

A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close & Carolyn Cowan

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NUMBER 5, FALL 2012

# SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF. LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

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Edited by Karen Close  
& Carolyn Cowan

NUMBER 5, FALL 2012  
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## SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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### A PUBLICATION OF THE **Okanagan Institute**

1473 Ethel Street  
Kelowna BC V1Y 2X9  
[www.okanaganinstitute.com](http://www.okanaganinstitute.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

The Okanagan Institute was formed to bring together a volunteer group of creative professionals for mutual effect, to conduct research and develop a number of creative initiatives that would “give back” to the community. It undertook these initiatives in order to inspire the Okanagan community to mobilise around a collaborative creative vision. While rejecting any kind of blueprint for our work and activities, we have followed a simple process to facilitate the mission we call “creative engagement”.

In the process of doing this work, we have come to the realization that there is a great deal of skill, talent and wisdom here in the Okanagan. We have also discovered that many of the people who have been moving into the Okanagan bring a great deal of creative energy and significant skill sets with them, and are only too willing to share their skills.

Across the world, economic development agencies have identified the creative industries as a growth sector, and most are supporting them through some form of cluster-based economic development strategy. A creative cluster includes non-profit enterprises, cultural institutions, arts venues and individual artists. Creative clusters feed on diversity and change.

– Robert MacDonald, Publisher

Sage-ing gratefully thanks ArtWalk 2012 for subsidizing the printing of hard copies of this issue.



According to one of Canada’s most influential scholars, Marshall McLuhan,

“I think of art, at its most significant, as a DEW line, a Distant Early Warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it.”

*Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude* is a volunteer publication of The Okanagan Institute. This quarterly journal is intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. It presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement, and is focused on honouring the transformational power of creativity.

It is our hope that your perspective on the arts and creative engagement might also change as you read stories of Okanagan artists, experienced and emerging, who engage in art for the joy of stimulating personal and community wisdom and well-being.

The theme, Art For Change, became a point of union for arts advocacy between ArtWalk 2012 and our parent organization, the Okanagan Institute. *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude* profiles creative engagement as a tool to empower the individual’s role in personal healthcare and community well-being. The last feature, VOLUNTEERING: DEMENTIA AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION, is a three part article. It invites the Okanagan community to become part of a Canada wide movement that introduces arts-based activities into health care. It is the Arts Health Network at [www.artshealthnetwork.ca](http://www.artshealthnetwork.ca)

Finally, by clicking on the video link at the bottom of any page of the journal, you can listen to an excellent and engaging teacher, Vernon artist, Heidi Thompson. Her perspective on art reveals a life time of study and meditation. Heidi is indeed *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. She is seeking to understand a path to creative expression that can help change the world. Consider Heidi’s perspective in the journal article, BREATHE IN - BREATHE ART.

– Karen Close and Carolyn Cowan, Editors

# JULIE ELLIOT CONSIDERS ART, LIFE & PROCESS

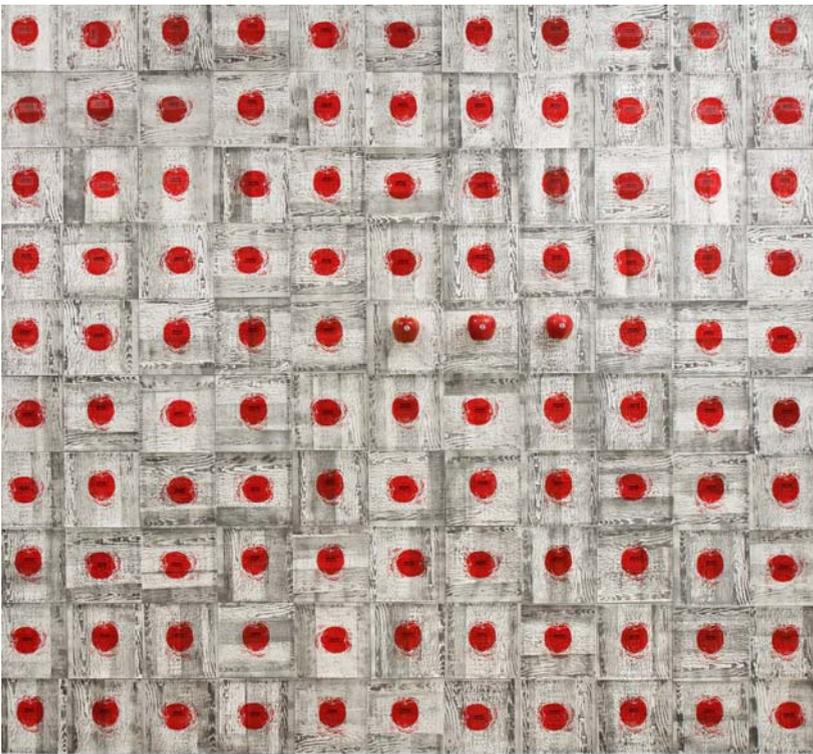
**Karen Close**

**As I work, I process my thoughts and experiences. It changes me and I learn things that I wouldn't otherwise know because the whole of me finds alignment.**

As we sit on her deck, overlooking their orchard and a glistening Lake Kalamaka, Julie Elliot muses, “For me making art is all about a deeper engagement with everything that happens in my life. As I work, I process my thoughts and experiences. It changes me and I learn things that I wouldn't otherwise know because the whole of me finds alignment. I'm learning that we experience life from three centres: the moving centre (body) the head centre (mind) and the heart centre (soul) and making art helps me find balance in those three centres. It also connects me to that deeper self that learns through the metaphors of line, colour and shape. Having access to this visual language is life giving.

When I'm working, there is the constant dance between chaos and control, even more particularly in my non-objective works. I am making the invisible visible. And when a work is done, I release it because it has its own journey to take. I know that. It brings me great satisfaction when I hear someone say they connect with a piece and would like to own it. It's found its place in the world and the whole process feels complete.”

Below: Orchard installation, Buy BC part 1



In her early fifties Julie is a model for *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. There is a deep calm and wisdom as she reflects openly and honestly on the ArtWalk 2012 theme: Art For Change. Julie and her husband are orchardists. Her work “Buy B.C.”, part of an Art Installation of Block Prints, was chosen to be this year's poster.

This work expresses a very personal concern and looks for change. In her artist statement she asks: “Have you wondered why we're surrounded by productive, flourishing orchards and yet the local grocery store is selling U.S. apples? Have you heard that the tree fruit industry is in crisis? Do you know that fruit growers are losing money every year? This installation is comprised of 120 block prints which

**My preoccupation with showing how B.C. grown apples are overwhelmed by the Washington crop is to draw attention to an economic fact: retailers sell American apples because Canadian consumers buy them.**

Below: Orchard installation, Buy BC part 2

Bottom: Three Centered Knowing

represent the estimated 2012 apple crop for Washington State and British Columbia. Each print (or square) equals one million boxes of apples. Clearly, British Columbia's crop of four million boxes is dwarfed by Washington State's estimated crop of 116 million boxes. This installation is a visual representation of the problem. Washington State produces a huge crop of apples and this creates a surplus in all of North America.

Linocut block prints were chosen to represent the Washington crop. With the repetition of the same printed apple, I wanted to express not only the enormity of the Washington crop but also that buying American apples is ultimately an empty purchase because there is no investment in sustainable farming in our own province. In contrast, the four million boxes of B.C. grown apples are represented by four Sunrise apples. This suggests that buying B.C. apples brings about *genuine* sustenance because we also support local growers, sustainable farming and the tree fruit industry that exists only when growers can earn a living.

My preoccupation with showing how B.C. grown apples are overwhelmed by the Washington crop is to draw attention to an economic fact: retailers sell American apples because Canadian consumers buy them. If Canadian consumers ask for and "Buy B.C." it will not matter that the marketplace is deluged with American apples. As consumers, we have a

choice to ensure that the orchards continue to flourish. We can choose to buy apples that are grown where we live."

Ironically, although "Buy B.C." clearly expresses the political side of Art For Change, its genesis for Julie showed her that making art can be true alchemy. She says, "Interestingly, just before beginning this piece I went through a profound change. For years I had felt some kind of internal pressure to *get going* and build a successful career as a commercial artist. However, I had come to a point where I realized this intention was ego based and not what I wanted my creativity to be about. Letting go of old beliefs was painful and I grieved deeply, but I decided to let my dreams go. I let my ambitions go. Within that week, Jim Kalnin called me to say he was curating an exhibition on the theme of 'harvest' at the Lake Country Art Gallery and some artists had pulled out. He asked if I had any orchard pieces that I could put into the show. This was a new moment of choice. I did have works that fit the theme but having made the choice to move away from work *that would sell*, I responded differently to the invitation. My intention had changed and I decided I would not make a commercial piece. I would make





Top: Expanding

Middle: Resonating

Bottom: In the Valley

an educational one.”

Bravely, Julie constructed the installation “Buy B.C.” She smiles ruefully at the paradox. “It is the piece not done for a commercial reason that has brought me a lot of attention. I understand a work of art must be about intention. The intention must be to show the purity of your understanding about the subject.” It is from this place that one can allow the magic of creative spirit

to indeed create you. Allowing creative spirit to expand your wisdom invites deep personal scrutiny and challenges one to act from a place of honouring and sharing one’s self.

“*You must be the change you want to see in the world.*” Mahatma Gandhi

Julie explains: “My process starts with a word, a phrase or a spiritual teaching that resonates with me and invites exploration. I then *listen to the work* as I weave together loose spontaneous layers with layers that are carefully considered. Lately, I’ve been preoccupied with the union of opposites – both as a concept to explore and as a process for painting. I’m striving for paintings that are both complex and simple, meaningful for me and open ended for the viewer, painted with abandon and built slowly over time with much reflection. It’s a challenging way to work and one that is also joyful and compelling.”

In the work *Three Centered Knowing* Julie illustrates this process. “I am intrigued by the theme of *Attention and Expansion*. What we pay attention to expands. The subject expands in meaning and my understanding expands.” Engagement with process has taught Julie a caution she shares with those beginning to explore creative spirit: “I realise I must be careful and stay alert to the purity of my intention. If I pay attention to everything that seems wrong, that will develop in the work. If I look at the strengths, those will grow.”

I once heard a senior artist reflect that ‘art allows the purifying of the particulars of experience into a deeper wisdom’. As Julie toured me through a collection of her works, I felt the meaning of these words expand. It isn’t just the experience of making art that brings wisdom. When one truly relaxes into the experience of looking at a work and allows oneself to feel the artist’s intention, that viewer’s deeper knowing also expands.

