

A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close & Carolyn Cowan

NUMBER 8, SUMMER 2013

SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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



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A PUBLICATION OF THE
Okanagan Institute

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Cover painting: see page 7.

MISSION STATEMENT

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Contributor Fay Wilkinson ponders the question many are considering. "As I navigate my own senior years, I wonder what role expressive arts has in my ageing gracefully and living fully?" Her article addresses a growing consciousness within herself, and her community, to explore creative fitness in the adventure of ageing.

Written one hundred and eighty years ago, the poem by Lord Tennyson about the

ageing Ulysses yearning to explore again, foreshadows today's seekers:

"... I will drink
Life to the lees:
... I am become a name:
For always roaming with a hungry heart ..."

Today, however, many are exploring within. The hungry heart is the seat of creative spirit. It beats until the last breath. Approaches to intuitive, spontaneous, creative expression, and a growing understanding of expression that bypasses conscious thinking, are at the forefront of brain research. Personal integrity and wellness expand when we divert the critical mind that is a barrier to the wisdom of the unconscious. Adventuresome creative expression reveals your consciousness, how you create your life, how you make choices and what is going on inside of you. Know yourself. Be yourself. Love yourself. Share yourself. Pan the gold a lifetime brings.

In this, our eighth issue, we are pleased to welcome Salt Spring artist and educator, Lisa Lipsett. Lisa will become a regular contributor sharing *Creative by Nature* theories and exercises.

As well, we're starting a new section, titled *From the Memory Vault*. It's a place for writers who wish to explore a memory from childhood that is deeply embedded in their psyche; a memory that outshines others for reasons we may or may not understand. The memory is often ordinary, not profound, yet it persists with us through the years, and especially into our older years.

In this and the next two issues, Dr. Dalia Gottlieb-Tanaka will share her research into creative expression in the care of dementia. Spreading awareness of emerging research will lead to a re-evaluation of creative expression and how to integrate it into our lives. Creative ageing means finding our own special way to express who we are and what we think. The arts are not a commodity to be purchased, or a reserved status for a special few. The arts are how we share with each other and communicate who we are and what we yearn for. Engaging in the arts is engaging with our own wisdom and well-being.

"The thing is to become a master, and in your old age to acquire the courage to do what children did when they knew nothing." – Ernest Hemingway

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CREATIVE BY NATURE ART BOOST

Lisa Lipsett, Ed.D.

“Life’s solutions lie in the minute particulars, involving more and more individual people daring to create their own life and art, daring to listen to the voice within their deepest, original nature, and deeper still, the voice within the Earth”, Stephen Nachmanovitch

For years, I dabbled in drawing and watercolour painting, carefully recreating the beautiful plants and trees around me in finely wrought images, but something always felt missing. I longed for more depth, connection, meaning and artfulness in my day to day. I longed for creativity to become a way of life. It was not until a cool rainy morning in 1997, when I drew and painted a vase of tulips, that everything changed. The tulip painting was technically fine, and the colours were beautiful, but somehow both the act of painting and the resulting image didn’t express the life I could sense in those flowers.

Out of sheer frustration, I followed the impulse to paint the way the tulips felt instead of the way they looked. Until that day, it had never occurred to me to paint a resonant feeling connection with another living being. I simply set that intention, sat quietly, closed my eyes and using my hands, painted whatever came. The painting was not what I expected, yet I loved it instantly. It was not only the vibrant colours and unique shapes that I loved, I also felt blissfully nourished by the process itself.

I was enchanted by the sense that something normally unseen was magically brought to light and was excited by the infinite possibilities that feeling painting provoked. I was inspired to explore further.

I wondered what would happen if I simply began recording feelings, then painted with no plan. Each day I began with a journal entry and used that writing as a jumping off point for a painting. Over time, I developed tricks (like closing my eyes and using my non-dominant hand). This painting process helped soften my planning mind, and guided me to trust what came spontaneously. Practising the process slowly released the tension between what I was taught to think and do when making art, and encouraged me to pursue what felt natural in the moment. Paint gave colour and form to my felt experi-



first tulip painting





next tulip painting

I firmly believe in the necessity of everyone strengthening their creative fitness as a way to enrich their emotional and spiritual well-being.

ence. I watched in rapt fascination as images transformed over time. Thinking was balanced with feeling, sensing and intuiting. I learned how to attune to nature using art as a bridge. Soon I came back to life with renewed connection, creativity and gratitude.

Now I share what I've discovered with others through the Creative by Nature *Art Boost* - a program of nature inspired activities to ignite a new creative habit. I am so happy to be sharing this practice with *Sage-ing* readers.

The life spark of a seed at the moment of germination, the undulations of a pine bough in a stiff breeze, the meandering line of an ant in the

cool earth, the spontaneous play of a child and human creative expression are all part of nature's creative language; a language which is spontaneous, embodied in the moment, engaged, and artful. It is a language that nourishes a resilient fit between all members of the earth community. Through creating, we not only express our fit with nature in the moment, we also strengthen this fit as we develop a habit that nourishes us for a lifetime.

In his book, *On Creativity*, physicist David Bohm describes art making as a "fitting together" or to "fit", and "beauty" as "to fit in every sense". By creating with nature and self we not only gain aesthetic satisfaction by making something we love, we speak nature's language and feel the beauty of connection with other beings. Archetypal psychologist James Hillman says, "Beauty is not physical, it is within the act of connection, it is breathing into our beings other life".

Wherever I go I carry around an art kit comprised of a folded watercolor book, a paint box, two pens and a water container. *Directions and a video on how to fold a Creative by Nature book can be found at www.creativebynature.org* With my kit readily available, I can drop deeply into any setting to connect, and then create. I renew my energy, soften my heart, deepen my connection to other living beings and quiet my mind. Drawing and painting for the last 15 years has strengthened my sense of belonging, deepened my understanding of nature, sparked my curiosity and wonder about how nature works, and heightened my sensitivity to patterns, textures, and cycles of the living world. I have been awakened to the potency of creativity to attune ourselves to the world around us. I now have immense respect for art as a way to know. I firmly believe in the necessity of everyone strengthening their creative fitness as a way to enrich their emotional and spiritual well-being.



Red Granite

Seafoam II

THE CREATIVE BY NATURE, ART BOOST PROGRAM

There are three phases to the Creative By Nature (CBN) Art Boost. First, we learn to track something we love with our senses, hands, eyes, and bodies while we express our experience through drawing and painting. We track a plant or animal in the moment and keep track of the encounter with colour and image. Then, we spend time working from the inside-out exploring our inner landscape through spontaneous drawing and painting as it relates to body sensation, feelings, inquiry and intention. In the third phase, we intermix outside-in creating with inside-out spontaneous creating to experience the boundless fluid dance between the two. I also emphasize the following four ways to work.

CLOSED EYES

"I shut my eyes in order to see." - Paul Gauguin

When we create with our eyes open, we can be seduced by the idea of creating something in particular. With eyes closed, we flow and feel the sensations associated with a nature connected creating. By moving away from the outward grasping habit of seeing, we open to a fresh way of relating. If we can't see what we're doing, then judgments soften and expectations fall away. Other senses kick in and we pay more attention. We can move beyond surface details and no longer see nature as simply another pretty picture. We let go of our need to control an image and move aside as it is born before our eyes.

BOTH HANDS

"Let your hands be your eyes." - Ruby Elena

We draw and paint with both hands and paint without brushes. We open to the wholeness of ourselves when we create with both hands. Both right and left brains are invited into the creative process. Materials bridge between the creator and nature when we follow where the hands spontaneously lead. Creating without brushes is often surprising and relaxing as the mind sinks into the textures and sensations of succulent coloured hands and fingertips. We learn to trust the wisdom of our bodies.

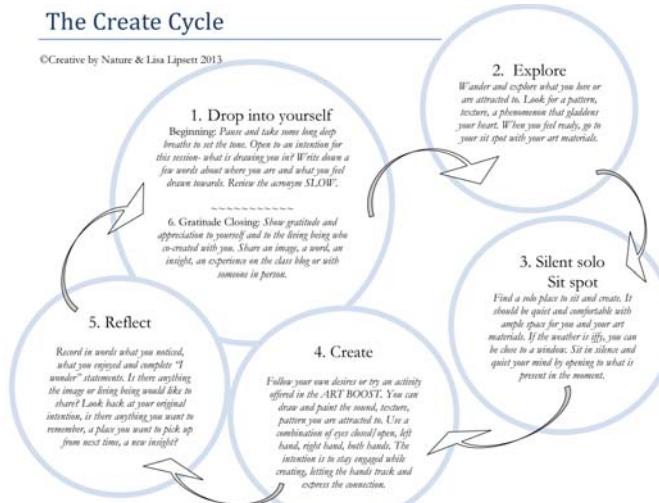
LET NATURE AND IMAGES SPEAK

"Everything has its own voice. Thunder and lightning and stars and planets, flowers, birds, animals, trees" - Thomas Berry

When we are finished drawing and painting, we often ask an image or a natural being if there is anything it would like to share. Then we record the answer. We also take time to reflect when we complete the sentences, I noticed.... and I wonder... . The *Art Boost* program develops a new way of listening, characterized by no preconceived notions about what nature might be trying to say and how it might be trying to say it. We open to receive messages and to fully listen again to ourselves and nature.

