consideration of the Feminine and her symbolic representations in many forms as especially important in my life.

Her significance was emphasized two days later when unpacking more papers and discovering a poem I had written in early 1996.

Notebook front and cover







Layout of the immram cards

## Woman Spirit, out of the mythic tree you grow.

### Woman Spirit

Woman Spirit,  
out of the mythic tree  
you grow.

Your roots  
are firmly anchored in the earth.  
Unseen,  
they continue their descent,  
spiralling farther  
into Earth's dank body  
where memory resides.  
Through tap-root filaments  
they drink from waters  
of the source of All Life,  
and lick at Earth's fiery core.

Below and above, Woman Spirit,  
you exchange atom for atom  
with beings extant in one form or another  
since the Precambrian age.

Woman Spirit,  
out of the mythic tree  
you grow.

Standing,  
you stir imagination and awaken consciousness  
as you emanate a vertical dynamism:  
thrusting downwards,  
stretching upwards,  
you connect the energy of Earth and Sky.  
In your equilibrium between  
thrust and counter-thrust  
you reveal a perfect stillness.

In your present moment  
you integrate past and future,  
reflecting all in your life field  
of structured and formless energy,  
like evidence found in age-rings, arboreal scars,  
and unseen emanations of the tree.

In your cycles of Death and Renewal,  
you release desiccated attitudes and beliefs  
like leaves cut off from their source of moisture;  
you offer freely  
flowing, pulsing, recharging and transforming radiations  
of Heart and Soul.

Woman Spirit,  
out of the mythic tree  
you grow.

**At the time of writing the above poem in 1996, I did not know how much I had to grow to discern my life and live the mystery.**

Emulating the repeated leafings and branchings of the mythic tree,  
the fractal patterns of your life  
extend backward through ancestral lines  
and forward through descendants' lives.  
These patterns weave together  
life's myths and local stories.  
Awareness of them guides and comforts me  
as I plumb my inner depths and outer spaces,  
trying to discern my life, and live the Mystery.  
For that, you are the seed that lives  
in the consciousness and memory of my every cell.

Woman Spirit,  
out of the mythic tree you grow  
to live in me, and include me in  
the mythic tree out of which we grow.

A little online research now led me to the source of the word *immram*. In ancient Irish/Celtic mythology, *immrama* recount tales of men embarking on heroic quests, spiritual and fantastic sea journeys that took them to unknown places. In contemporary times many women have investigated their own quests and expressed their own stories creatively in words and images. The narratives of both men and women who have gone on such spiritual journeys have often included accounts of their personal transformations.

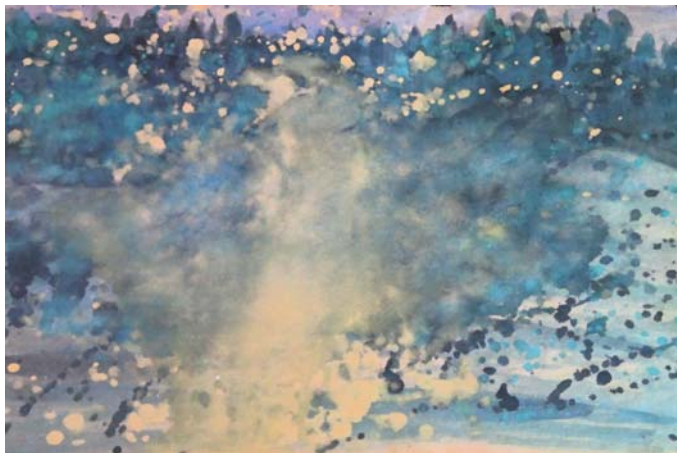
The call to journey has been described by one of these women, writer-educator Clare Mulvaney, as a deep inner creative urge that persists in its whispering to “follow me” and to rebirth the explorer’s life force. My notebook, with its poem, painting and text, is such an account.

In 1994, I had written a description of each category in the *immram* plus my challenge in relationship to each category, sometimes in question form to guide me in my consideration. I recapitulate here a few of those questions: Have I attended to detail with commitment and faithfulness? Am I mindful of how my actions affect others? Do I respect the Other and see his/her light? Have I permitted myself the stillness of silence, the attunement spaces I need to hear what my soul says? Have I allowed myself to breathe? Have I given thanks for my abundance?