Please consider joining Julie and me at ArtWalk for a talk about art, life and process. I invite you to allow yourself to be transformed as you connect to a selection of works by Julie Elliot.

# KAYAK DREAMS

## Margaret Kyle

In my painting series “Kayak Dreams,” I employed the kayak and kayaking as a metaphor for exploring the human spirit and the values that are important in my worldview. The kayak is a symbol of my inward journey as well as a representation of my concern for water conservation and other environmental issues.

To prepare to create the series, I first mapped out the ways that the experience of kayaking felt authentic to my inner values. In my journal I wrote down words that came to mind about the experience of kayaking, such as “hug the shore,” “camaraderie of kayakers,” “unhurried,” and “silence.” I looked through the many photographs I had taken on my kayaking trips to view the shapes made by the water and land. I wanted to simplify and abstract these experiences and shapes because I was interested in the inner world rather than the outer world. As a result, I chose to use an aerial perspective and uncomplicated outline shape of the kayak to allow me to paint without worry about the accuracy of outward details in order to produce a more symbolic representation.

Below left: Kayak Dream 30 x 48 acrylic on canvas

Below right: Kayak Dream close-up

After naming the paintings in the series, with the help of my journaling





process, I drew thumbnail sketches of land masses and water shapes with movement and flow. Acrylic paint was then added to the canvas to represent water and land. Rubbing alcohol was sprayed into the water areas to create foamy textures. Collage of kayak shapes onto the painting was a natural outcome that came about as I worked. A variety of paper scraps were attached with acrylic medium and reacted in different ways to the paint to achieve desired effects. The red kayak found in all the paintings represents myself.

Our modern digital world is disconnected from nature and experience of the environment. It takes a lot of effort to “unplug” and get away from all the busyness. My desire, or dream, as well as what I dream of, is a simpler, slower, more connected lifestyle – one that honours the earth and moves through it with authenticity.

In the first painting, kayak shapes are echoed in the earth land masses to create a dream-like vision. The kayakers move across the water from shore to shore without any apparent direction.



Top: The Search Inward 30 x 20 acrylic on canvas

Above: The Spirit of Kayaking 18 x 36 acrylic on canvas

Above right: The Spirit of Kayaking close-up



Calligraphic lines, drawn into the earth in this next painting create a sense of human history and ancient movement, yet add contemporary texture. The painting depicts my need to be connected to the past as well as the present.

The inward search involves value choices and a questioning of motives. Here the kayak is at a crossroads where many beautiful paths beckon, but only one can be taken at a time.

The inward search also means moving deep into the inner landscape – while remaining present to what is. The imagination understands that there are water areas that flow outside the painting that are still unexplored.

Kayaking involves interaction with other kayakers. In this third painting, the boats and equipment are often bright and varied in hue showing individual differences just like humans. In “The Spirit of Kayaking” I wanted to draw attention to and remember the camaraderie among people that makes

Right: Responsible for My Own Boat while Watching Out for Others 30 x 24 acrylic on canvas

Below: The Slow Lane 24 x 24 inches acrylic on canvas



life worthwhile. Here the kayaks, an embodiment of the human spirit, join together on the shore in a time of rest and relaxation. Community is vital to my life experience.

It is not difficult to see that our earth is in trouble environmentally – and this affects all life on the one earth that we share. We are individuals on our planet, but are connected by our shared space. The inner circle of this fourth painting represents the earth of water, land, and sky; the kayaks represent individual lives past, present, and future. Each of us has a responsibility for our individual actions and a responsibility for all life, to which we are connected. It is an awe-filled, beautiful home and my dream is that we work together to leave it in this condition.

In my fifth painting, our lakes are filled with speed boats represented by the white shapes in the middle area of the water. The kayak on the other hand



is an unhurried craft that is mostly found serenely moving along the shoreline. The painting is a reminder that I need to slow down and create space for my inner thoughts and feelings. “Time to be” is an important aspect of knowing the self, creating art, and feeling balanced.

**Each of us has a responsibility for our individual actions and a responsibility for all life, to which we are connected.**

# CREATURES OF LIGHT

## Harold Rhenisch



I went to Switzerland to photograph the house of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. From 1920-1926, he'd written poems there — the last and perhaps most refined from a civilization that stretched back to the earliest history of Egypt. The goal of this civilization was to cultivate the soul and guide it on its path. It all ended under the machine guns of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, and has only been seen in fragments since. Shattered by the war's physical crudity, Rilke looked for a chance to recover an earth he'd lost. He found it in Switzerland's Rhone Valley.

I went to Sierre because contemporary literary culture had driven me from poetry. I wanted to write a book about Rilke, woven around photographs, to tell the story of a poem, *The Duino Elegies*, which he started in 1912 and only finished in Sierre ten years later. As was usual for Rilke, the poem's history began with him begging the beautiful women of the European aristocracy at the end of their age for support. His one-time lover Lou Andreas Salome let him stay begrudgingly in one of her castles, Duino, high on a cliff outside of Trieste. How romantic!

Not really. It was winter. That was no accident. The chill perfectly reflected the current condition of their relationship; when winter fog rolled in off the Adriatic, Rilke was trapped between cold, grey walls of stone, in grey fog, kept from the sea by a long fall to grey waves. In his depression, he went walking, and there he heard a voice, as if part of an ongoing conversation: "...and if I screamed, who exactly would hear me in the ordered world of the angels?" He rushed back to the castle and wrote the words down, then tried to work them up into a poem. He failed. Then came the war.

Many years passed, while the world went one way and poetry went another. I followed the poetry. Finally, I went to Switzerland to photograph. The irony of this journey wasn't lost on me: the 52-year-old Rilke of 1922 and the 54-year-old Harold of 2012 found themselves at the same point of their poetic careers in Sierre, with their poetic worlds shattered by massive social change and that problem of all spiritual poets: after enough time recreating your self in the forge of words, you lose the way back to where you began and wander, well, in the fog.

Rilke's attempt to return to the world was to finish his long poem about Duino in Sierre, but what started in 1912 as a poem praising the world of the angels became a warning against attempting to walk down that path. It led, he'd seen, to war and horror. "Every angel," Rilke wrote, "is terrible." My attempt was to blend photographs and words in large symphonic structures to bring something of poetry over into a culture that had left it. I'd take a few



Top: Harold Rhenisch, Photo by Kalista Photography

Above: Rilke's House in Muzot, Switzerland



Top: Raron Church, Switzerland

Middle: Rainer Maria Rilke's grave at Raron Church

Bottom: Rilke's grave close-up

photographs and drink a bit of wine where men had been producing it for 2200 years and move on.

So I thought. Then I went to Rilke's grave. The grave lays in the cement-mining town of Raron, about halfway up the Rhone between Siere's vineyards and Europe's highest peak, the Matterhorn. A few vineyards are planted on the nearly vertical scree slopes above town. A train goes past high above them, screened by pine trees. The town was largely put together five hundred years ago by stacking stones in clever ways so that they haven't fallen out of place too much. I followed a footpath steeply uphill between old houses, a collection of gnomes, and private shrines to Christ and Maria, then stepped into the alpine meadows and met the wind. The meadows were thick with grass with large flowering brushes white in the sun like cotton made out of light. A warm, gentle wind poured over them, upwards into the mountains, at about fifty kilometres an hour. I felt my whole spirit flowing uphill with them.

Rilke is buried in the graveyard of the village church, which sits on a promontory above town and juts out into the Rhone Valley like the forecastle of a ship. The graveyard is ringed with a stone wall on the cliffside and a black iron fence towards the mountain. The gate latch is of a unique handmade design, much like a lock, and took me

a long time to figure out.

I found Rilke in a neatly-tended grave, set alone on the windiest corner of the church, with a view over the valley to Italy and down the valley to the west to Siere and France. And the wind! Half of Europe was pouring over that promontory as it was being drawn up the valley towards the Matterhorn. If you were a dog, you could sit out there and smell breakfasts in Paris and a bakery in Brussels, coffee in Geneva and a bottle of wine being uncorked in the Loire. Warm air restlessly got under my skin and lifted me as if I were weightless. Observations like this had led Rilke to choose the Raron churchyard for his gravesite. He felt that nowhere on earth could any man be closer to the spirit of the universe and the earth that was being spiritually purified through human effort.

It was like someone had hit me with a brick. The air went electric around me. I, who'd found my way into poetry through apple trees and Rilke and then got lost in there so there was no way back, who'd lost poetry and was trying to build a new art so something would survive the ruins, was sitting there with my old friend Rainer. I slumped down and spontaneously started talking with him as grey lizards came out of the stones around his grave to warm themselves in the sun. The wind lifted up the petals of Rilke's roses and dropped them and lifted them again. There was a lot to talk about. I talked.

**This perspective is what a poet who is 54 years old has left to write, in an art form in which to be thirty is to be impossibly old.**

After a half hour, a group of high school students in bright anoraks, with the wild gesticulations and flying hair of the young came around the corner in a burst of laughter, like strange and beautiful spiritual messengers. It was time for a man no longer young to step back and give them their space. After a few minutes among them, as *they* tried their best to be quiet to give me *my* space, I slipped around the back of the church — but I just couldn't leave. I was standing in the Catholic part of the graveyard, with my body filled with a great calm as an old woman in a green dress watering flowers with a blue watering can slowly stood, nodded, and walked arthritically to the gate. I watched her open and close the latch with ease, then went up to Christ on his Cross and continued talking. "Look after my friend," I asked him. I said a lot more, then walked out of the graveyard through the last stragglers of the school students (slowed down by the need to figure out the mechanism of that black iron gate), and down the hill in the wind and the sun.

This time, though, it was no longer a hill, no longer a wind and no longer a sun. It was light and spirit. That entire world that had once been open to me in poetry and which I could no longer find was there. Its energy to become a tool for negotiating social and political relationships on a slam stage was not lost. It's just that, like Rilke, I was no longer young and I had been too close to it. Instead of living in words and poems, my environment was now the world. This perspective is what a poet who is 54 years old has left to write, in an art form in which to be thirty is to be impossibly old.

This connection with wind and place is what Rilke found in Sierre too: a way not further into the mazes of words, but back to the earth. His revised *Duino Elegies* may not be the poem of conversations with angels he'd planned, but when all that was destroyed, what was left was the impulse itself, this ancient, spiritual earth that in youth we call rock, stone, tree, rain and wind and through which we find poetry. If we devote ourselves long enough to the words, the earth becomes the energy of the universe. If we finally notice, we are like trees in wind.