The Create Cycle

©Creative by Nature & Lisa Lipsett 2013



4. The Create Cycle I use.

we engage with nature with appreciation, wonder, humility and gratitude.

GRATITUDE

"If the only prayer you said in your whole life was thank you, that would suffice." - Meister Eckhart

We begin and end a session with reverential mindfulness towards nature and the creative process. We ask for permission to engage and we say thank you or express our gratitude in some way when we are finished. Sometimes we can be chosen by a plant or animal. At other times we follow what attracts. Either way we engage with nature with appreciation, wonder, humility and gratitude.

THE SLOW APPROACH TO DRAWING AND PAINTING

S- be silent at your sit-spot. Go slowly so you can remain in connection with a sound, texture, pattern or some other aspect of nature.

L- follow what you love. Work only with what you love. Be loving and kind to yourself and others as you create. When drawing and painting, use one continuous line. Really listen.

O- open to the sound, texture, pattern that you are working with. Work with opposites together (for example draw and paint at least some of the time with both hands).

W- maintain a curious state of mind. Let your senses wander. Use your whole brain by working with both hands equally, and eyes closed part of the time.

I recommend that you keep the basic cycle the same and change only one small thing each session. Don't be afraid to try the same creative task repeatedly over a number of sessions. While creating, be an archaeologist of your own experience. Watch what helps you stay in the flow and what jars you out again. The more you follow your in-the-moment attractions, the less time you spend in the planning mind, and the deeper your connection.

From these beginnings I later develop works in my studio.

In my second article with the *Sage-ing with Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude journal*, in September, I will share an eight-day practice you can try.

Learn more about Lisa Lipsett's work at www.LisaLipsett.com

Creative by Nature Center- an on-line network with classes and event information:

www.creativebynature.org

Art: www.Lisalipsettimages.com

Blog – The Drive to Create: www.thedrivetocreate.com

AN EXPRESSIVE ARTS ADVENTURE

Fay Wilkinson

Expressive arts promotes personal growth, healing and community development.

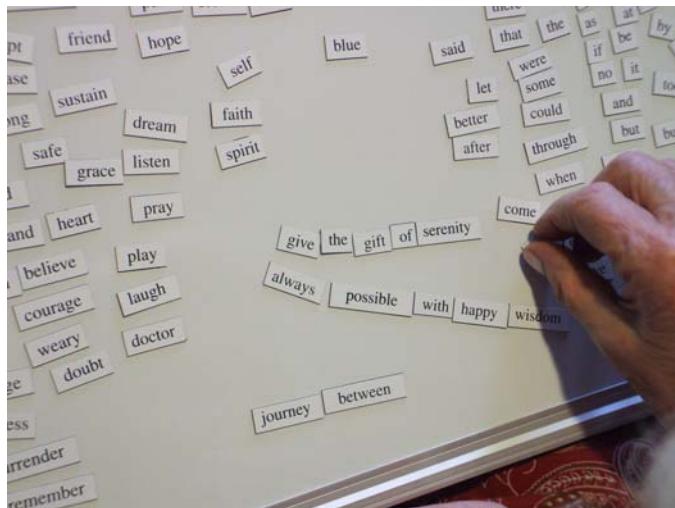
I work in the relatively new field of expressive arts at the practitioner level. Expressive arts is an interdisciplinary, or intermodal practice, that integrates all forms of art-making including: visual art, narrative arts, poetry, sound, movement, fibre and fabric, sculpture, and collage. Expressive arts promotes personal growth, healing and community development. The practice shifts between art-making processes to amplify an emerging theme. For example, a piece of visual art may shift to movement or a piece of poetry may shift into sculpture. A trained practitioner understands how each arts modality deepens and builds on the other, and knows where to start when choosing the approaches that will best meet clients' needs. There is as much emphasis on the creative process as there is on the final product. Expressive arts experiences delivered at the practitioner level are not art lessons, or crafts or therapy, but they can be therapeutic for those who engage.

My adventure of working with older adults began in 2008 in my small, rural Ontario community. I developed a pilot program called Arts Rx supported by our Arts Council. The program inspiration came from three sources: one, my own experience using the processes for my personal work; two, witnessing the power of this kind of work with individuals and groups I worked with and three, hearing about the Arts on Prescription programs where doctors in the UK were prescribing art-making for their patients.

My next program, Visible Voices - Seniors Connecting with Isolated Seniors through Expressive Arts (2009 / 2010), followed the highly successful pilot. Funded by New Horizons for Seniors, I trained volunteers to work one-on-one with seniors in their own homes on a weekly basis over several months.



The intent was to give a 'voice' to people like M. (from the pilot program) who stated that once the doors of the longterm care home closed, she became a nobody. Through Visible Voices, far from being 'a nobody', M. engaged with media she had never used before, and delighted in her explorations. I also wanted to share the stories of those who, just because they are up there in terms of years, are still playful, creative and full of potential if given the opportunity.



Potential (Acrylic created by a senior participant who had no previous art-making experience)

Magnetic Poetry with a senior participant

Adding the formal, arts-based research component (with two professors from Trent University and a community researcher) was a chance to see if some of the stereotypical notions about older adults could be dispelled. For instance, myths surrounding their ability or inability to learn new things, the very value of their lives and that age does not preclude dreams for the future: client B. is now planning to build a model railway and R. wants to be a Visible Voices volunteer and resume her reflexology training. In addition, I was interested in learning about the impact of the work on senior volunteers and what, if anything, they learned about themselves while working with the program.

Trained volunteers (most of whom would not describe themselves as artists) could readily extend the reach of expressive arts into community.

Participant and volunteer outcomes included the following: increased confidence and self-esteem; improved social engagement; reduction of stress and anxiety; a chance to be authentic in a safe space; the blossoming of potential and clarity; and making meaning in one's life. People found their



A community member's response to the Visible Voices video

As I navigate my own senior years, I wonder what role expressive arts has in my ageing gracefully and living fully?

voices, literally and figuratively, through the process of expressive arts; they felt the joy of making visible what had previously been invisible in their lives.

The resulting research paper will, I hope, add to the growing body of evidence that supports the benefits of expressive arts on mental and physical health, and thus the greater well-being of those who participate. The executive summary and full report can be accessed at: www.haliburtoncooperative.on.ca/literature/index.html click Search, then enter Visible Voices in the Title field.

This brings me to the latest Visible Voices - Through the Looking Glass Program delivered over the past year and funded by The Bell Let's Talk Community Fund, part of the Bell Mental Health Initiative. I had the privilege of working with older adults living in long-term care, exploring depression through expressive arts. I continue to learn more about depression and its many layers, each layer containing shades of colour and depth of complexity. Mental health challenges are familiar to me on a personal and family level. Depression is a term that is commonly used in conversation, but seems to be understood in different ways, even amongst eminent doctors and researchers. This confusion makes perfect sense to me given the degrees of the symptoms and the challenge of what to do about them. We are all still learning.

Now in my sixty-third year, it feels like I have been on an emotional rollercoaster for the past twelve months. I have been both proud and humbled by the entire experience: proud of the seniors, (the vast majority of whom had no art-making experience whatsoever) for their willingness to explore and experiment with me; proud of our community for their powerful and honest art responses to the video; proud of being part of meaningful conversations that helped to reduce the stigma of depression and foster understanding. I was humbled by the stories I heard around depression, not only from the seniors, but also from community members of all ages.

The extent and depth of what is called depression is staggering. The art-making gave people permission and a degree of safety to express and share their experiences. A video can be seen at: <https://vimeo.com/55992979>

As I navigate my own senior years, I wonder what role expressive arts has in my ageing gracefully and living fully? What can I learn about ageing by working with seniors in a way that keeps the creative fires burning for them and for me? I want to continue to explore the relevance of the relationship that develops between my senior participants and me as an expressive arts practitioner. When does a professional role melt into two human beings creating and telling stories together? And is the blurring of those lines desirable? What are the pitfalls of creating alongside my participants? Would we have the same real conversations without the shared art-making process? While there is a broader context for the work, my motives are not entirely altruistic!