Despite not remembering a practice I had developed over many years, I am aware that I have incorporated into my daily being the questions articulated above and the knowledge I gained through exploring and expressing these questions.

At the time of writing the above poem in 1996, I did not know how much I had to grow to discern my life and live the mystery. What I would learn later was that some of my ancestors, including women, had an opportunity to attend and even establish universities and sanctuaries in the Middle Ages

My painting at the back of my notebook



Although **Dr. Brenda Weinberg** is retired now in Canada, until the onset of the COVID-19 crisis she had been teaching and supervising sandplay therapy in Korea for two separate months each year, work to which she may now return. Prior to retirement, she practised as a psychotherapist/sandplay therapist both privately and for the North York (now Toronto) Board of Education in schools for children with developmental delays. Brenda is a teaching member and final-case reader for the International Society for Sandplay Therapy (ISST) and, until her retirement from the Ontario Society for Psychotherapists, was also a teaching member and supervisor for the Canadian Association for Sandplay Therapy (CAST).

Passions in life include art, images and sandplay therapy, which she began in 1991. Brenda's knowledge of the work world is broad. In the 1960s, before she worked in a bookstore, she became a mother and began her repeated activity of "going back to school" to study psychology and psychotherapy, attaining her master's degree in psychology in 1991 and doctorate in education in 2009 at the age of 70. She has worked in a bank as a secretary, in a polio lab as a technician, in an elementary school as a first- and second-grade teacher, and for the National Film Board as an educational researcher. Her formal education and practice over three decades have allowed her to integrate her dual professions as psychotherapist and educator, roles that are inextricably related.

Now 84 years of age and with limited mobility, Brenda recently moved from her long-lived-in townhouse in Toronto to a strata apartment in Victoria, B.C., where she has an amazing view of the ocean. Through this view, she maintains her connection with nature from a different perspective than what she was familiar with: the hills of a family farm and the greenbelts of suburban Toronto.

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because of their financial privilege and political status. I did not know the extent to which racism was coupled with the white privilege I enjoyed, nor the fact that some of my white Western European colonist ancestors, landing in north-east America in the 1600s, had near-relatives who were slave owners. Despite being a classroom teacher of young inquiring children for several years, I did not know that in past times young children could be sprayed with bullets and murdered by people too young or insane to purchase or possess a weapon of war. I did not know that only in 1918 could some Canadian women vote, and that more than 40 years would pass before their black and Indigenous sisters or co-patriots could. I did not know that my government could determine whether a couple or a woman could purchase contraceptive devices, determine when or if to have children, or elicit medical care that could save the woman's life.

I still needed to learn that my trace of aboriginal blood meant I could be related to those aboriginal people whose unmarked graves were only recently discovered and made subject to papal acknowledgement and condolences. Nor that bending the knee by a popular American sports figure was considered disrespectful by some and a reason for denying him a talented livelihood. I did not know that many young black men stopped for driving infractions would be shot and killed by traffic police. I had not known how the greed and lust for power of autocrats could ignite so many awful circumstances. There was so much I did not know, even though I identified myself as a lifelong learner.

In retrospect, it seems that the immram cards, true to their name, have helped guide my journey on the path of the Ever-Living Lady and Woman Spirit, my reflection now taking in a loss of innocence as well as the realities of power and privilege. Thus, back in 1994 when I recorded the details of my immram, I identified that I was on the Island of Sorrow. At the time, I had thought my sorrow was personal. I came to realize it was at a much deeper level, part of the emanations of the mythic tree alive within me.

A very interesting part of the process of discovery of this notebook and its text is the painting at the back of the book. Looking at it now, I see a part that was not completed or that was originally partly obscured. Now, it seems to me like a large bird with its mouth open, as if singing. I take the liberty at this point to associate the painting with Card VII, the Realm of Fair Women, with its connection to the Island of Singing Birds. Because I was at a different stage when I originally expressed myself creatively through the painting, I was not ready to see the singing bird. Now I am able to connect with it by rejoicing for life itself and expressing gratitude for the wonders of life in my ever-unfolding universe, about which I continue to learn. I no longer am afraid to feel the intermittent sadness, disappointment and anger that life also envelops as part of our human existence.