I walked back down past the gnomes and the old cherry trees growing over new solar panels on the roofs of the houses of Raron. Then I drove to Rilke's house, where the caretaker, who gives no one entrance, let me in.

*Harold Rhenisch has been writing poetry and memoir from the British Columbia Interior for 39 years. His many awards include the CBC Literary Prize and the George Ryga Prize for Social Responsibility in Literature. His *Out of the Interior: The Lost Country* remains a classic of Okanagan writing. He lives in Vernon, where he explores the Okanagan landscape in his blog [www.okanaganokanogan.com](http://www.okanaganokanogan.com)*

# ACCEPTING THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN

**Anita McComas**



Above: Fallen

Below: Lake Reflections

When it comes to my painting, I have become an unknown entity to myself. My patience is unending, my energy level is boundless and time flies. Not even lunch can draw me out of my painting mode (and I do love food!). When I was working those fifty-hour work weeks, and struggling to be the modern woman who could have it all (three kids, white picket fence - you know the story), I could I not have looked down the road to see myself as I am today. There is no way I could ever have pictured standing for endless hours at an easel, unaware of the passage of time. There is something amazing to be discovered by opening up to the creativity within. Something I never even imagined seems to be there, waiting to break out.

I am in the most exciting time of my life; I am looking at everything around me in a new light, imagining how I can incorporate some little thing that has inspired me into a present painting, or the next one. I have even been known to wake myself up at night with an idea about a problem area on an ongoing piece, and creep down to my studio in the quiet of the night because I need to put it there *now!* Whoa!

In my creative journey, I am now in a struggle with the inner me. I am an artist dealing in duality. I am painting two very different styles of work. In trying to describe this, even to myself, I can only relate it to that well studied Chinese theory of light and dark: two opposites, the yang and the yin.

One side of me, the yang, wants to create exciting landscapes or florals that scream with bold unexpected colors, lots of movement and layers of overlapping brushstrokes which will give depth and excitement to the painting. These expressionistic pieces lean towards reality, but with creative exaggerations; I paint every bit of color and energy I can onto the canvas. The paintings seem to have lives of their own. They come into being through pure

inspiration with very little planning. I feel they are driven from a powerful energy within me. Even I am surprised at their final outcome.

Then there is my other side, the 'art undefined', my yin. These pieces seem to grow quietly on the canvas. Through simple stroke work, muted colors, slight changes in tones, and a limited palette, I create calm pieces which let the viewer see deep into the painting without searching through layers and layers of paint.





Top left: Quiet Lake



Top right: Mountain Mist



Above: Endless

These works may be landscapes or completely undefined pieces that just soothe the soul because they are quiet and give off a soothing aura. It is as if these pieces slow me down and balance the energy within me. This is the work hanging as a backdrop in my living room, that space where I go to wind down at the end of a day.

As I begin to look at what I am calling my yin and yang, the interconnected shadow and light that I have within, I am beginning to recognise and accept my natural duality. I see the two opposing sides to the artist within me, the energies which are actually acting as complementary forces balancing my creativity. As I evolve as an artist, I begin to feel a shift in these two sides of me. The 'art undefined' side is becoming a stronger force. Perhaps, I am beginning to look at my creations and ask more questions of myself, or maybe it is that I am letting go of the notions that I have held about art. I don't really even want to look at why. I want to let my understanding evolve; as if in asking too much, I will change the journey.

When it comes to my art, I don't want to be a deep thinker. In fact, I feel that in thinking too much I will stifle the creative energy. If I ask 'why', then I will need to actually come up with an answer that fits the box, defines and labels. I am not comfortable there. I do struggle with myself to go beyond what others will like (hmm...am I a pleaser?). Of course I want people to like my art.

I don't want to know why I paint the way I do. I only recently realized that I can actually have two sides to my paintings; it is another story to really accept this awakening. In perusing the creative side of myself, I am trying to 'just let go', to embrace the yin and yang within my creative self, and to let the passion come through. What a gift it is to be able to follow one's passion.

# FROM OUR READERS

## MY MOTHER IS PAINTING



Mother Checks Out Her Work

Art reaches to the deep corners of the soul and brings us to a place of healing.

My mother was an artist. She always painted in a very detailed and realistic way. She enjoyed the comfort and familiarity of an organized painting. For a few years now, Alzheimer's disease and macular degeneration have robbed her of this joy... this passion she has had all her life.

A couple of months ago I was introduced to an art program for Dementia sufferers run by volunteers at Village at Mill Creek, Residential Care. I was deeply touched and I got inspired.

Through gentle encouragements, I was able to watch my mother "play" with paint again. Mom felt out of her comfort zone with the abstract side of it; it was foreign to her. But the familiar motions of working with the brush slowly came back. I think it brought her a certain peace.

I hope we share many more playful moments with paint. It might feel "out of the comfort zone", but every time it is an adventure.

—*Hélène Letnick (See Mother and Daughter Retrospective, in the Summer, 2012, issue)*

## BIRTH OF AN ARTIST

It all started one Sunday afternoon when MJ and I were up at Big White and she suggested we go down the hill early and drop in to see Brenda and some others who were painting. I had never painted before but knew that the girls had gotten together a few times and painted and had a great time. What really intrigued me about all of this is when MJ came home one day with paint from head to toe and on all her clothes. In addition to the paint all over her, was this huge smile that really said it all, how much fun it was.

As we came down the hill that Sunday, we decided to pick up a bottle of wine and a couple of cans of oysters to take along. The intention was to just pop in and say hi and see what was happening. As it turned out, when we arrived and walked into the *paint room* which was a garage converted over with tarps everywhere to try and protect it, we saw these great happy faces and people with paint all over themselves having a ball. They paused to greet us, as we opened the wine and oysters. Everyone was eager to partake in the offering but they continued to paint. Everyone was happy, relaxed and enjoying the occasion. Before long, MJ and I found ourselves with paint apparatuses in our hands and starting to join in. This was my initiation

into painting. I must say it was a coming out of a shell event for me, but one that I enjoyed, especially with all the encouragement from those around.



Above left: Two Families At Play With Art



Above right: Don't You Worry. I've Got You!

Below: The "Titanic" Pose

They all had huge smiles. I was never sure if it was from watching me, this newbie, or were just seeing happy people doing fun things.

As we went home chatting about what had just happened, how much fun it was, and how much we enjoyed it, we decided to do it again. I had a birthday coming up. We decided that it would be a great way to have our families get together and everyone would participate in a painting. The planning was in place, canvas purchased, paints selected, location decided on, and all participants invited and told only, bring clothes you don't care about!

The day arrived. The location was at the end of the cul-de-sac on the road where we live. Everyone showed up on time, from infant children to grandparents, almost 80-years old, and including teenagers. In all, there were 17 of us. It was time to start.

– *Stafford McKergow*

## SEEING AND SAGE-ING

We have all been friends for over 40 years, stemming back from teenage days. We've woven our lives together, individually and back again, meeting up whenever time permits. In this photograph, I'm enamored by the stunning beauty of the valley view, color hues and the participants all intertwined for a moment in time.

When we climbed atop the highest point of this Okanagan mountain, the first thing my friend strongly wanted to express was the "Titanic" pose. I have always perceived her as being far braver than I in life. She does many things I would only dream of, and thus she motivates me to back away from my own fears.

I took the picture as I once again admire her bravery. I muse that we're all in a new time of life now, where being fearless is not as easy. I know of the fears she faces, yet for me she appears as strength. In the past, she has always



dodged through struggles in life, head up and feet firmly on the floor.

My other friend, her sister - beneath her in the picture - displays a form of strength and support.

She too has come boldly and bravely through many trials and a renewed strength has developed. She admires her sister, 'the rock' grounded in the Okanagan. When she looks at the photo she laments, "So much of my soul is there, too, but I'm always flying away it seems! I've never really thought of myself as particularly brave. Fears are but states of mind!"

As I study the photo, I note how my friend's dogs, gentle spirits, also appear to hold up and support both ladies - like watchdogs. I'm intrigued how this moment, frozen in time by the camera, allows me to glimpse a tapestry of interwoven lives within a family who've been very diverse in their careers, lives and interests, but now weave back in again. Each supports each other and creates a renewed strength and gentleness for life within their spirits and souls.

– Susan Cunning

## AWESOME

"When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." Wayne Dyer

One of the things that was most awesome about all the rain that we got here in the Okanagan this spring and beginning our summer was the opportunity to view the most beautiful rainbows. We are Blessed. A friend took a picture of one beautiful rainbow when it was right above Black Mountain and posted it on Facebook. He was thrilled when I contacted him and told him I was thinking of stealing it and asked if he would let me use it. He loved that I loved it enough to want to steal it.

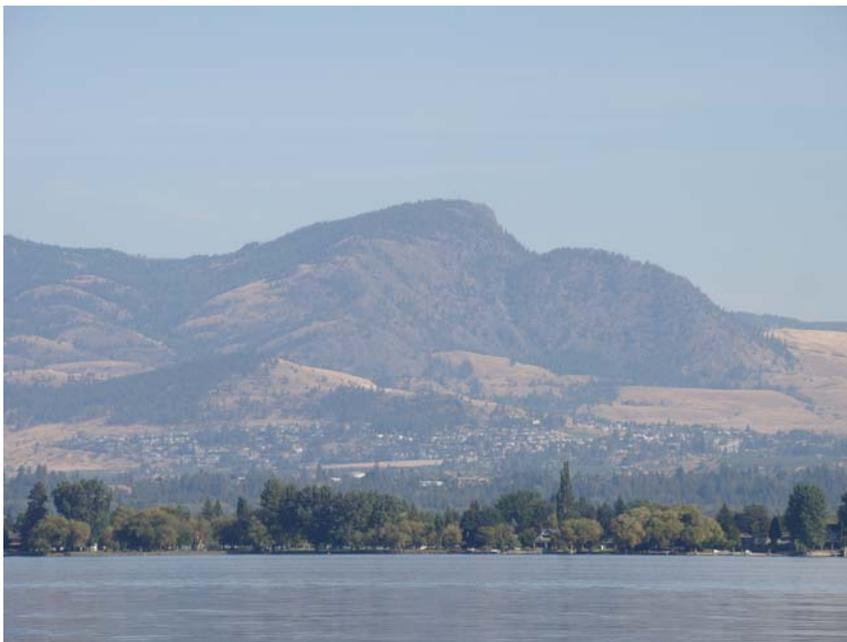
I have been told that Black Mountain got its name because some people believed it looked like a Knight lying on his back and I think the Black part of the name is because of the black silhouette it makes at dusk.