My perceptions are shifting. What I am noodling on, and creating art around, are notions of impermanence and what that is to me. I am learning new insights: to face my own mortality, and accept that there are far fewer years ahead of me than behind me; to pay attention to the new rhythm of time and the speed with which it is passing; to be grateful for my current interdependence, mobility and dexterity; to not wait; to make sure I do it now, and play as hard as I work. How do giving up, letting go, and letting in relate and impact each other? What does passing the torch look like and feel like? Can others continue to evolve the work to leave room for what is next for me? Who am I without my work? How do I ensure my personal creative processes remain a central part of my daily practice? I see things a little differently now. It is through art-making that I am beginning to gain some new insights. May the learning continue.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

H. FAY WILKINSON, REACE

Fay is a registered, independent Expressive Arts Consultant/Educator, storyteller, and artist working out of her Creative Cocoon studio in Eagle Lake, Ontario. She is a member of IEATA and the Global Alliance for Arts & Health. She is a graduate, former coordinator and faculty member in the Expressive Arts Post Graduate Program at the Haliburton Campus of Fleming College, Ontario. Fay designs and delivers expressive arts experiences for both individuals and groups of all ages, and continues to research the impact of this work on health and wellbeing. Nominated for the Creativity and Innovation Award from the Chamber of Commerce, and awarded the Fellowship of Applied Education from Fleming College, her current focus is using expressive arts to contribute to the mental health of seniors and expanding the storytelling facet of her services in new and innovative ways. She can be reached at fay@thecreativecocoon.com or visit www.thecreativecocoon.com

LINKS AND RESOURCES

The Expressive Arts Therapy Association: www.ieata.org

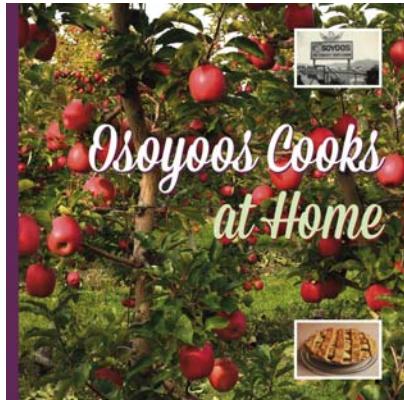
The Society of Arts in Healthcare: www.thesah.org

National Center for Creative Aging: www.creativeaging.org

Fleming College's Expressive Arts Program: www.flemingcollege.ca/programs/expressive-arts
Video: Visible Voices - Through the Looking Glass. Exploring depression with seniors through expressive arts: <https://vimeo.com/55992979>

Arts-based research: Visible Voices - Seniors Connecting with Isolated Seniors through Expressive Arts: www.haliburtoncooperative.on.ca/literature/index.html (Click on Search, enter Visible Voices in the Title field)

COOKING UP COMMUNITY



In April of 2012, the Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI) in Osoyoos was awarded a grant from the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors program to create a community cookbook. The goal of the cookbook was to conduct a project where seniors could share their knowledge of cooking by providing hands-on cooking demonstrations to young people in the community. The Good Shepherd Christian School partnered with CASI Osoyoos for this project.

For the duration of the project, students and seniors shared cooking skills, computer experiences and laughs. Six CASI Classic Chefs also volunteered to share their favourite recipes and teach hands-on cooking and kitchen skills to the students.

The cooking sessions were made even more memorable as the students received art training from a professional volunteer artist and created colourful artwork for the book based on the six cooking sessions. The cooking, photography and art sessions have been filmed and photographed and are featured throughout our book.

Senior chefs led the students on fun culinary adventures featuring recipes full of locally grown fruits and vegetables. The students acquired new kitchen

Carrot Soup with Ginger

Submitted by Nancy and Glen Heather

1 tbsp butter
1 onion, chopped
1 celery stalk, chopped
1 medium potato, chopped
5-1/2 cups of chopped carrots
2 tsp minced fresh ginger root
1-1/2 quarts chicken stock
a good pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Melt the butter in a 2 litre pot. Add the onion and celery and cook for about 5 minutes until soft. Stir in potato, carrots, ginger and stock. Bring to a boil. Lower heat, cover and

simmer for about 20 minutes. Cool soup and puree in a blender or food processor. Return soup to the pot and add nutmeg, salt and pepper. Reheat slowly to serve.
Serves 6

"We harvest the carrots in my garden in late fall and enjoy this soup on cold winter days. This is Glen's favourite soup!"

Crunchy Carrot Tidbits:
Carrots were first grown as a medicine not a food.
Carrots are the second most popular type of vegetable after potatoes. There are over 100 species of carrots. By the way, the last meal on the Titanic included creamed carrots in the fifth course.

CASI Volunteer van driver Glen Heather checking the oil before a van trip.



Dandelion Salad

Submitted by Serge Boujeat,
CASI Volunteer

1/2 lb dandelion greens (young and tender) cleaned and dried
1-1/2 oz parmesan cheese
1 anchovy fillet minced
1 tsp minced shallot
1 tsp mustard (mild)
1 large fresh tomato, cut in slices or small cubes (optional)
3 tsp olive oil
3 tsp red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large bowl whisk together vinegar, mustard, anchovy, salt and pepper. Mix and add olive oil. Toss dandelion greens and tomato. Top with shaved parmesan and touch of lemon if desired. Mix well, enjoy.



58 Osoyoos Cooks at Home

In North America dandelion is a curse. In Europe it is one of 5 top plants. Instead of killing dandelion with weed killer, save your lawn. Harvest the dandelion with a knife and cut them. You are fed beautifully. There are amazing nutrients in them.

Tip: Try to remove warts: cut stem from a blooming dandelion flower, squeeze yellow juice on wart and rub 3 to 4 minutes. Repeat 1 time a day for 3 days. Warts should disappear soon.

Serge and Victor sharing Picasa editing techniques.

expertise and had the special opportunity to also share skills and experiences with senior members of our community in a friendly homey kitchen!

This project has forged new friendships, ideas and has culminated in a community cookbook that features delicious time tested recipes from local residents of Osoyoos who love to cook and share the secrets of the bountiful harvests that can be found in the town of Osoyoos.

For more information: [www.okagananinstitute.com/osoyooscooks](http://www.okanaganinstitute.com/osoyooscooks)

Three Hour Pickles

Submitted by Heather Baxter

5 long English cucumbers
4 large onions
4 cups sugar
4 cups vinegar
1/3 cup salt
1 tsp celery seed
1-1/2 tsp turmeric
1 tsp mustard seed

Slice cucumbers and onions inch thick and put into a plastic ice cream pail or a large glass jar. Boil sugar, vinegar and

spices and pour over sliced veggies. Refrigerate and stir often. This can keep up to a month ... if they last that long!

The story of the Bad Granny. "I used to play hide 'n seek with my grandchildren. One time I snuck behind them and yelled, BOO! I scared the living pants off them. One of them said, "I'm telling Mom". The other one said, "Bad Granny". On my 50th wedding anniversary I snuck out of the house, told my husband I was getting a haircut and got my "Bad Granny" tattoo instead!"

Heather Baxter, the one and only "Bad Granny"!



66 Osoyoos Cooks at Home

Rosa's Foccacia

Submitted by Rosa Tortora

4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup olive oil
2 tbsp salt
2 tbsp Fleischman's active dry yeast mixed with 1 cup lukewarm water with a pinch of sugar. Don't forget the sugar or the yeast won't rise. Let stand 10 minutes.

Work the flour with oil and salt with your hands. Then add the yeast/water mixture. Knead it until it becomes a dough. If it is too dry or flakey, add more lukewarm water. Let the dough stand for 30 minutes. Cover with a plastic bag (a clean one) or a cloth. While waiting, spray or coat a 9x10 inch pan with oil. Make sure your pan has an edge. Coat the edges with oil. Wet your hands with oil. Pick up the risen dough and put it in the pan. Extend it with your oily hands to the edges. Let it rise in the pan for less than 30 minutes. While waiting, drain

one can of diced tomatoes. Chop some fresh oregano or rosemary. Spread the tomatoes and herbs on the risen dough. Drizzle olive oil on top. Poke the dough with your fingers. Bake on a middle rack in a 430 degree oven until golden brown and the bottom is crusty, about 30 minutes. Check it after 25 minutes to see if the bottom is crusty. But don't take it out until it is done!



Rosa enjoying sammies at CASI's Client Appreciation Luncheon.

FROM THE MEMORY VAULT

ON THE MOVE IN MY MIND

GOBNAIT MCANOY



Whenever Chris De Burgh's melodious voice filters through my living room singing the song *The Lady in Red*, I'm immediately held captive. Whether folding laundry, mopping the kitchen floor, feeling the pull of aching arthritic knees, another world unfolds before me. In a heartbeat, Toronto's rumbling streetcars, busy thoroughfare, and population of four and a half million give way to a small city, thousands of miles away. In my mind's eye, I drift upward and onward across the Atlantic Ocean to the city of Cork, Ireland.

Cork's meandering streets, steep winding hills, tolling church bells provide the backdrop to my reverie. I am landed in a local rugby club's compact crowded hall in this city of less than two hundred thousand. In one corner, a four piece band sets the stage as rugged rugby players and eager young girls ease their way onto the dance floor. I'm a teenager once again bopping to the music of the fifties on a Saturday night. I move to the beat of *Blueberry Hill*, *The Twist*, *Magic Moments* and always the last dance of the evening *I'll See You In My Dreams*. I'm no wallflower tonight, hands reach out, tap me on the shoulder. "Dance please?" repeats itself like a mantra all evening. I'm bewildered by the thrill of it all.

My *No-Fail Red Dress* swirls and swishes as I waltz, foxtrot, rock the evening away. I am convinced this dress is the impetus to the magic of my night out. I've tested others; green, blue, pink, low-cut, laced collar, knee high, long sleeves and short sleeves. Not one comes close to this red dress's success on these dizzy evenings.

In perfect tandem to the music of this pulsating vibrant rugby club, another kind of music is on my mind, rendering both forever connected to each other. It's made by my mother in the kitchen of my childhood. She's the designer and creator of the red dress. The day she promises to have it finished, I can hardly wait. I dash home from school, rush along the hallway, past the sitting room and down the narrow staircase that curls like a corkscrew to the kitchen below.

Mammy is there expectantly waiting. "Almost ready" she remarks with a smile. The sun beams on the old upright Singer sewing machine close by, poised and ready for action. Mammy sits and presses both feet on the pedal making the music begin. Her feet see-saw back and forth as a steady purring rhythmic sound echoes through the kitchen, a prelude to the music of those giddy Saturday nights. Together, she and I have carefully chosen this fabric now winding its way through the machine as it hums along. Mammy keeps the treadle in motion, needle and thread impress, stitch by stitch give shape

Her feet see-saw back and forth as a steady purring rhythmic sound echoes through the kitchen, a prelude to the music of those giddy Saturday nights.



younger days

**Our eyes lock
mischievously
together. "Well, why
not. We'll do it in
style" she chuckles.**

to a skirt gathered and full, almost complete. She releases her feet, the Singer is silenced, Minx the cat basks on the windowsill, dosing in the warmth of a sunbeam.