# AN UNCONDITIONAL GIFT



## Jacques G. LeBlanc, MD, FRSC

In early 2020, the pandemic hit and the world started to close. Lockdown and isolation appeared to be the only treatment against this COVID-19 virus we knew little about. My wife and I decided to make true on a dream of having a dog. We thought we had many hours staying home and we could raise a puppy. In June 2020, a dark short hair 4.5 pound female mini-dachshund joined our family. We thought she was so sweet that we called her “Sweet Pea.” It seemed to fit her so well. Sweet Pea was fragile. She had food allergies and skin problems. She was not ecstatic about a walk like most dogs wagging their tails and running at the door. But graciously, she took us out every day for a walk. In the rain and snow, she happily lay in our doggy backpack with her ears flopping in the wind. Sweet Pea was a great shopper, lying in her pouch over my shoulder, looking at everybody and waiting patiently for my wife to try on clothes. She was the child we never had, and she knew how to talk to us.

How can such a lovely mini-dachshund inspire creativity? “All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking,” said philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Taking a walk is one of the best ways to get the creativity flowing, boosting inspiration by stimulating the senses with new environments, particularly natural ones. Dogs inspire us to get outside and be more active, which can lead to increased mental well-being over time. The simple act of getting away from all the devices and going to the park, being in nature, is a good way to switch off the brain and let the subconscious do its thing. Sweet Pea took me away from my computer where I thought I was being creative by writing, but in fact a quiet walk in nature or sitting on the grass in the park was far more inspiring.

Loving feelings make people happier and being happy can increase creative-thinking abilities by allowing for a broader and more connective mode of thought. When you live with your dog, you connect to their specific heart energy. Often, you will know exactly what your dog is thinking or feeling without any words being spoken. This process happens organically. Our Sweet Pea spent 24 hours a day with us, first because of the pandemic and then because we had not trained her to stay alone. She grew up taking our habits, sitting on our laps as I worked at my computer, or on my wife’s as she read or watched TV. Our puppy loved to sit upright in my wife’s arms as I was cooking dinner, really observing everything. With time, we got to know what she would like us to do, such as waking up at 5:30 a.m.,

**Dogs inspire us to get outside and be more active, which can lead to increased mental well-being over time.**



Sweet Pea

**Animal energy is a bit like Reiki energy; it helps us clear our energy channel in order to experience the energy around us: feel the rain on my skin, look at the snow falling, sit on the grass in the park enjoying the wind and Sweet Pea running.**

when it was breakfast time for her. A good lick on the face to wake us up made the point.

This heart-based connection helped us not only to connect with our dog, but also to connect with the energy of our surroundings, to our subconscious and our hearts. Animal energy is a bit like Reiki energy; it helps us clear our energy channel in order to experience the energy around us: feel the rain on my skin, look at the snow falling, sit on the grass in the park enjoying the wind and Sweet Pea running. And this flow of energy helps with our creative projects. Our creativity is often fuelled by ideas and insights that do not come from our conscious mind, but from our surroundings and subconscious. And these subtle energies inspire us to create something new.

However, for creating something new, one needs to think outside the normal box and translate that wonderful new idea into a project. I found having Sweet Pea inspired me to start a new creative project. If you too have a pet, why not try to spend some time together and let that lovely heart-based connection fuel your creativity? Just sit together, share your energetic space, and let the ideas flow through you.

Unfortunately, one morning a few weeks ago, our Sweet Pea woke up with her lower legs paralyzed. She was diagnosed with a slipped disk, which occurs with this dog species. Despite aggressive medical treatment, she deteriorated. We could not let her suffer and it was our turn to give her our unconditional love for the amazing three years she gave to us and the creativity she triggered in us. Keep inspiring us, little girl.