What do you see when you look at these pictures?

I first fell in love with that mountain and that view when we moved to Kelowna in 1978 and rented an awesome house in Casa Loma, right on the lake facing the Black Mountain. There is so much beauty in that scenery, in our nature and all that comes together to create such beautiful images that are there for yours and my pleasure and contemplation. Seeing their reflection is what sage-ing is all about.

Sleeping Beauty and A Rainbow





Black Mountain

One of the pictures I saw when I looked out at those hills, mountains, valleys and pastures was a glimpse at the very top ridge of one of the mountains; the way the trees had grown looked like a row of riders on horseback along the top of the ridge. Imagine what it must have been like for the first people who came over that ridge. The sight of this beautiful valley must have taken their breath away.

I took me a long time to see the Knight that people told me about, but now I can see it anytime I want. I've engaged my creative spirit. (Big Smile)

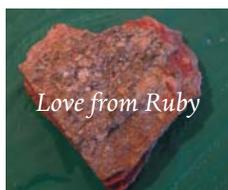
I love to look at the 'the riders' and I love to look at Layer Cake Mountain with the gentle, soft looking grassy area closer to the base of the mountain. It gives me such an easy, peaceful feeling.

One day, 10 or so years ago, I was driving down East Kelowna road and WHOAH!! Just like that. I looked at my beautiful mountain and I saw the most beautiful sight. I was looking at the same mountain I had been looking at since 1978, but I saw it differently. She had been there all along, but I had never seen her, a woman lying on her side facing me. You can follow her body all the way from the top of her hair, head (south) neck, shoulder, waist and hips towards Knox Mountain (north) The highest part is her shoulder. Her arm is bent at the elbow and rests in front of her.

You may or may not see her or the black knight. You may see something totally different. That is what's awesome! The magic of creative spirit is all in the way we look at things - all in the way we see things.

You know what is really awesome. That mountain would have had a totally different name if it had been me naming it. I think I would have named her 'Sleeping Beauty Mountain'. I think this difference in perspective resembles life and what the joy of engaging creative spirit offers. I see things differently when I look at things differently. Life is so very, very AWESOME when we engage creative spirit. What surprises we find!

Yours in Creative Engagement,



# MINING ME: FINDING GOLD

**Brenda Valnicek**



This early spontaneous process painting was the gentle realization for me of the concept broken open.

**I began to change, to embrace my creativity, and to become the carefree child I once was.**

When I retreat back into memories of my childhood, I realize how creative I was. What happened to me?

At age forty-four I got cancer, but I knew having cancer was not me. I began to take a look at many of the life choices I had been making and at my ingrained ways of thinking. From a place of humility and openness I asked: What am I being blind to? Why do I have cancer?

My good friend Karen Close posed the question: How are you being creative? Was I creative? What was I doing that was creative? I realized that I did not consider myself creative, and especially not an artist. If I was dressing myself, or decorating my home or my garden, I followed what others did – and what the magazines were saying. I usually chose a ‘style’ or ‘label’ - or I let a designer choose for me.

Slowly, I began to realize that these choices were a reflection of how I chose to do many things. Rather than going into me, I looked around me. What did others do? What did society think was attractive? What did others like? I would let these considerations influence what I did. Looking back now, I know this is indeed heartbreaking. I realize that I was afraid to mine my inner self and ask the questions: What do I like? What do I want? I was afraid to act from a place of confidence in all of who I am. Even when I got glimpses of my real self, I would usually rationalize these thoughts away, or be too nervous to act. What would others think?

Karen suggested we form an art co-operative. We decided to call it heART Fit. Since February 14, 2008, it has been a place where we have shared new philosophies for me on creativity, definitions of what an artist is and the process of spontaneous process painting. We encourage each other to believe and trust in ourselves, and the supportive process of creativity. As I learned to listen to the whispers from within, they gradually became louder. I am mining gold. From inside me comes compassionate, loving and excited wisdom for all aspects of life.

Through the process I learned that:

- Often my *mistakes* are the best parts of my painting.
- My paintings are full of color and movement.
- The less judgmental I am with myself, the happier I am with the painting.
- Everyone paints differently.

A painting put up in front of a group of 20 people, receives 20 different opinions. Why am I trying to please 20 people when they all have different ideas? I learned that what someone else says about my painting is more a reflection of that person than of me.



Above: I am strong now, supported by my ability to listen to the loving and wise voice within. I am more able to face adversity and not as afraid to make mistakes.

Below: The first time I saw this painting hanging, my heart contracted, but then expanded and began to fill with joy.

Then the real life changes began to happen in my life.

Our home was brown inside and out, and had been designed by a professional. We had no original art and there were mostly prints on the walls. Items were purchased from fancy stores, so that our home would look like what was expected. The home was comfortable, but by copying the 'look' and giving the pleasure of creating the 'look' to others, instead of to me or to my family, we were missing out on the joy of personal expression.

I began to change, to embrace my creativity, and to become the carefree child I once was. I painted our house walls white, and had feature walls of bright colors. Our teenagers loved these changes. As I proceeded, I repeatedly asked myself: What do I like? What gives me joy? What gives my family joy? What ideas whisper to me? When the old doubts and fears surfaced, I remembered the insights I had gained while painting. I realized that just as with a painting, everyone who comes into our home will have their own reactions. Some will find joy, some confusion; some will be judgmental. When guests come into our home, I watch and listen. I realize that their reactions are more about them. Real-life mining does take courage. A good friend once told me, when others are judging, pull out your imaginary lawn chair, shake up your imaginary martini, pour yourself a glass, sit down and watch their reactions.

The art in our home now is our own, and original works by friends. There are even paintings we have done together as a family. We have framed and enlarged photos our teenagers have taken. We have a doodle board - the large old prints turned around to expose a white surface. Beside the board is a container of markers to be used by visitors to write and draw. Sculpture and accessories inspire and remind our family and friends to create. As our family's expression bursts forth, our home has become an organic moving painting which feels full of life and joy. Creativity has changed me and our family dynamics.



This winter, I painted in the garage. I bought large lengths of raw canvas and vibrant house paint. I played, and invited friends to do the same. What wonderful memories and what happy works of art we created. I was going to cut up one of my large canvases into compositions. My husband became determined to stop me. He wanted the large painting for his office! He took down a wall full of diplomas that sat behind him at his desk, moved them to the side, and placed the 5 by 7 foot painting behind him. He says the colors and the happy vibes my painting generates fill him and others with passion. His decision was a gesture of joy and love that has much meaning for me, and for him.

I have found something I was blind to...the authentic brave me, gold. Painting and the gentle voice of my creative spirit has guided me to be me. Now, I am my own colors brightened by the knowledge that this is not only healthy for me, but also for the people in my life. I tend to judge less, appreciate more and realize that there is no need to compete in how I express myself. I feel safer because I am not as affected by others' judgment. I am free to be me. Deep within me was a knowing that the relationship with myself and others had the potential to be outstanding. When I honor my creativity - my individuality - I see this connection of heart that unites. I have been craving this ever since I can remember. Had its absence made me sick?

Creativity allows the pause I need to communicate with myself in a space that is loving and personal, but which also contains universal reverence for all of us. Being creative gives me a place to mine myself, to grow and to experiment. Creativity shows me the way to the deep love within me – the gold.

# FROM THE MIND'S EYE: ART APPRECIATION AND THE SIGHT IMPAIRED

## Ruth Bieber



So, who says people, who are sight impaired can't enjoy art?

It's a warm September 2011 afternoon in Kelowna, and the Okanagan sky is clear and blue, accented only by the rolling mountainous surround. A small group of people can be seen gathering in front of City Hall. To an onlooker, it is apparent that, several of the group members are donning white canes. What is less obvious, potentially surprising, is the reason for the gathering. A car pulls up; the driver is Sharon McCoubrey, key organizer of the Lake Country ArtWalk. Many folks might not yet make the connection, but this cannot be said of Sharon, who had contacted me several weeks prior, asking if I might assist with the organizing of a group of people who are sight impaired to attend that year's Lake Country ArtWalk. Perhaps this gathering helped set the Art For Change theme for 2012 by introducing a new audience to the Visual Arts and a new perspective on art appreciation.

Our group planned to arrive during a quiet point in the day, which allowed for a more personal experience of a select portion of the art exhibits. The first exhibit was a collection of sculptures, described to us by local artist, Lynden Beesley, together with a second artist, Mel Hunt. If I am not mistaken, Lynden's Medusa was a slight favourite; who can resist feeling all those snakes? We were then escorted into the community centre, where Sharon described several pieces of fabric art, which were amazing to the touch. We were quizzed on our tactile abilities, as many of the pieces were representational works of nature scenes, while many others were deliciously abstract.

Well, conventional wisdom dictates that none can, but as so often is the case, convention is short-sighted! In addition to the Lake Country ArtWalk, several tours for blind art enthusiasts have been organized by the Kelowna Art Gallery. Not that all vision impaired tour attendees started as enthusiasts, but at least they were willing. Jeffrey Gartrell, a regular attendee of KAG tours often tells me, "I didn't used to care about art, but now I really enjoy these tours!" Like many people who are legally blind, Jeff had simply picked up on the general consensus, that if you can't see, you can't enjoy the visual arts. So, how does enjoying art work without sight? In the end, it's not so very different for blind people, than it is for the sighted. Think about it, once a



A Labrador Retriever Has Played Many Roles For Humans

sighted person takes a quick look, and I do mean ‘quick’ (the bane of every artist who spends hours on a single painting), what comes next? The viewer looks for the write-up that is supposed to tell us what the painting is all about. When I lived in New York City, and attended my first tours for the blind at MoMA, Guggenheim, Brooklyn Museum, et al, my favourite guide and art educator Georgia Krantz, used to say her blind patrons always had the most interesting comments regarding the meaning of any art piece. That takes brains, not just sight. What’s next? Well, if we haven’t already done so, we research the type of art; abstract, representational, impressionistic and so on. Then we become interested in the political and economic culture of the time of the production of the work; again, here the mind supersedes sight. Knowing the context of a piece of work is essential to really appreciating its meaning, yet those who take visual appreciation for granted often don’t stop to consider a work’s context.