Mammy turns towards me holding the encircled waistline open wide. The fabric rustles as I gingerly step inside. She presses it in place around my body, measuring, tucking, pinning it to the bodice. Hands finally at rest, she pauses and leans back in her chair. Her feet housed in black pumps are now grounded, her dark hair peppered with grey frame strong features. She smiles with pleasure, taking in the fruit of her labour. I give a little twirl as I look down at my full dirndl skirt; tiny embossed white flowers seem to smile back at me. I imagine a starched mesh underskirt spreading this fabric out like a fan and stopping abruptly at my knee. Dare I ask?

"Please, pl-e-a-se Mammy?" I plead, imparting my thoughts. Our eyes lock mischievously together. "Well, why not. We'll do it in style" she chuckles. She rummages through the shelf piled high with fabric and retrieves some folded meshed cloth.

Softly and gradually Chris de Burgh's voice fades out. The music stops. I'm back to reality, back home in Toronto. My eyes wander hazily at first round my living room. The waiting vacuum cleaner meets my gaze; I decide to ignore it. The wing chair beckons. I sink into it, allowing my body and mind to unwind. Thoughts drift reflectively to what once was and to some extent still is alive within me. Outside morning light casts a soft glow across the city skyline. Schedules and commitments wrestle with my desire to bask in a seductive reprieve. I decide to wallow in its pleasure.

Then I wonder, What about Mammy; was making that red dress a fond memory for her? Would it surprise her to know that I remember every detail with pleasure? Did she realise how much joy it brought me? Did she ever know how much I loved her? A sense of melancholy invades this question as I hear the rain pitter-patter on my terrace, quenching the thirst of potted begonias.

As the pitter-patter now becomes a downpour, I gingerly get to my feet, pause as I ease my stiff joints forward, and make my way to the waiting vacuum cleaner.

Gobnait McAnoy developed her interest in writing after retiring from a long career in the business world. Her personal reflections on life, submitted to and published in Catholic New Times, a national independent newspaper, were a beginning. Over the years, Awards of Merit received from the Canadian Church Press at their annual convention provided an added impetus. Later, Creative Writing in Cabbagetown, small group workshops run by Prim Pemberton from her home, provided an opportunity to collaborate with aspiring writers and benefit from Prim's leadership. Currently Gobnait lives in The Distillery District in Toronto. It was here her friendship with Carolyn Cowan began. Presently Gobnait edits and writes for The District News, the newsletter of the Gooderham and Worts neighbourhood.



THE IMMIGRANT

ANTOINETTE VOÛTE ROEDER

Waiting for an ultrasound, I hunker on a bench in a closet-sized space, enveloped in a shapeless tent whose ties seem to be sewn on at random. There must be thirty cubicles ranging up and down this hall. A stout, stern female in mint green polyester guards the doors, ordering people in and out. I have a sudden overwhelming urge to escape. An early memory has overtaken me: the first time I found myself in a similar booth, the year was 1953. The place was Holland. I was a little girl, nine years old, naked and cold and trembling. It was of little comfort to me that my mother and my sister occupied the cubicles next to mine. We did not speak. Were they as afraid as I was?

We had traveled to Rotterdam for the physicals which were required of those wanting to immigrate. Footsteps resounded down the hallway. My door opened. The cramped space was filled with what seemed to be a very large woman who loomed over me and not unkindly, began to examine every bare inch of me. She took my hands, palms up, palms down. Was she looking for missing digits? Were there deformities that might disqualify me?

I think I must have followed her when she moved next door to my mother. I remember my elegant mother standing tall and vulnerable, facing the examining nurse. Her nudity gave me a shock. I'd never seen my mother naked. Everything that my mother embodied for me, solidity, stability, continuity, seemed to have been shed with her clothes. She had been rendered just as I, unprotected, exposed, and helpless.

We were directed to get dressed. I only wanted to seek the comfort of my mother's arms. Instead, we were taken, one at a time, to see an American doctor. He, I recall, asked difficult questions in a tongue I did not understand. The nurse standing by translated for him. When I was asked to identify the capital of the United States, I wildly grabbed the only city name I knew and answered, "New York." I wasn't much better at Holland's major rivers, remembering only the Rhine. Was it a geography lesson or was it merely to see whether I had a brain at all? Meantime, we were hustled from one waiting room to another. Now came the needles. Blood tests and vaccinations finally behind us, we were through. We were done. What did that mean? I had no idea that this disconcerting sequence of events cleared the way for the uprooting of my life that would inform every subsequent experience.

Perhaps there had never been solidity, stability, or continuity for us. I had been born in the midst of a global war whose outcome no one could predict. My father had put himself and his family at risk by working with the medical resistance in Holland. After liberation in 1945, he had left us for eighteen months to practice medicine for The Netherlands Red Cross in Indonesia. Upon his return he was never the same. He had become a restless, questing man who at mid-life could no longer settle where he had been planted. My parents' marriage was in turmoil. They decided to break all ties and start

Upon his return he was never the same. He had become a restless, questing man who at mid-life could no longer settle where he had been planted.



My birthplace, Rembrandtlaan 26, Naarden, The Netherlands (2011)

The pond near the house in which I was born and is typical of green spaces found in every city and town in The Netherlands (2011)

The longer I live the more I recognize that home is not a place, it is an inner state.

anew in the land of golden opportunities across the ocean.

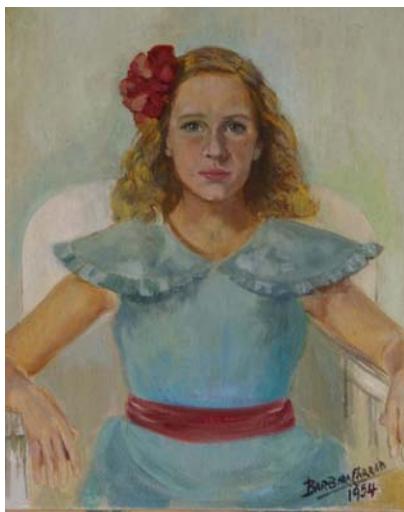
Our immigration was not to the east coast of the United States where the culture shock would have been a great deal less severe, but rather to the desert of southern New Mexico where my father had a colleague and friend, a dashing Dutch surgeon, whom my father admired very much. He would join the surgeon in the 20-bed hospital he had started in a hamlet called Eunice, New Mexico. Here, my father would patch up men who had sustained the most awful injuries working on oil rigs.

We rented a tiny pink cinder block house on the edge of a relentlessly dry wasteland. None of our lives would ever be the same. Had my father ever imagined the long-term consequences this move would set into motion for his family? My parents were nearing fifty when they emigrated. They left behind a lifetime of friends and family to say nothing of a culture and milieu that had nurtured them. Late in life, my father could sometimes be heard to question his decision, shaking his head and calling it crazy.

I'll never forget climbing on board the Ootmarsum at sunset that fateful day we left our homeland. Daily, we girls sat on deck with our mother who drilled us on the configuration of the U.S. map. We learned the names of the 48 (at that time) states and their capitals and could locate them on the map. Later of course, we were quite bewildered to find that Tucson, Arkansas and Albuquerque were not at all pronounced the way they were spelled. Our English-born mother taught us a few catchy phrases like yes, no, and *I don't understand you*. The latter got a lot of use in those early days.

As the seas turned rough, I sought my bed. Even the sight of an orange tossed on my bunk by a well-meaning sailor sufficed to make me sick. As we rounded the Florida Keys, my father diagnosed one of the sailors with acute appendicitis and the Coast Guard was called to fetch him. I was paid a visit by my mother who conveyed a message from my dad: start eating or you will be put in a Miami hospital along with the unfortunate sailor. I understood that my family would go on without me. Many years later, when I was a parent myself, I recounted this event to my father who had no memory of it whatsoever. "Frankly, my dear, I'm not impressed with your suffering," was his response. "You survived, didn't you?" Even now, his lack of compassion nearly breaks my heart.

When we landed in Houston, a giant crane swung one railcar after another off the decks. Then came two huge crates out of the hold. They contained all our earthly goods. The surgeon and his wife had driven to Houston to welcome us and we four, packed into their car, made the nocturnal trip in July's sweltering heat to what would be our home for a year. Our introduction to life in America was far from pleasant. We stopped at an



View from our kitchen window in the little cider block house in Eunice, New Mexico. We looked out on desert and trash cans. (1953)

Portrait of me painted by my mother in the summer of 1954, when I was 10, in Eunice, New Mexico.

all night diner for something to eat, only to find when we returned to the car that we had been robbed. Cameras and other valuables were missing. And so we have no surviving photographic record of our landing in America. Those two enormous crates would later be put side by side at the back of our little cinder block house in Eunice. A carpenter would turn them into a studio for my mother. Here she would set up her easel and paint, perspiration streaming down her face in New Mexico's summer - her salvation I guess.