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

# RHYTHMIC WEAVING WITH THE PAST

## Ute Carson



The inspiration for my poems is my belief that stories can move between past and present, even fantasy and reality. A picture is a still-shot. It stops time and focuses on a single unique moment. Poems rhythmically weave stories and pictures together by reconnecting through creative reflection and bringing fresh perception.

In both my poems I start with a story—preparations for the escape to the West in “ALBUMS,” and the search for my grandparents’ summer cottage in “AS TIME GOES BY.” I then switch to pictures, pointing to the articles my mother and grandmother pack, especially the photo albums. The pictures in “AS TIME GOES BY” feature the cottage, now and in 1944, and the photo of me at the water pump is also a snapshot in time.

The Album photo belongs to the pictures of my parents’ wedding in 1938. The two photos of the cottage are from 1944 and one from now. The present one shows me with our two grandsons Kaius and Lucas. The other picture is of me at 4 at the water pump.

Poetic musings end the poem “ALBUMS” with the question “What did they take? Why did they choose albums? Was it to preserve certain moments? Would pictures remind them of happier times? In “AS TIME GOES BY” I use poetic imagination to conjure up a tactile experience with an emotional impact, transcending story and picture. A pleasurable feeling is evoked when I remember the well-water splashing my face.



Left: my parent’s wedding 1938

Middle: cottage 1944

Right: cottage today, me with two of our grandsons, Kaius and Lucas





## Albums

Neighboring villages up in flames,  
the bridge over the rushing river below  
our Silesian castle demolished  
as Russian troops advance. It was the winter of 1945.  
"You have 24 hours to pack," warned the local priest.  
"A horse-drawn wagon will bring you to the train station."  
Fur coats and hats with thick earflaps for the trek  
were pulled from the closet  
where they hung next to Parisian evening gowns  
and, on the shelf above, plumed hats from Berlin.  
Ignoring the Meissen china and engraved sterling cutlery,  
my mother unraveled the hem of my coat and  
showed my grandmother how to pack the lining with jewelry  
which could be bartered for food and medicine in the West.  
A small wooden trunk with painted cornflowers and poppies  
had to suffice for what remained.

What did they decide to take?

Albums! Photos of my mother's wedding, and  
of her first year with her husband, now a casualty of war.  
Snapshots of me at four  
and a few of my father's letters from the front.  
Then my mother dismantled the gilded framed paintings.  
She rolled up the oil portraits of herself and my father,  
as well as sketches of her brothers, now missing at Stalingrad,  
and some photos of ancestors.  
My toy lamb was squeezed in under the lid of the trunk  
as it was nailed shut.

Why albums when danger from a marauding army was imminent?

I am convinced, as were my mother and grandmother, that pictures  
capture life stories that verbal accounts may miss.



**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. Her poetry collection, *Reflections*, came out in 2018. Ute received the Ovidu- Bektore Literary Award 2018 from the Anticus Multicultural Association in Constanta, Romania. 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)

Left: Me, age 4, at the waterpump

## As Time Goes By

My grandparents' summer cottage on the Baltic Sea  
had a seagrass roof in 1944  
with flower boxes profuse with blossoms,  
a sprawling green garden  
and a hand-pump tailor-made for my four-year-old self.  
Indoors, the cottage was outfitted for vacationing,  
with serviceable furnishings  
and fluttering lace curtains at the open windows.

Today the little house is occupied by  
impoverished tenants who kindly invite us in.  
The roof has long been replaced  
by sheet metal, now rusting,  
and the window openings are boarded shut against winter drafts.  
Tattered paper peels from the walls,  
and the stairs to the upper floor are rickety.  
The outdoor hand-pump is gone, and the well filled-in.  
Sand from the nearby beach has turned the yard barren.

Still, the cottage speaks to me.  
Memories bubble up as I stand among the neglect and debris.  
Wild roses clamber abundantly around the leaning fence.  
I hear the roaring waves from the sea and smell the acid seawater.  
When I close my eyes, visions rise into the air on a gentle breeze  
and I call up those bygone days  
when well-water sprayed my face as I pumped.

# 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.