Considering these factors, we realize that enjoying art is less about seeing, and more about thinking. In fact, Gartrell states, “My favorite part about the gallery tours is the gatherings afterward, when we share our perspectives and ideas about the exhibit we just experienced.” Howard Gardner, author and scholar of the multiple intelligence theory reminds us, that art is cognitive in nature. It would be erroneous, if we were to exclude an altogether multi-sensory experience when considering art and blind people. Rather than seeing, the focus often turns first to hearing. It does take a certain amount of skill to be able to describe a piece of art to someone who can’t see. There’s a fine balance between giving too much detail, so as to lose the listener, and not giving enough highlights in order to gain a good mental impression. The staff at the Kelowna Art Gallery receives ongoing training in the “art of talking about art”. It not only includes verbally describing the art exhibit, but also involves training in sighted guide technique, as well as responding to requests, such as enlarging titles of paintings when possible. This was Gartrell’s special request, and I recall how thrilled he was when the

gallery responded favourably by the very next tour for the blind.

We mustn't forget the fact that many legally blind people have some useful vision. This fact can be very confusing for the general public, but very useful if a partially sighted person is allowed to stand close to a painting and take a good, long, hard look. It would be entirely remiss if we didn't refer to the haptic sense. The truth is even sighted people are tempted to touch the paintings, but know they aren't supposed to. Sometimes people who are blind are given special permission to gently brush their fingers over an art piece under supervision, but most often this is not possible. Here the Kelowna Art Gallery staff shines with their imaginative responses, such as creating sample canvases for the touch, and bringing forth touchable items, such as a printmaker and some sculptures, for example. At long last we arrive at the artist him, or herself. Isn't this why we love to attend openings; to meet the creator? This again is no different for people, who are blind or sighted. I'll never forget conversing with John Kissick, a Canadian artist, whose abstract works happened to be on exhibit for the first tour for the blind in Kelowna.

Lake Country ArtWalk 2011 helped shape a movement which is changing the relationship between the sight impaired and the visual arts. This year, at ArtWalk 2012, there will be an exhibit of works by local blind artists; PJ Lockhart, Jason Derkach and Ruth Bieber. Additionally, a special tour is planned for art enthusiasts who are blind and partially sighted on Saturday, September 8. This tour will include a select portion of the total ArtWalk exhibit, as well as the regularly scheduled reception followed by an evening theatre event called *Laugh Until you Change*.

2013 will herald more changes. The Kelowna Art Gallery will host an exhibit of works by blind artists titled, *Just Imagine*. It will open Friday, January 11, followed by a panel discussion on Saturday, January 12. Plan to attend these events and join us as we change perspective on how to enjoy art works! [www.playwithperspective.com](http://www.playwithperspective.com)

**Lake Country ArtWalk 2011 helped shape a movement which is changing the relationship between the sight impaired and the visual arts.**

# THIS IS WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE

## Maureen Lejbak

We all have creative seeds planted in our DNA. If we are lucky enough to recognize these, and heed them at an early age, the flow of life will emerge with the least resistance. For others, hopefully, these seeds blossom later on, in due course. Sadly, for some they never emerge at all. Life has taught me this. Lives will flow more joyfully if you trust your instincts and allow yourself to listen and follow.

Looking back over my life now, I can see that from an early age I enjoyed expressing myself creatively. However, growing up in small town Saskatchewan, spending time in creative pursuits was minimal. The arts were looked upon as hobby activities. There were no art galleries or theatre groups and most parents considered the rock and roll music of the time to be loud and annoying. So I quietly produced drama productions in our basement, setting up elaborate sets and railroading my sisters and friends into acting in my productions.

Fortunately, once in high school, there was a large 'Lit Nite', where the school would produce a drama evening once a year. I gravitated to that like a bee to honey. I finally had an opportunity to channel the creative forces burning inside me. My crowning achievement, and despite encouragement from my peers to carry on, the end to my drama career was winning Best Actress Award in south west Saskatchewan. It felt like the Academy Awards. Oh, how sweet it was.

Alas, with that award also came the time to graduate high school, move on into the real world and prepare myself for a real career. After much thought and soul searching, I decided I wanted to go to Hollywood and become a set designer. I proceeded to tell my parents and teachers my career choice. Unanimously, the response was, "You are being unrealistic here, Maureen". The career choices given to me back then were: secretary, nurse, teacher, airline stewardess or bank teller. None of these choices appealed to me, but instead of listening to my heart, I obeyed. I went to Mount Royal College in Calgary and took a secretarial course. Upon completion of the course, I won a scholarship. I needed to then make another career decision in order to use the scholarship. Once again, I failed to listen to the voice inside me. I was insecure and intimidated by the adults in my life. I went to university and got my teaching degree. Had I listened to my yearnings I would, at least, have been an Arts teacher, but heedless of the seed burning inside of me, I specialized in Business. Consequently, my teaching career was the most unsatisfying and unhappy time of my life. I was not in the zone of my real being.

**Growing up in small town Saskatchewan, spending time in creative pursuits was minimal. The arts were looked upon as hobby activities.**



Painting on some pieces of driftwood which I found on the island.

Auspiciously, universal intervention entered, just as my teaching career was self destructing. My husband got a job opportunity in Kelowna. Thank you, Ron Rubadeau. I decided it was time for me to stand up and say, enough is enough. I am no longer going to blindly follow career choices that do not suit me. I need to be me. My decision was to say no to a job at Okanagan College and to let life take me down a new road. This was a frightening choice. I was in a brand new city with no friends and no job. I was extremely lonely and rudderless.

After soul searching, I decided to volunteer for something creative and exciting. At the time, the biggest event in Kelowna, with the most fanfare, was Regatta. I heard its call. I walked into the Regatta office one day and said, “What can I do?” Two days later a very official director, Don Hills, appeared at my front door, in his regatta attire and said, “Maureen, we need a day for kids at Regatta. Can you put that together for us?” Overwhelmed, but determined, I said yes. I turned to my three-year old son to help me plan a day of fun for kids in our new city. Thus began my amazing creative career. I finally listened to the voice inside. Over the next twenty-five years, by relaxing into the flow of my own being, all the people I needed to meet came into my life. I was following my instinctive force and as a result I was successful in creating *The Fat Cat Children’s Festival* as well as partnering and developing *The Country Bumpkins’ Christmas Show* and a small company called *Creative Concepts*.

## All the world’s a stage

I never got to design sets for Hollywood, but I have decorated many a store window on Bernard Avenue and still decorate Orchard Plaza and the Kelowna Airport every year at Christmas. Over the years I have done the decor for many fundraisers and galas. Most recently, I have been fortunate to work on opening and closing ceremonies for large scale events and businesses in our community.

“... And the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven stages. ...” – *William Shakespeare*

The time came, however, to move on to new ventures and with that came an urge to try painting. After a quiet retreat for a month alone on Mayne Island, I listened and again went with the flow. I bought a few paints and a paint brush and began painting on some pieces of driftwood which I found on the island.

I found the process liberating and expressive of my soul’s yearnings. When I showed these to my friend, Karen Close, she was very encouraging and insisted that I must become heART Fit. Over the past four years, on

Tuesday mornings at the Rotary Centre for the Arts, I join all those who want to explore creating in an intergenerational community where the purpose is to share in creative spirit. When possible, I bring my niece and nephew to encourage them to feel all of who they are meant to be.

When my husband and I travel, I bring my paints so that I can express more easily my inner connection to the beauty or tragedy I see before me. Other times, I relive the adventure by working my photographs or memories into paintings. Last year, to cope with unsettling back pain, I focused my energies on a large painting that embodies our travels. It was wonderful to immerse myself into the painting and thus help my body to heal. I am pain free today.

I am one of the lucky ones. I struggle to call myself an artist as others might define that word, but I do know that the little seed inside me needed to be nourished and cultivated. When I finally listened, it changed my life. This journal, *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* encompasses all I believe in:

“... By taking time and giving attention to creatively respond to what might at first seem ordinary and not deserving of notice, life ripens with significance and meaning. Creative expression is simply the giving of attention. This giving of ourselves fills us with enthusiasm and awe, and we feel compelled to share.” (Summer, 2012, issue)

On his 30th birthday, it felt good to give my son the first of several large paintings that I feel embody his spirit.

Below left: Painting Collage of Our Travels

Below right: Trees Are Our Tallest Teachers





Above left: Evolving

Above right: When Maureen took Rena Rowan's course at the Kelowna Art Gallery, their camera spotted creative spirit in action.



I tell him and all the young people I meet, who will listen to an aging crone, to create the life they want. If your life is a struggle, you are on the wrong path (voice of experience here). Listen to that little voice inside and I guarantee you, your life will flow as it should and the people you need to meet to help you in your journey will present themselves along the way. Trust, and contentment and joy will follow. Maybe being an artist isn't about making a beautiful painting, but rather about making a beautiful life.

ArtWalk board member, Maureen Lejbak turned 65 in August, 2012. Seeking an adventure to carry her forward on the path of creative aging, to feel a merging of spirituality and creativity, she again turned within. Haida Gwaii, Islands of the People, had long been calling her. As she wrote this piece she was packing her bags for these northern B.C. islands. Where this calling will guide her, she is not yet sure, but she knew she had to listen. Perhaps the woman whose *Fat Cat Festival* entertained the youth of Kelowna for over two decades will encourage Kelowna to join Edmonton, Calgary and many U.S. cities who host *Creative Aging* events.

Check them out on the KAG wall.

# CREATIVE WRITING ... CREATIVE DRIVING

## Dona Sturmanis

It is often said people become writers because they have something to say or a certain point of view. I started writing when I didn't have any particular thing to say or a point of view. I relished carving words and wanted to carve an identity.

I became a writer and that became a large part of my identity. There were and are even times when I describe this organic activity as a life raft: when nothing else or no one else seems to exist.

Not only did writing help to form an identity, but form a personality. It was hard for that to take shape growing up under a domineering father who dictated every aspect of my life in detail: what I did, wore, read, listened to, who I associated with, and how I was educated. Think Quaker girl, attending

museum lectures on Saturdays, reading science books, listening to Mozart, spending time with pre-approved friends, being woken at five in the morning to watch physics shows on the public learning channel.

The rebellion was to continually run away from home. Naturally, I was caught and punished every time. This usually meant two extra hours studying math or learning a foreign language from a tape.