So began the first step into a life of wandering. Each time I think my father hoped to improve our situation with an eye to his children's education, his work conditions, cultural opportunities, and finally, beauty of place. My siblings and I left home for university and only returned for visits. Each moved far away, three out of four to other countries: one brother back to Holland, the other to Germany, and I to Canada. My parents finally retired in Santa Fe. It had a cooler climate, lots of music, beautiful scenery, and a rich cultural heritage.

This July I mark sixty years since our immigration. What is there about aging that seems to turn our eyes to the past? The ache of what we lost becomes an ever increasing hollow inside me. When my father was widowed, he suddenly and somewhat desperately started returning to The Netherlands, but there was no way to pick up those abandoned relationships again.

Everything we experience in childhood is recorded somewhere in our cells. Is there a gene marked *immigration* within us? I am part of a three-generational pattern. My mother immigrated to The Netherlands from England when she was five. I immigrated to the United States from The Netherlands when I was nine. Our children immigrated with us to Canada when they were six and two. I have now lived in one place for forty years, longer than I ever lived anywhere. It has supported me in rearing two healthy children, in pursuing my love of music, writing, and spiritual direction. The longer I live the more I recognize that home is not a place, it is an inner state. If one can be at home in oneself, place is secondary.

Antoinette has a Master of Music degree and is a published poet and writer. She has been a spiritual guide for more than twenty years and is passionate about the sacred in the cosmos, poetry, music, people, and the earth. Her two books of poetry, *Weaving the Wind*, and *Still Breathing*, are available at www.amazon.ca/ She can be reached at a.roeder@telus.net.

SWINGING WITH THE STARS

Karen Close

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are! ...”

Popular English lullaby

As small children, how many of us looked up and sang those lyrics? Now, I often find myself humming the words, but the beam of interrogation seems directed on asking who I am and where I fit in this vast universe. Recently, I sat down with Jane Hoffman, also in her sixties. Despite being named Canada's top selling realtor for Caldwell Banker over several years, and indeed the eleventh top realtor in the Caldwell Banker's international preview's properties, Jane admitted she too is hearing an insistent, little inner voice wondering the same question. Then she received a sage piece of advice, “Jane, at your age always say yes to whatever is presented to you.” When asked for a second time to be a dance participant in the Central Okanagan Hospice Association fund raiser, Swinging with the Stars, Jane said yes. Zealously, she approached the business side of the event with the Jane Hoffman team and her well-honed skills. The event was very successful, raising a record breaking amount for Hospice with Jane and her team winning the award for the *Most Pledges Raised*. However, the surprise for Jane was how it felt to swing in rhythm with her creative spirit.

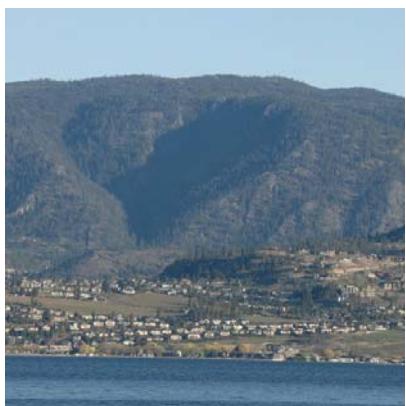
She began her training session with Chris Thorburn of Kelowna Ballroom with some trepidation. Jane loves to dance, but this would be different. There would be a large crowd at the event and although the dance was only two minutes, she wanted to perform well. When she arrived for her first class, the sky was ominous and midway through the session, the room went dark. She and Chris continued with only the battery glow on the computer. In those last moments, Jane says she sensed the brightness of creative spirit

begin to burn within her. Each week, she would eagerly return to the practice sessions relishing the sensations dancing was arousing. Sessions were in the evenings, often after very long, busy days, but as she faithfully counted the beats, just as Chris guided her to do, she began to feel deep harmony with the rhythm. Her mind relaxed, flooding her body with sustaining energy. She felt open, alive and joy-

The surprise for Jane was how it felt to swing in rhythm with her creative spirit.

The Jane Hoffman Team





Stepping Out

Okanagan Lakeshore

ously whispered, *just say yes*. The little star that is Jane in this universe began to burn in new ways. On performance night, March 2nd, 2013, the judges awarded first prize to Jane and Chris.

Jane became intrigued with how saying yes, and Swinging with the Stars, began to influence her life in other ways. These choices have given her the courage to accept two very important speaking engagements. “You know in my business I talk every day to clients, and I love that, but public speaking has terrified me. I am a very quiet private person. I have never attended national awards presentations. I have always declined speaking engagements in the past, but this year when I was asked to speak at a conference, I spontaneously accepted. After saying yes to dancing in the Hospice event, I decided to say yes to more ways I can explore who I am. Perhaps it’s time to share. I read what you wrote in the journal about passing on to the next generation. I haven’t ever really called my approach to our business a creative approach, but I have always let intuition guide me in my dealings with clients, and I’ve been pleased by the results. Even in my decision to move to Kelowna and become a specialist in lakefront properties, I felt guided.”

Jane Hoffman was the first person I met when I moved to Kelowna. If you’re moving to this community and desiring to live on the lake, you call the Jane Hoffman Group. Kelowna is a retirement capital. Statistics Canada tells us that, proportionately, it has the third largest senior population in the country. As Jane and I chatted, we discussed the power we feel radiating from our lake. There is energy generated when you relax into the presence of its deep waters formed in ancient times. I told Jane about the special view that greets me from across the lake with sunrise each morning. My neighbour’s creative eye alerted me to that heART in the hills across the lake from our homes.

The first Sage-ing Journal began with the image of sitting on my dock contemplating creative spirit. Eagerly I shared with Jane my dreams for awakening all of our community, and those who might like to move here, to the Creative Ageing movement. I told her of my excitement when I first discovered the 2002 study by Harvard MD Gene D. Cohen showing that those who engaged in the arts late in life had fewer illnesses and injuries and more independence. Cohen calls creativity ‘chocolate for the brain’ because it builds dendrites, bridges between brain cells. Creativity keeps us younger and more willing to try new things. I shared his equation C=me² (creativity equals me to a higher power when I give creative energy to the mass of experience that has been my life). Creative acts encourage you to reap wisdom from a life’s experience. “You know,” said Jane, “Chris explained that many suffering from dementia and Alzheimer’s find dance lessons very helpful, and interestingly that men benefit more than women. I certainly sensed something when I was dancing; my brain changed.” I laughed with her, and suggested she was perhaps experiencing what has been called the alchemy of creative spirit. Look at those new choices she has been making.



Relaxing Into It

Through creative expression you can pan the gold of a lifetime.

"What music did you dance to?" I wondered. "Bruno Mar's *Catch A Grenade*," she responded, and I really laughed. I thought of the Futurism Movement in art. At the beginning of the last century, their 1909 Manifesto for the Arts was a grenade that changed people's perceptions of the role of arts. This century will evolve when individuals begin to value creative expression as an expressive healing source, rather than just a means to create another commodity or a special talent reserved for a rarefied few. As soon as Jane heard the words to *Catch A Grenade* she knew she was hearing her 'Song of Myself'. Her heart responded to the lyrics that proclaim unyielding sacrifice, determination and love. Jane had felt that from her father and her husband. She believes, "Everyone wants to feel that love and to feel that they are that precious." Jane was widowed at age thirty. Courageously, she determined to build a future for herself and her young son. Now she has a grandson. There were four generations of men in her heart as she danced to that song. Jane seems destined to be a powerful warrior on this 21st century's path towards understanding creative ageing and the role of a sage. She has the wisdom to impact the business of arts and the lives of the seniors she has sold homes to in this community. This woman knows how to sell, the courage to catch a grenade for love, and she is ready to relax into the wisdom of her life's experience.

As Jane left my home, she paused to recount a personal story about her sister's mother-in-law who began painting in her seventies, when she needed to heal. "She was good too. Maybe I'll start painting." Jane laughed. For certain, whatever choices Jane now makes will be informed and influential.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are! ..."

See Jane's performance on YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDkMv8LID7s

Karen Close is on the Advisory Council of the Arts Health Network Canada, www.artshealthnetwork.ca and the Society for the Arts in Dementia Care in British Columbia www.cecd-society.org

THE WORTH OF A CUP OF TEA

Harold Rhenisch



In 2008, I travelled east on the Camino, the ancient pilgrimage and trade route that created Northern Europe. The usual route for pilgrims is from southern France through the Sierra Nevada and a landscape of light to Santiago and the burial place of St. John. I took the other route, from Saarbrücken on the north east French border, through the old Roman city of Mayence. From there, I continued to the crypt of St. Boniface in Fulda, and through the dark of the German forest to Dresden and east through wheat fields to the Polish border. The road continues on to Minsk. My section, the German one, was done. It is called The King's Way.

For the last year, *the Sage-ing journal* has graciously hosted stories of my pilgrimage. There was a visit to the grave of the German poet Rilke, who knew The King's Way well. I visited St. Elisabeth and St. George in Eisenach, where modern Germany was forged out of a woman's love. I even took us all to the miraculous and joyful church of roses in the old bell-makers' city of Apolda. Today, I'd like to talk about those roses.

The whole journey has been among flowers. The King's Way is not just a road financed to keep traders safe through forests owned by the King by day and bandits by night. By day, the King's soldiers patrolled the road. At night, no traveller dared to be out there alone. Out there, a human life was worth less than a crust of bread. The grimness of the Brothers' Grimm comes from these night forests. That is a dark route, but we're not going there. We're pilgrims, after all. We're on The King's Way. It's a path of poetry that once guided the German aristocracy towards enlightened rule. It led, sadly, to war, yes, but also to traditions of art, science and sensible government.

At the heart of this culture are Sleeping Beauty's three castles above the Saale River north of Jena, deep in East Germany. These are the Dornburger Schlösser, or The Palaces of the Fortress of Thorns, or just The Rose Palaces. They sit in a loose group high on a chalk cliff above the Saale River, looking east to the rising sun.

To put these castles and their heart-stopping views into perspective, Eastern Germany is largely flat, with rolling hills and occasional cliffs, which quickly gentle out to rapeseed fields and long, rolling carpets of wheat. Trees line the roads, to shade foot travelers. The King gave us those. As for castles, most of them have no views at all, or limited ones — certainly no romantic views, in the sense of a view today, with rolling hills and green trees and the purity of nature. The views are there, of course, and are very popular, such as those on the Rennsteig, the high walking trail across the ridges that runs north-south across the centre of The King's Way. The aristocracy didn't go



Dornburg, Renaissance Schloss



Schönburg

Schönburg Village and The King's Way
(Great for Taxation)

there for nature or for the views.

A view is a middle class idea. It is modern. In the old story, castles were built for military purposes, not recreational ones. Because they were offensive, not defensive, you didn't need a view. You just needed to be seen. You needed to be in the way. In terms of hunting lodges, that meant to be where the deer were. You found those in dark thickets and in tapestries of trees. As a result, hunting lodges were set deep in the forests. They were shuttered, and private affairs designed for serious drinking. You didn't need to see out, and it was better to stay locked up tight when the sun went down. The woods were dangerous.

I know of two exceptions to this rule. One is Schönburg (Beautiful Castle), built by nuns and blocking the road deep in a narrow winding gorge east of Leipzig. It's so indefensible that its beauty allowed it to flourish for centuries, because it wasn't worth the time of day to attack. The other was in Dornburg, where the Rose Palaces didn't seem to defend or tax anything at all. In place of defense and taxation, though, they had something that no other palace had: a view. I know, I mentioned that a view was a modern thing, but this was different. This was an aristocratic view. The castles look out from terraces of roses and nearly vertical vineyards as if they are on the clouds looking down to an earth so far below that one was a god. All those old paintings of the Old Masters that decorate the ceilings and walls of other castles are here the landscape one walks within and above. In the Rose Palaces, one is really in Heaven, and in the perfume of roses, too. Always a bonus.

A word of warning. We're not talking about a middle class Heaven here. We're talking about practical, tough-minded aristocrats looking down haughtily from unattainable height, viewing the whole country laid below like a map. The people down there were hardly real at all. Better yet, their stink didn't make it up the hill. Yes, stink. Not to mince words, but the riches of the area came from the woad trade. Woad is an ancient herb used to produce blue dye. Before the discovery of Indigo in Brazil, it was in high demand for the robes of the nobility and the clergy. Woad dye was worth more than its weight in gold. Its creation out of woad was a long process, which included the brewing of cheap green beer, the collection immediately of urine from happy beer drinkers, and the use of it to soak the woad for a smelly fermented year filled with thrashing, squeezing and more fermentation until it yielded up its blue colour. Every building in every town was devoted to this almost alchemical task of creating gold. To escape to a palace of roses and perfume, above it all, now that was really something—especially when it was Heaven, and especially when you could call it a hunting lodge.

That's what the Rose Palaces were: hunting lodges. They weren't in the forests because it wasn't deer that one hunted there. It was women. Or maybe it was women hunting men. At any rate, here men and women walked together through roses, through the paintings of the Old Masters, through a secularized and politicized Heaven full of romance, tea parties and



Goethe's Garden House, Park on the Ilm

Shakespeare, Park on the Ilm

stunning views that displayed power as nothing else could.

It was here that a poet transformed the aristocratic world into the middle class one we still enjoy in the Okanagan today. The poet's name was Goethe. He ran the principality of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach for the Duke. He was often invited to spend the weekend here, and hatched the idea of making a new kind of park, one which regular people could walk through. Instead of walking on The King's Way through a landscape of lawless forests, beer cellars, stinking woad factories, haughty castles and convents charging high tolls, one could stroll with one's sweetheart through the park meadows. Together you could contemplate romantic castle ruins (fake) and the death of the aristocracy (real), from deep in the valley, just as the aristocracy used to contemplate the tininess of the people far below on the plains of the Saale.

This park was built in an old sheep pasture in Weimar. It had a statue of Shakespeare, a roman bathhouse, artificial ruins that looked exactly like those found in the romantic paintings of Goethe's childhood house in Frankfurt, and beautiful views through stands of artfully arranged trees. It was a painting — one that lovers could walk through and bring to life. It's what came out of the roses of the Dornburger Schlösser. The romantic tea parties Goethe shared with the Duke and the Ladies of the Court were focussed through a steely resolve that translated that old world into a new one that belonged to all the people, not just to a few.

And so The King's Way was gentled by women and their poet into Weimar's Park on the Ilm. Like everything on The King's Way, the park was political and spiritual at the same time.

In modern terms, The Park on the Ilm was the beginning of Disneyland, which also has Sleeping Beauty's Castle (fake) at its heart, in a historical landscape that one walks through and enjoys with one's body (real), rather than hanging on a gold frame on a wall or perched on an inaccessible cliff that only the powerful can reach.

Today, the Rose Palaces are a shrine for the Nationalists — that's to say, for very conservative men, who believe that the country belongs to a select, hard-knuckled few. Property next to them is very expensive. Against that sense of power, Goethe's tea parties, and the gentle enduring strength of women, infused into power politics by a poet, remains our collective defense. I like to think of that whenever I pick up a tea cup decorated with roses or, as I am doing these days, tending my rose garden in the sun.

Harold Rhenisch has been writing poems and histories of the Okanagan for over thirty-five years. His work is based on a wide range of models from literature to ancient prayer, myth, and spell-craft. He is currently exploring the deep roots of the language in Old Norse and Anglo Saxon. After twenty years in the Cariboo and on Vancouver Island, and after two long journeys on the German section of the Camino, he has returned home. He lives in Vernon, where he writes the deep ecology blog, www.okanaganokanagan.com

30-DAY PAINTING CHALLENGE

IN THE MAYAN RIVIERA

Jaine Buse



What? Paint every day in a medium and style I am not comfortable with? You cannot be serious!

In January 2013, on my second winter escape to Playa del Carmen, Mexico, I pondered the challenge of taking art supplies with me. The easiest solution was to pack along my unused watercolor palette and pads of paper that I had purchased six years ago. I had little intention of accomplishing much until I was inspired by Sea Dean's *Get Your Art Out There* Facebook challenge. The goal was to create a piece of work every day for 30 days using a medium and style that is uncomfortable for you.

For the past three years, my medium of choice has been mixed textures with acrylic paint on large canvases. At the weekly heART Fit sessions in Kelowna, I practiced some spontaneous painting using acrylics. In Playa del Carmen, the only supplies I had were watercolor paint and paper.

For the first two days, I felt like I was painting with my left hand (I am right-handed) with my eyes closed. I quickly learned that when you are painting in an environment you are not familiar with, you need to let the culture, sights, sounds, and smells get embedded in your soul. I was very strongly impacted by the heat, the blues of the sky and ocean and the physical environment and people. I have talked with artists who have done residencies in various parts of the world and they talk about the necessary immersion for the creativity to be freed.

For me, watercolor painting is a very unforgiving medium. Once a mark is made, you cannot easily hide it. I did all my painting outdoor which with watercolors is difficult as it dries very quickly. Thank goodness I was in a humid environment.

Logistical issues aside, the mere thought of painting a new piece every day for 30 days is overwhelming. Where will I find inspiration? What subject matter should I use? How do I start? What size paper should I work on? These are all blocks to traditional painting.

SPONTANEOUS PROCESS PAINTING (SPP)

The pieces of art featured in this article are all from my personal 30-day painting challenge where I utilized Spontaneous Process Painting (SPP). SPP requires a particular mindset which involves:

- Following your intuition;
- Letting the painting speak to you;

Feelings - Cool underwater images





Dance of Life - The spirit of the people in Mexico

Mayan Ancestor - Dreams of our heritage after a visit to Tulum

Triptych – Visitors come and visitors go

- Observing and listening to what is meant to appear on the canvas; and
- Trusting that following the first three steps will create your original work of art.

Once I was able to embrace the SPP mindset, all my questions, concerns and mental blocks dissolved. I was able to lay the paint on the paper and let the work evolve by using the following methods:

- make your first mark, anywhere on the paper
- trust
- drip paint
- follow the mark
- rotate the page
- step away
- spray some water on the canvas
- squint the eyes
- layer on more paint
- feel the heat of the sun on my face
- listen to the sounds surrounding me
- sip the next margarita
- know when to STOP (painting, that is)

Over the 30 days of the painting challenge, I posted the pieces on my Facebook site and was in awe of the feedback from my worldwide network. A complete showing of the pieces will be part of my solo art show, August 2013, in the Alex Fong Gallery in the Rotary Centre for the Arts, Kelowna.

Sea Dean, thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone!