The active acts of finding myself began around 12, secretly listening to the underground music of the mid to late 60s (Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead) on my transistor radio, reading books like *Greening of America* and anything by Allan Watts as well as beat poetry. Penning poems and fantasy novels were the perfect silent acts of expression as long as they were not discovered by my father. To keep them undecipherable, I learned how to write them in the Greek alphabet, upside down and backwards no less. It was easy because I am very left-handed. I can still do it to this day.

My science professor father naturally wanted me to be a scientist like he was. In his heart, however,



Dona Sturmanis, MFA Creative Writing, is a long-time professional writer, editor and teacher. In the business for 30 years, she has won 18 different awards for her fiction and poetry. She has taught classes in writing, publishing and presentation at Okanagan College and other venues since 1992. Her workshops are designed to foster trust and self-confidence in personal and public communication, both in writing and presentation.

Dona moved to the Okanagan Valley in 1992 from Vancouver where she already had an established 20 year career as a magazine and newspaper journalist, book editor, publisher, poet and college instructor. She started teaching writing and publishing courses at campuses of what was then Okanagan University College and the Okanagan Summer School of the Arts. She was also the founder of the popular Secrets & Surprises anthology book series about various towns, written by the people who live in them. She has edited, and written for, numerous magazines.

Dona discovered she had breast cancer in late June and has since been starting the rounds of appointments on the way to surgery and treatment, expected to take at least several months. She has a certain amount of savings, but as she is a freelance contractor without a partner or family to help, this will eventually run out. Her goal is to become healthy, hold on to her home, and get back to work as soon as possible.

To aid Dona in her transition, the Okanagan Institute and a group of her friends and supporters are planning a celebration of life on October 4th in Kelowna. More information will be posted on the Okanagan Institute website [www.okanaganinstitute.com](http://www.okanaganinstitute.com)

he was artistic. When sober, he was a carver and caster of jewelry; when drunk, he played an out-of-tune violin.

After high school, I announced I wanted to be a writer and not a scientist. The result was that I had to pay my own way through university without his help. Well, with the help of many waitressing jobs and student loans I eventually got the master of fine arts degree in creative writing at the University of British Columbia, or creative driving as we used to call it.

In the creative driving department, I felt like I had found myself. I also found my people. Here were teachers and students I could relate to: creative, colourful, intelligent, open-minded, witty, all connected to a vibrant, stimulating social scene both on campus and off.

Besides developing craft, everyone's goal here was to get published. Not all writers aspire to this, but in the creative driving department it was penultimate. I became driven and managed to get some of my experiments in poetry published in obscure literary journals.

I was however impatient waiting for acceptances. Opportunity arose to write articles for a well-known Vancouver hippie newspaper and for a national teen magazine, thanks to my boyfriend's older sister, who worked for them in Toronto. I also won a national short story contest, probably more because of the quirky content than the technique (It was heavily edited when it went to print). It was a fiction about hanging out with three gay guy pals on Easter Sunday, rather forward for 1974. The bonuses of these activities were quick print, wide audience and I got paid. Money was much appreciated at that time.

In addition, two other jobs cropped up during the creative driving department period that rooted my future. A summer was spent with some of my colourful student friends producing a weekly arts newspaper on a government grant, complete with smoky office on the tenth floor of a historic Gastown office building and copious amounts of beer in the bar across the street. Through a close friend in the creative writing department, I also got a part-time summer job packing books and reading through the manuscript slush pile at a small press that published literary titles, choosing this over a lifeguarding job that paid twice as much.

To crown it all, I became the first student, first woman editor of the creative driving department's well-reputed literary magazine in my final year of school.

There was no turning back from my writing journey now. My father's consternation was most apparent when I told him I had truly found my calling.

Through all this time, I have retained my identity as a writer, but not always with a trademark point of view like other scribes. The perspective has always remained fluid, arising according to the topic, situation or experience. And that's when the satori or aha moment kicks in without laborious thought: the ultimate reward of being a writer, at least for me. I will always be a creative driver.

# BREATHE IN – BREATHE ART

## Heidi Thompson

For centuries, artists have been using meditation to cultivate intuition, evoke spirituality, manifest visions, and tap into the subconscious. Their studies changed the direction of art in the twentieth century. One of the most famous artists to use meditation was Wassily Kandinsky, the pioneer of abstract painting who believed abstract painting would be the language of the future. His revolutionary ideas continue to influence artists today who seek to awaken viewers to their own deeper being.

I studied art in Europe in the 70s. I investigated various meditation techniques and became inspired by artists like Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Rudolf Steiner and Mark Tobey, who studied Eastern philosophy and practiced meditation. After returning to Vernon, I began to study Breath Awareness and quickly realized the benefits it brought to my life and my art. Like Kandinsky, I began to believe that soul vibrations can be expressed through color, light, and movement and that painting real objects was a thing of the past.

Although I had been painting all my life, meditation became the primary factor responsible for transforming how I paint. My earlier paintings, photographs, and drawings were more realistic. The images expressed what I perceived to be a truthful depiction of the human condition. Many of my images of people were somber and dark. Today, in stark contrast, my art is light-filled and spontaneous. My paintings are vibrant, colourful, energetic,

and totally abstract. Breath Awareness is a simple exercise proven to reduce stress, increase focus, and promote emotional and psychological well-being. It helps to calm the distracted, often disturbed mind and connects us with a sense of tranquility and harmony. It changes how we feel about ourselves, affects the way we see and react to the world around us and can change our relationships and health.

I am fortunate to have found an appreciative audience for my work in both Canada and the USA. Seeing others enjoy my work is not only the most rewarding experience, it moti-

Heidi with Cerulean Blue and Orange  
Yellow Energy





Heidi's New Book *Calm, Focus, Joy*

**My paintings are inspired by nature. I don't paint actual scenes or landscapes, rather I create abstract images that resemble nature.**

vates me to keep painting. [www.heidithompson.info](http://www.heidithompson.info)

My paintings are inspired by nature. I don't paint actual *scenes* or *landscapes*, rather I create abstract images that resemble nature: the earth's crusty and eroded surfaces, the movement and depth of water, the orderly chaos of tangled vegetation and branches, and the infinite space of the deep blue sky.

I want to evoke a purely sensual, vibrational experience for myself and my audience. Experience takes time. A viewer's response deepens if they allow the time to appreciate the sensual fields in my works. Although the intellect initially seems satisfied when it recognizes the familiar, hopefully, my paintings will short-circuit the all-knowing intellect allowing the viewer to experience hard to describe feelings, sensations and energy.

"Indeed, the remarkable thing about her abstractions is the lasting claim they stake upon us. They are magnetic things. They pull us into their orbits, and we are complicit in the making of meaning through contemplation." James Campbell, art critic and curator, Toronto.

In my work, I seek ways to heal dis-ease. I believe that world peace begins with a peaceful mind. I can't say I'm there yet, but I keep trying. Art and people who enlighten and guide me in my search toward knowledge, compassion and peace, are my mentors. My journey with Breath Awareness and art is a life pursuit. I believe that the goal is not to control how or what we create, but rather to simply observe the experience. The value and beauty of art is in its truthful exposure of the artist's state of mind, whether that state is desirable or not. Art mirrors who we are. As we become aware of our unconscious motivations, and mind states manifesting in our work, we gain self-knowledge. Examining our art allows us to eliminate undesirable qualities and nurture the positive. In this way, I believe, artists grow.

At ArtWalk 2012, September 8th and 9th, panels of my painting will be displayed by heART Fit, a local arts co-operative which also urges others to look into the mirror of what they are painting and grow in wisdom by nurturing the positive. HeART Fit believes that, when we embrace this intention as we make art in community, the individual and the community grow in wisdom. I am also delighted to present a fun and informative *hands on* workshop called, Breathe In – Breathe Art. This workshop will introduce participants to how a simple breath awareness exercise can enhance creativity, increase focus, and transform one's creative expression. It is part of my recently published book, *Calm Focus Joy: The Power of Breath Awareness – A Practical Guide for Adults and Children*. [www.calmfocusjoy.com](http://www.calmfocusjoy.com)

# INSIDE OUT

## Carolyn Cowan

For me to be creative to a timetable is more a game of chance with the art gods. Time can pass without interruption of artistic intuition or impulse. When the creative voice does speak, it emerges from a place unbeknownst inside. I have no control over its articulation, direction or timing. This fact was reinforced for me, recently.

At the Tuesday morning art group in late June, at the Rotary Centre in Kelowna, a project is proposed. For those of us interested, we will each paint a 12" x 12" canvas which will, in turn, become part of a painting montage on the theme of *Inner Spirits Speak*. The collective art piece will be displayed as part of the heART Fit exhibit at ArtWalk 2012, in Lake Country, B.C. The individual paintings are for sale to the public at a nominal price. The context for each painting is to illustrate three or four qualities we love about our self. Not qualities we *like*. Qualities we *love*. Accompanying feelings are translated, through painting, onto our square foot canvas over several weeks. That first day, I write a poem, as I normally do with a new piece of art, and begin the painting. The poem accompanies this article.

The resulting canvas is perplexing. I paint instinctively instead of reflecting on the feelings invoked by self-love. When I finish, there was nothing related to beloved traits recognizable in the art piece.

At home, I set the painting on my mantelpiece, as usual, to observe during the upcoming days. My initial reaction is *Now, that's an angry sky!* Still, I like the painting. It captures my imagination. So, I return the following Tuesday to see if I can lighten the aesthetics? As I start to paint, I contemplate the physicality of laughter and the happiness it brings me. Suddenly, my brush strokes become confident, and deliberate. I feel free. I am in touch with the source, the creative, the *eternal now*. There is nothing wrong with the painting. It is simply the right painting at the wrong time, although the poem reflects the project criteria. Yet, the poem and painting grow out of the same source in time and space from within?

When I first see the fury in the painting, I think I must have been very angry the previous Tuesday, and not recognized the anger? As I consider this explanation, realization surfaces. I have just returned from a 10-day trip around Alberta. I drove from Kelowna to Calgary for seven hours, while the sky opened her fury and pummeled my car with rain; during most of the week, while I visited family in Calgary, it rains. I drive down to Pincher Creek, in southern Alberta, to visit friends and listen to Cowboy Poetry. It poured rain. I set off to drive back to Kelowna across southern B.C., and fought against pounding rainfall for close to 10 hours.

The sky was indeed angry. Black, ominous clouds dumped rain, day after day. The visual is fixed in my imagination. And so the image of the sky in a

## My My

Carolyn Cowan

What lovely insides I have.

Laughter and fun compete with  
Solemnity for time and space.  
Most often, the combat settles with  
Laughter sitting firmly on top.

Care.  
Do others carry  
Compassion as deeply?  
Of course, but  
I know only of mine.  
It manifests itself  
From a source of strength,  
Not of niceness.  
That's important to me.

Kindness, a quality I believe  
Inherent in my nature  
But  
Not one I can be certain of  
For myself.  
Some qualities are best left  
To others to see  
And for us to simply be.

## UNTITLED

Carolyn Cowan

And yet they say  
It lay there  
In lower case,  
Waiting for fate to  
Fulfill its promise.



An Angry Sky

continual state of fury flowed onto my canvas the first Tuesday back. Instead of painting what I expect, I painted the vision from my subconscious. It is tangible proof, to me, that creativity finds its own voice at its leisure. Considering the result from another angle, through an artistic outlet, a fragment of the subconscious can become conscious. Once the image has worked its way onto the canvas, I am able to concentrate on the ArtWalk 2012 project. What are those qualities most appealing to me about my personality? Can I translate personality traits into a painting?

### Laughter

My number one quality is my most redeeming. It is the immense pleasure I get from laughing, making others laugh and having fun in life. Laughter is a great counterbalance to the serious and overly sensitive part of my nature. In fun, I am my favourite target with enough material presented daily to keep me amused at my own foibles. Laughter requires no audience. If I run out of material, I branch out to the closest person around. I love to tease and be teased. Teasing seems most humane to me. It shows a natural human affection for another person. To work, teasing requires a joint instinctive acknowledgement of play. One lesson, still to be refined, is to choose my targets of play more carefully. Occasionally, I select someone who stares blankly back at me with eyes and an unsmiling expression that say, *What are you talking about, woman?*

### Compassion

The second quality I love about myself is care and compassion for our fragile, endlessly inventive and beleaguered human race. I hold fast to compassion for others because they are me. I don't compete with anyone for a compassion title. I am simply enormously grateful that I care about and empathize with others. Compassion draws me to celebrating another's happiness. At other times, it is to offer caring support to another when life throws its inevitable curve balls.

### Kindness Matters

It's important to self-knowledge that I distinguish between qualities that others are best left to decide versus ones I *know*, through reflection and experience, about myself. I *know* that I love to laugh and *know* that I care



Inside Out

about other people. I cannot *know* or say with assurance that I am kind. Kindness can be mistaken for weakness or, that most dreaded word, niceness. On the reception desk at my Chiropractor's office sits a plaque that reads, *Kindness Matters*. And so it does! Kindness is, I believe, a quality we cannot know about our self. Rather, kindness is what we do, whether or not anyone realizes it. If we *know* or believe we're being kind, we probably aren't. Kindness is a quality that only others can observe about us. It is best left that way, untainted with expectations or a need for reciprocity.

### Honesty

If I have a fourth quality, it's honesty. It's not a trait, though, that I love about myself as honesty comes with its own set of complications. I try to be honest with myself, about myself and with others. Honesty is tricky, a complex characteristic, fraught with mine-

fields. Often, people don't want an honest response – solicited or unsolicited - or they can become angry, or their feelings are hurt. Furthermore, I may not be right or only partly right in my assessment. The result for me is that I usually end up feeling guilt. I can only hope that if someone likes me, they'll put up with the annoying parts to spend time occasionally with the good parts. Those people I most admire are diplomatic with their honesty. It is a combination well worth maturing into.

The creative force, in action, still amazes me. Not because of its, more or less, greatness but because a creativity flow seems to work! As noted above, my finished painting is to include three cherished characteristics: laughter, compassion and kindness. I began the painting in the Tuesday art group but continued the intuitive work on the painting at home, outside on my patio. The *L* for laughter was intuition. I began by using joint duct tape and instinctively extended it into a large *L* shape. I used the same intuitive process for the other two traits. I sat quietly and allowed the feelings associated with the emotion to surface onto my paint brush on the canvas.

When I finally looked at the almost finished product, I realized that it miraculously represented my original intent. It may take, a little or more, imagination for you to see what I see in the painting.

Isn't an individual interpretation what art is all about?

# ART FOR CHANGE

**Linda Lovisa**

## Born to Create



We are all naturally born to create. But somehow we define art, and creation as something only for those who are *naturals* or are *born* with talent.

Being naturally born to create, it's what you do with that energy as you grow: you can grow into it, or grow away from it. I see with many of my students that if you grow away from it, someday it will call you back. Perhaps you feel or felt that life is too busy to create (you know, the kids, working full time, never any time for yourself, and so on). There were a million reasons that there wasn't time and time trickled away.

A day comes along that finds you searching for what has been missing. You wake up and realize that it is your yearning to create. It is the arts.

There is a longing for creative expression in all of us. It could be any one of the many art forms available at your fingertips writing, music, dance, theatre, or the visual arts. In your search, you will discover a whole new world out there. All of your senses will be awakened. You'll notice colours that have been around you all your life! The music created by the wind gently blowing through the trees makes you pick up a pen to write a line or two. The sound of a certain guitar reminds you, I've always wanted to play.

The urge will come when you least expect it. There will be a day when you begin to explore how you'd like to express your creative self. It's never too late. There is an urgency to start your journey now. Leaving behind thoughts like, I have no talent, you must ask yourself if you have really searched and tried to create? It's your journey and your job to look and find where your talent lies. Enjoy the journey that the exploration brings. You will surprise yourself!

Maybe your path doesn't lead to theatre or music; it could be calligraphy or photography. Perhaps it's more than one discovery that leads you into illustration, writing and creating your own book!

## Reflections: an Inspiration Journal

A new book is what I created. The title is Reflections: an Inspiration Journal. It's due out mid-September, 2012.

Over the years, experience with my own sketchbooks and journals found me doodling in both. My idea for the book was to produce a collection of favourite works and moments. The journal has explorations that foster creativity with prompts and inspirational thoughts. Each painting is followed with blank pages where the readers can create and develop their own working journal. Twenty of my paintings are inserted throughout the



Top: In My Studio

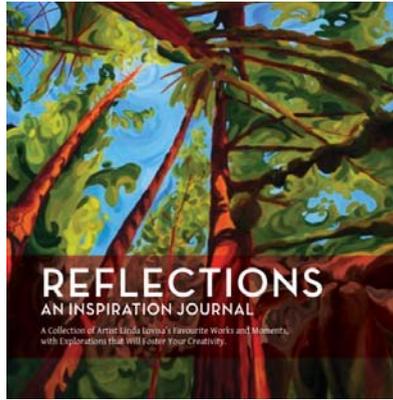
Above: Antler Totem



Top left: The Storm

Top right: New book, due out mid-September, 2012

Above: Afternoon Light in the Forest



journal with my inspiration for that painting, techniques and prompts for you to explore. The book reflects the teaching in my art classes.

Reflections: An Inspiration Journal is designed to inspire creativity in a number of ways: creative writing, collage, photographs, sketching with ink, pencil, charcoal or watercolours.

A lot of thought was put into the construction of the book. Its size, 8"x 8", and spring binding allows this journal to function as a portable workbook. It's not dated, so you can work through it at your own pace.

### Cross Pollinating Creativity

The wonderful thing that happens in the arts is that you discover one area and it leads into more and more. The arts weave one into the other. It's magical. There are areas to grow when you thought you've done it all. What a feeling! Invigorating!

Creation brings a renewed excitement to everyday life. It's something to look forward to and lose yourself in. The creative way to wellness is guilt free. You deserve to treat your brain, your body, your inner self and the soul in a respectful way, remembering that we are all born with talent and to be creators. It's up to you to find your way! Start by putting art into your daily routine, like having your morning coffee or walking the dog.

### New Moon Art Gallery

Linda Lovisa owns *New Moon Gallery* and *Natural Transitions Art Studio* in West Kelowna, British Columbia. She is a visual artist who works full-time painting and teaching in her studio. Linda promotes local area artists in her gallery while sharing her talents in various mediums, including acrylics, watercolours and pastels. Classes are offered all year round in the studio. Please stop by the gallery for information or check her web site at [www.newmoonartgallerykelowna.com](http://www.newmoonartgallerykelowna.com). Reflections: An Inspirational Journal will be available online for pre-sales and at the New Moon Gallery mid-September. You can reserve your copy at the Gallery or through Linda's website. Linda is pleased to be participating in ArtWalk 2012. Please stop by to say hello!

# WORDS FROM THE HEART

## A GIRLHOOD

Susan McCaslin



Susan McCaslin is an award-winning Canadian poet and educator who taught English and Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster, British Columbia, from 1984-2007. Her work has appeared in literary journals across Canada and the States. Her most recent volume of poetry, *Demeter Goes Skydiving* (University of Alberta Press, April 2011), was nominated for the B.C. Book Prize (Dorothy Livesay Award) and the winner of the Alberta Book Prize (Robert Kroetsch Award) in 2012. She has recently published a volume of essays titled *Arousing the Spirit: Provocative Writings* (Woodlake Publishing, 2011).

Susan has been writing poetry since the age of twelve. Freed to be a full-time writer since 'retiring', she lives in both Fort Langley and Victoria, British Columbia, with her husband and an active Australian Shepherd. [www.susanmccaslin.ca](http://www.susanmccaslin.ca)

Hazel eyes, clear pale skin,  
a dolphin's nudging of the shoals of air

and you so desperately wanting to be good,  
good as you could be

Arduous labour to complete the tasks,  
sorting of seeds coarse and fine

hoping someone might notice—  
God or some imagined prince

carried on beauty's flood;  
yet not knowing yourself, hazel eyes, pale skin

a dolphin's nudging of the air,  
and so desperately wanting to be good

and labouring arduously to finish  
the tasks, the sorting

of seeds and seeds and seeds  
coarse, fine, wet, dry

hoping someone kind would notice—  
God—or that dear

imaginal prince

and now at sixty-five  
you are prince and maiden too

unscarved, naked, alert,  
wild wind turning where it will

into the reclining Christ and his bride  
deeply asleep in a storm-tossed skiff

all external weather gathering  
around some central calm

## NOT LOGICAL

Antoinette Voûte Roeder

Logic will not  
show the way.

Reason won't  
provide a map.

Some things can never  
be explained.

The heart's flight  
the spirit's dance  
take place somewhere  
beyond our ken

can only be sensed,  
perhaps described  
by poetry and paints

not with  
the machinations  
of the mind.