Jaine organizes a plein air group that paints outside every Friday morning in the Kelowna area from May through September. She is largely a self-taught artist who engages in many workshops. She paints with heART Fit and is on the Board and paints with the Mission Painters. Jaine is, also, on the board and paints with the Livessence Society, for figurative artists and models. Her artworks can be viewed at Jainesaffordableoriginalart.weebly.com Contact jaine.buse@gmail.com



VOICES GATHERED

A COLLABORATIVE PIECE

KAREN CLOSE

In 2002, at age fifty-five, I learned of the study released by Harvard MD, Gene D. Cohen, where he claimed that those who engaged in the arts late in life had fewer illnesses and injuries, and more independence. Thirty years as an English and Visual Arts teacher had shown me the power of creative confidence for youth. Cohen's words reinforced my hopes and fed my dreams to spread awareness of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. Through the years, this journal was born.

As we age, it is essential to find creative engagement with something we love, and to feel the release and wisdom, waiting within and ready for birth through creative expression. Two days into spring 2013, I met eight dynamic Alberta women, part of an art group, and as eager as I am to nurture creativity and experience sage-ing. I was visiting in Canmore, Alberta, and so we gathered cradled by the Rocky Mountains, powerful symbols of endurance, permanence, challenge and human fragility. We felt sustained - connected to each other, to human yearning, to what truly endures, and to the need to express the heart's wisdom.

This article is a sharing evolved from emails exchanged after that day together. Each person's perspective is an invitation to each of you, our readers, to seek creative engagement for your own health, wellbeing and joy.



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and human fragility.**

**This sense of being a
midwife to the process
of creative endeavors is
a freeing thought.**

GRACE ADAMSON

It seemed to me moments after our arrival at Karen's condo I was entering into a presence of permission. My first awareness was of the tightening in my solar plexus that usually accompanies me into an unknown situation, relaxing. Throughout our day in Canmore, the experience of permission only deepened and it carried over into a Chinese Brush Painting workshop which I attended the next day. I heard myself saying "be the brush, just let go and be the brush". In retrospect, as my week unfolded, I realized what I had most been impressed with under Karen's tutelage is best described as midwifery energy. In my understanding, midwifery is about supporting process over outcomes. Midwifery is accompanying process all the while moving through it and trusting in an unknown outcome. This sense of being a midwife to the process of creative endeavors is a freeing thought. *Responding to while not being responsible for* is a different way of looking at creativity.

DERRYN YEOMANS

On a bright Alberta day of sun and blue sky cut by the peaks of snow-crested mountains, I introduced myself to eight women, some previously known,

some not. “I am Derryn”, I said, “and it must be Karma that led me here today.” Within a month, my life will hold many changes; entering my 66th year, leaving the formal work environment. Unlike my earlier years, I now know there isn’t limitless time, nor limitless energy. Choices must be made, carefully considered, judiciously weighed.

Karen said, “The only place you find direction is within”. I believe that creativity, through art, provides our path. To me, creativity is an endless quest for self definition. Paradoxically, just as our remaining span of years shortens, the depth and breadth of our creativity expands. At this S-age time we can create the space, the serenity, the communities we need to, “Pay attention with love.”

Synchronicity – oh yes! On my return from Canmore, the book I picked up to read contained the following stanza from a poem by Rabindranath Tagore:

“The butterfly counts not months, but moments
And has time enough.”

KATHRYN BURWASH

A day exploring the inner world of self and art in the Rocky Mountains of Canmore. How could I miss this opportunity? Hours later, experiencing Karen’s vitality and stories, feeling the effects of a head cold in progress, sensing the energy of other wise women, and letting my unconscious percolate, we experienced the process of “spontaneous art work” using the medium of watercolour pencils. I am familiar with the concepts of mindfulness, the unconscious, inner self, creativity, and storytelling, but even so I was surprised by what emerged. It is said that the unconscious holds the truth, and so it transpired for me. A familiar theme, one that has brought suffering to my life, one that I thought I had “dealt with”, reared its ugly head, but in colours so beautiful I was surprised. This inner truth, coming forth through the process of creativity, continues to inform me. A few days later a poem on possibility inspired me again to create another work, and I have the photographs of the mountains still to come, and Easter dinner to cook. And so our lives unfold, one creative outpouring after another.

SUSAN ALLORE

I have always loved going to the mountains. I would go there just to get a cup of coffee sometimes! Whenever I go to the mountains, whether for the weekend or just a few hours, it’s like going through some kind of time warp. When I get home, I am refreshed and somehow, magically, an extra day or two has been created – it feels like I’ve been gone a lot longer than I actually was. A true mini-vacation. There is something about seeing the mountains that starts to pull me away from my linear, logical work world and into the realms of instinct and intuition. It’s not a place I can go to very often, but so appreciate it when I can.

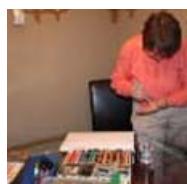
This was another such journey. As we drove up, the mountains shone so

I'd like to try the exercise with my granddaughter - she loves drawing and creating too!

WOMEN GATHER

Naida Brotherston

In the shadow of three sisters
 Nine women
 Pregnant with purpose
 Butterfly women
 Shedding chrysalis constraints
 Women circle
 In kitchen-table contemplation
 Women afire
 With communal wisdom
 Women transform.



white in the sun, shimmering and sparkling – it was a beautiful day. I was looking forward to the day. When we were all together, sharing our stories and feelings, it was really wonderful to feel a sense of connection with others who experience the process of following a path, of allowing intuition into creative play. When we did the exercise with the watercolour pencils, I did move to that logical part of myself, wondering what kinds of effects I would get from the medium I was using – sometimes it's a challenge to deliberately move to that state of letting the unconscious take control! That's ok though – it's just the way I am – flowing from logic to intuition and back – wherever the flow takes me. It was lovely to see what everyone else had done and to hear their experience of the exercise. For me, I did two pieces – I wanted to try using my medium in different ways just for fun – and it was. I would like to do the exercise again – to let go more once I've got a feel for the medium. Let go and see more of what would come out. I'd like to try the exercise with my granddaughter – she loves drawing and creating too! As we headed home, it felt like I'd been gone all weekend – that time warp thing! Lovely ...

NAIDA BROTHERTON

There is a time when we develop a deep longing to understand our universe and our reason for being within it. Some choose to begin a journey to explore the essence of self. I believe this journey is circular – one explores one's unique spiritual context, which manifests in an awareness of the core self in the context of our spiritual understanding. The self strives for tangible creative expression. It is in the gifting of that creative expression to a community, and the compassionate receiving of it by members of that community, that completes the circle. When we continue to make ourselves vulnerable to community through laughter, learning, playing and mutual introspective conversations, we deepen even more our understanding of our inner self and the importance of continuous connectivity with both seen and unseen worlds.

As we met at Canmore with Karen, someone with whom we had never met previously, but whose understanding of a spiritual creative process mirrors my own, I felt a circle was created that will continue to spiral upward – a labyrinth of HeArt and souls. When women gather with mutual intent, magic happens. I feel our magic will inspire change in this world.

JUNE CHURCHILL

For me the highlights of the day were watching the group gel in a different way. We were all a little out of our element in a number of ways; most of us did not know Karen or Derryn. We had to find places to work - to be separate, yet very close together.

Karen led us in an exploration of the watercolour pencil medium in a new way. I felt like being in kindergarten again trying to make something beautiful and trying not to peek at others' creations. So comforting to have Karen and others say, "all great artists trained by copying"; it's part of the



creative energy bonds us to each other

Community helps to motivate, helps to encourage, helps to honour this part of me that thrives in art making.

creative process. Expressing feelings in colour and line still feels foreign, but I am growing in my comfort level, to have fun and to go deeper into our birthright of play and creativity and self expression.

MAGGIE LINDSAY

I am thinking of the Bow River, the ice starting to break off and those very loud gulls going after food all night long. The river runs fast as it eddies around the bridge supports. The busyness of daily life sweeps me up and takes me along the swift current. I keep looking at the shore where sits my art making materials, I often reach out to touch and find I am swept up again by family and work life.

How I relish the time with the art journal group and any art classes. The dedication of others, of time and of space helps me be strong and swim across the current, leap onto the shore, excited and ready.

Community helps to motivate, helps to encourage, helps to honour this part of me that thrives in art making. Driving up to Canmore that Saturday morning, (now a month ago!), so enjoying the sharing of ourselves, the beauty of the mountains and the delight in a whole day dedicated to creating and community is a sweet memory. There was warmth in being within the company of wonderful women.

I was inspired, breathing in Karen's excitement for art making with community and hearing her personal story of how life's twists and turns took her to her present commitment of working with others and creating: Art, Aging and Health. The spontaneous art piece was fun; I put colour down quickly and smeared with my fingers, visual and tactile. Sitting with the piece illuminates some of the emotions I have not been listening to. Being a witness for others stirs aliveness in me. The space inside opens up. It is easier to be present, standing on this shore with others. I can breathe deeper, with gratitude.

LINDSAY HOPE-ROSS

I approached the day in Canmore with great anticipation. I never fail to be inspired when I spend time with my creative friends. The women in our group are truly special – not just in their art-making, but in character. Without exception, they are intelligent, wise, caring, compassionate, spiritual, warm, open, encouraging, accepting, trustworthy, gentle, and every other adjective I might use to describe a true friend. I am always comfortable in their presence. So taking a “road trip” with them was something I was not going to miss!