Antoinette Voûte Roeder, M. Mus., is a poet and spiritual director in Edmonton, Alberta. She facilitates retreats and workshops on writing and poetry, prayer and meditation, spirituality and mystics. Antoinette is passionate about the earth, people, poetry, and music. Her two volumes of poetry, *Weaving the Wind* and *Still Breathing* are available on Amazon.ca.

## THE GIFT

Harold Rhenisch

A girl who plays the piano with the ease of water  
falling over seams of soapstone under yellow birches,  
plays the memory of her great grandfather, who played Chopin  
during a war that made a whole generation abandon  
music and authority. The most hated man in Silesia  
learned it among the mines in Poland, where workers choked  
in cramped tunnels, with water beading on ruined stone.  
The girl does not know this man, but plays with his fingers.  
It is a kind of memory, much discussed in the greenhouses  
and winter gardens where every flower is remembered  
in the seed and the seed in every flower. The mind  
blooms while snow falls against the coloured glass of the windows,  
and each struck key is a tiny hammer of snow, striking glass  
and shattering just as it slips into silence, and enters us  
where we listen without a thought in our heads, only this  
deep attention to the things of this world, that move  
through us and through which we move.

Harold Rhenisch article, titled *Creatures of Light*, is published in this journal, as well. He has been writing poetry and memoir from the British Columbia Interior for 39 years. His many awards include the CBC Literary Prize and the George Ryga Prize for Social Responsibility in Literature. His *Out of the Interior: The Lost Country* remains a classic of Okanagan writing. He lives in Vernon, where he explores the Okanagan landscape in his blog [www.okanaganokanagan.com](http://www.okanaganokanagan.com)

# VOLUNTEERING: CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND DEMENTIA

**Jenny Sato**

Convinced that creativity is healthful for body and soul and certain that it is innate, Karen Close and I were open to ways in which this notion could be shared with community. A year ago, the activity coordinator at Village at Mill Creek, a residential facility, indicated that she would like to start a painting program for residents who are cognitively impaired. Previous attempts to teach painting had not succeeded because of residents' inability to grasp concepts and retain new information.

Karen and I offered to assist – she, to offer practical knowledge of painting and I, to support the residents. Karen was able to gather several volunteers, many through the HeART Fit program, to assist for an hour each Monday afternoon. This hour came to be called, *Playing With Paint*. We do, indeed, play. There are no expectations of outcome; we simply enjoy the process. The volunteer needs no specific art education, but must be open to seeing the process as exploration. There are no *mistakes* needing correction, for the work is what it is. Sometimes, a resident can verbalize his intent, sometimes not. Sometimes, he or she needs a little help getting started, so the volunteer may help him to choose a colour to begin.

The following accounts tell of volunteers' encounters with residents, one in the painting group and another in a home setting. We envision that creative activity might be carried out by home-visitors if a senior is unable to join similar activities in the community. What potential for creative expression might we be able to tap by the presence of a volunteer bringing art supplies to the senior's home?

The idea of creative engagement, even when one faces many challenges in later years, is distinctly exciting. Even as words fail and thought becomes disjointed, the ability to create remains.

In September, we will be assisting SunPointe, a residential facility in Rutland, to start a painting program on Thursday afternoons. *Playing With Paint* needs volunteers for all its programs. Would you like to join us and help someone to tap into his/her creative self? Please contact Jenny at 250-763-3845 for more details.

**Engagement with creativity brings benefits both for those with dementia and for those who share their experience.**

**People's artistic and imaginative responses can remain strong for years after the onset of dementia.**

# VOLUNTEERING WITH HEART

**Kyla Ramirez**

I have spent time with my young daughter at heART Fit, which is a place to draw, paint, and create without the need for guidance or the idea of proper technical teaching before beginning to create something. The sessions were a great opportunity to be with my daughter and to watch her create with complete abandonment. She has no judgment towards herself - the bonus of only being two and a half years old! The challenge was for me to allow myself to create without self-judgment. I am not artistic, as society deems an artist. But I've realized I can create. The idea of heART Fit is that there are no rules, no guidelines – you're free to just create. I get to be the two and a half year old, in a 38-year old body, creating lines and colors on paper - just being.

My days at heART Fit prepared me for my incredible experience a couple of weeks ago while painting with dementia patients at the Village At Mill Creek seniors' facility in West Kelowna. I want to share this with you. The clients of Mill Creek are all at varying levels of their illness. Each week, the clients who come vary, depending upon who is interested in coming to paint that day. We do get the *regulars*, but often there are a few new clients who decide to join. On this day, one of the new clients was quite distraught. She was confused and anxious. One of the employees was trying to calm her down with discussion and an explanation of where she was and what we were all doing in this place. When the employee wandered off, the client became more anxious. I decided to sit with her and see if she wanted to paint. She was calmer when I was speaking with her, but still uncertain about her surroundings and she couldn't focus on the paint in front of her. She also seemed apprehensive about not knowing what to do with the paint. Her questions were repetitive and you could feel her anxiety throughout. I considered what I had experienced at heART Fit. Meanwhile, another client came in and needed a place to sit, so I asked her to join us, as well. You could see that initially she did not want to join us, due to the anxiousness of the other client, but she sat down despite her concerns, and tried starting a conversation to help ease this woman's anxiety. As all three of us were talking, I started playing with the watercolors on the paper and showing different things that you can create, just with fingers, without using paint brushes. The woman who was feeling anxious didn't want to paint. She kept saying, I don't know what to do with this. I remembered seeing another volunteer use a technique I decided to try. I asked her to hold the paintbrush with her favorite color on it and I moved the paper around while she held the brush. She was creating! As we continued to add colors and movement, she became more and more calm and eventually quite proud of what she had created. It was incredibly

**When I saw how a little bit of paint and a couple of my hours a month can help ease these senior's pain, even for a short while, I ask, Why wouldn't we help?**



Creativity Engages

touching to see her eyes fill with a sense of accomplishment and joy. She created not only one but two paintings while we chatted and created together. The three of us got into this little zone of creating together - painting, not thinking. The chatter and anxiety lessened while we created.

We painted without being so-called artists; we created our masterpieces! It was absolutely rewarding to see this woman become calm and feel less pain, and it all happened with a little bit of patience, paint and the desire to be part of community. When I think of the number of people who are in homes and have been diagnosed with dementia, it is overwhelming. There are so many people who feel distraught and anxious on a daily basis. We are told the numbers will increase dramatically in the years ahead. When I saw how a little bit of paint and a couple of my hours a month can help ease these senior's pain, even for a short while, I ask, Why wouldn't we help?

When I heard about volunteering with dementia patients, I was excited at the opportunity to be with the elderly. My Nana was a great guidance in my life. I have

always felt a closeness and respect for people who are older than I am. Although we are an increasingly aging population, we seem only vaguely aware of, or interested in, the elderly. We deal with our seniors very differently than in many other cultures. Assisting dementia sufferers through *Playing with Paint* has brought me an interesting dynamic to volunteering. I am pleased to have been given a way to enjoy being with seniors and share in a happy time with them. I believe that volunteering is a way to be a part of a community. Volunteering is what *community* truly is.

# ANOTHER WAY TO VOLUNTEER

**Karen Close**

The success of *Playing With Paint* at The Village at Mill Creek brought an invitation to start another chapter of the program at SunPointe. When program coordinators came to discuss how to begin, we were told about Anne Davies who had recently moved into the village. She and her husband, Ken, had moved to Kelowna six years ago. Within a few years, Anne began showing symptoms of dementia. In earlier times Anne had enjoyed a successful and exciting period of self exploration and reflection through painting. Her creative spirit wasn't something her husband understood, but he had always been supportive as best he could, even as the disease advanced. When the decision came that Anne should move to SunPointe, her husband thought she might settle better with some of her paintings in this new environment. Synchronistically, it was one week after he had brought some of her works to SunPointe that we visited. We were all instantly intrigued with Anne's works and the pleasure she revealed when she looked at them. I asked to speak with her husband and discovered that their home is quite near mine and that Anne comes home each Sunday. I asked if I might try painting with her and was warmly welcomed.

**The power of image making is that it allows an individual living with dementia to express herself or himself in ways that are satisfying and communicate with others; that the made image does not disappear and can be rediscovered.**

Research indicates that the power of image making is that it allows an individual living with dementia to express herself or himself in ways that are satisfying and communicate with others; that the made image does not disappear and can be rediscovered. Whilst such self-expression may have diagnostic significance, it is the ways in which creativity allows a person with memory loss to transcend the isolation she or he may be feeling, work through issues still troubling her or him, and enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction of the process of creating.

Anne and I have spent three Sundays painting together. Our relationship is just beginning. She needs me to be sensitive to her emotional and physical fluctuations, but there have been great moments of laughter and sharing. I loved it when she announced, "Oh I feel all perky." She and I are exploring how *Playing With Paint* could design a much needed at home program for families living with dementia. On our first day I loved her suggestion that we attach the small figure of Big Bird, with his palette, brush and beret right on to the painting.

A longitudinal study of human development was carried out at Harvard University over six decades. The study led Dr. George Vaillant, a medical doctor and current coordinator of the project, to the conclusion that, "In retirement ... creativity, like play, should be a primary goal." Vaillant in his book, *Aging Well*, gives an account of the longitudinal study, and his finding



Big Bird Orchestrates

that for successful aging, whether with or without physical illness, creativity is essential. “Creativity allows us not just to wish upon a star, but to throw ourselves into life ... creativity provides a means of containing wonder as well as a means of resolving conflict.”

*Playing With Paint* is looking for volunteers who are ready to spend an hour a week assisting with their valuable programs. Each of us possesses the skills needed to share creatively with another, but an orientation session will commence in mid-September. To enroll, please email [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)

# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Edited by Karen Close  
& Carolyn Cowan

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Email [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)

According to one of Canada's most influential scholars, Marshall McLuhan, "I think of art, at its most significant, as a DEW line, a Distant Early Warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it." Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude is a volunteer publication of the Okanagan Institute. This quarterly journal is intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. The theme, Art For Change, became a point of union for arts advocacy between ArtWalk 2012 and the Okanagan Institute. The journal presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement, and is focused on honouring the transformational power of creativity. ArtWalk and the journal hope that your perspective on the arts and creative engagement might also change as you read stories of Okanagan artists, experienced and emerging, who engage in art for the joy of stimulating personal and community wisdom and well-being.

Sage-ing gratefully thanks ArtWalk 2012 for subsidizing the printing of hard copies.