The day proved to be as enjoyable as I had imagined it would be and more. I felt enveloped by the warm connection that I only feel when I am with kindred spirits. Looking out on the beautiful Three Sisters and the sunlight reflecting off their bright white peaks, I felt grounded – calm and at peace. “This is where I belong – where I am meant to be”, I thought. With this as my internal knowing, I could not wait to begin the free-flowing art activity.



What we Created

Feeling the Power of The Three Sisters.



Usually I am very detail-oriented and realistic in my art. This day I felt the safety needed to just let go and be spontaneous – to just let the colours and forms be what they wanted to be. I became more of an observer of the process and, in doing so, allowed myself to just “go with the flow” and delight in the outcome. This extended into the rest of the activities of the day and evening, and I returned home feeling rejuvenated and centred – just exactly what I needed and hoped for.

We taped all the works up to consider and share with each other.

Looking out on the beautiful Three Sisters and the sunlight reflecting off their bright white peaks, I felt grounded – calm and at peace.

Karen Close is in the advisory committee of The Arts Health Network
www.arthealthnetwork.ca and the board of The Society For The Arts in Dementia Care www.cecd-society.org

WE ARE SISTERS OF THE CLOUDS

Naida Brotherston

We are sisters of the clouds
 The moon is our mother
 And the stars windows
 To the centre of our souls.

We are sisters of the clouds
 Lighting the earth
 With our joy of living
 In creativity and transformation.

WORDS FROM THE HEART

THIS MAY BE THE LAST TIME

Marilyn Raymond

*"This may be the last time
This may be the last time children
This may be the last time
It may be the last time I don't know"*

Blind Boys of Alabama

Morning
and the river is full of light
running smoothly over round brown stones.
The glacier flow stills and warms in a deep silent pool.
Sheltered by trees and rocks
I am swimming naked - alive and awake
The valley is vibrant with summer light.
Sharp and sweet.

Last week I visited my father.
We sat on the porch and looked at the land
The fruit trees, the tidy raspberry rows and the froth of rhubarb, the vegetable garden.
A curve of marigolds and alyssum pulled my eyes along the driveway
and the *For Sale* sign leapt in my memory like a hooked fish.

We spoke softly of his fading health, of the impending move.
It doesn't matter where, he said,
Whatever it is – and he gestured with his long-fingered hand that looks just like mine –
whatever it is, it won't be this.
Seventeen acres of fields and woods - the home he built when I was eleven –
45 years of his life.
We went to the garden to dig potatoes and pick beans . . .
It may be the last time – I don't know

I stroke slowly across the pool
The small sound of my movement
opens the silence.
Bird song, wind in the fir trees.
A small fish jumps
pulled only by the river and its own need.

The sweet coldness of this moment
This naked morning alive in a river of sunshine and silence and promise
And my dad,
Lost in the flow of his life,
losing his strength,
losing his home,
Parkinson's sharp as a hook in his heart.

My father isn't good with mornings
He sleeps late and moves slowly

My mother helps him dress
His body hurts and trembles
It's this land that pulls him into life
Slowly digging carrots
Browsing through the raspberries
Riding off on his old golf cart to get the mail
to visit Ted down the lane.
One afternoon he high-centred in the neighbour's field
– he couldn't remember why he went there.
And Ted died last week.
Some mornings, my mother says, her mouth twisting awkwardly,
dad sits in the kitchen and cries.
My dad!
Aching and unbalanced
battered and wounded
he fights that hook.

In the quiet pool,
Sunlight beyond my closed eyes,
I hold my dad in my mind.
His last summer on the land
One day soon
the last morning
and then
the sharp rapids of grief.

Let it be like this for him.
Let his life take him, like a river, to a calm deep pool
sunlight
and birdsong ... and night.

A MEDITATION ON THE FEAST OF ST. MARY OF MAGDALA

Susan McCaslin

Before the foundations of the world
I and the source of all that is, joined hands,
setting every nerve in alignment,
connecting every muscle in a superb net.

Then, one day, without reason,
my self sent myself into exile
wandering through space and time—
my prodigal worries questioning everything.

Am I safe? Have I fallen out of balance?
What if the girders unloose themselves
and the house falls into ruin? Will I
be able to restore this submerged garden?

Then the part of me that never stopped creating
sent dreams saying, despite everything,
the Partner is still building, forging
new bones and muscles every instant.

Then Doubt, that sad charlatan, sniped:
 "Why should you expect more
 love, mercy and protection
 than anyone else?" Why indeed!

Alone, I craft calamities,
 apocalypses, doomsday scenarios,
 Hope-voice and Doom-voice
 alternating in endless, brutal warfare.

Now I wait where my original face
 rises from the dark: *You have entered
 the unending duality loop. Break through!*

EVERYDAY GRACE

Lesley-Anne Evans

Sun's long gold pours into the evening
 my nose in a fresh picked peony breathing
 in a memory, a beginning of noting gratitude.

Fog over sea, first light meeting cloud rising
 from coffee mug, the warmth expanding into morning
 not always knowing, but knowing.

Two guitars wait by the music room wall
 his dress shirts fresh from washing, hung to dry
 and our fingers intertwined, pressing flesh to flesh.

A lifetime of books, expressing risky and beautiful
 and how the old ones smell. And photographs
 capture time, place, proof of our passing.

Night sky, full moon shining me awake
 profound simplicity of my husband's words, *just breathe*
 and us working out the details, making it work.

That God is found here, in this, outside
 church walls, the fullness of the echo of his voice
 that this world and these people are wonderland.

And my eyes are dull, my heart crusted over, my ears deaf
 I need to take time to remember the rain
 falling soft, the music of breath, the weight of darkness.

TEXTBOOK LEARNING

Kim Lake

The wise ones say
 the only textbook we really need
 is ourselves

Open at any page
 and a story of life
 is revealed in progress.

Jump ahead, read into the future,
it makes little sense but no matter,
Meaning comes as time catches up.

Flip back to days gone by,
Your colour heightens
you can hardly believe that was you

So different in appearance,
like an old forgotten snapshot.
It really looks like someone else.

And if you could see unburdened by delusion
Oh how wrong I was!
How could I have believed that, you would ask?

Is this really me?
Closing the book
You press your face to the desk in shame.

The teacher pats your shoulder, consoling.
It's best not to look back, he says
But I always peek! You protest.

Without it how could this present
have any meaning?
And what meaning is that?

The present moment, says the teacher
Really has no meaning
until it becomes past and we make story.

Did you ever consider this?
You create yourself as you read?
Try to stay on the present page, he advises, tapping the book.

But if I stayed in the present
where would I be?
How would I know it was me?

The sage whispers,
perhaps you wouldn't need to know.
Did you ever consider this?

The future will come,
the past is fully in your present
It's written in your body

Stop grasping and explaining,
telling and bemoaning,
There is much to understand, he's said.
And nothing at all.

This poem is incorporated in Kim Lake's painting, of the same name, published at the end of the Journal.

OUR LIVES REVOLVE AROUND MUSIC AND LOVE



It's about creating the opportunity for my students to have fun and enjoy themselves. It's necessary to create a space in our lives where we can live out loud, and with purpose - a space where everyone can feel safe to express themselves.

Barbara Samuel

Spend a few minutes with me and my husband, Neal Klassen, and you quickly discover that we eat, sleep, and breathe music. As a musical duo, we perform throughout the Valley; we are members of a local band named "Sista B & The Boyz". I'm Sista. Neal and I also co-direct the music and arts team for the Centre For Spiritual Living Kelowna, where I serve as a Staff Minister. We are both passionate about the choir we lead and the house bands we've established.

Both of us were also raised in musical families. My father was a cellist with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra so music was always a huge part of my growing up years and our family's life. Neal hails from a Barbershop background because his father was part of the Barbershop Organization and Neal, himself, is a great harmonizer.

Together we share another passion that transcends music and our love of the industry. We are passionate about each other and helping each other to grow. I know we're not the only husband and wife team in the world, but it's a special gift we get to share, as we remain supportive of each other. It's truly a blessing and nice thing we've got going.

Not only is it nice, but successful too! Our CD, *Shine On*, was nominated best in the rhythm and blues / soul category for the BC Interior Music Awards in 2009. In 2013, I was nominated for outstanding music achievement in the community as a vocal coach, entertainer and spiritual leader. That felt good. This year has been a breakthrough year for us; opportunities are fast opening as we experience huge life shifts. I run and operate a successful Professional Vocal program with students ranging in age from 5 to 85. I've created a space where kids, teens, adults and even families come to participate in the excitement of singing and performance. Intergenerational sharing through music is hugely important.

Many have asked my vocal coaching secret? It's very simple. It's about creating the opportunity for my students to have fun and enjoy themselves. It's necessary to create a space in our lives where we can live out loud, and with purpose - a space where everyone can feel safe to express themselves. That's a key component to being successful and happy and living a life that is truly fulfilled.



Barb and Neal

Respecting each other's talents allows us to work really well together

Neal shares this belief that playing music should be fun. "That's why they call it playing," he says with a smile. Neal had an impressive musical background playing the bar circuit in Southern Ontario in his younger years. Still like many, life happened and we both were pulled away from our passion. We each put our appetites for music on hold while we raised our families and created careers in other fields. I've come to see this as being side-tracked.

When I moved to Kelowna ten years ago, and twenty years after placing and leaving my flute under my bed, I was inspired to pick it up again. Later Neal dusted off his guitar when

he was invited to join one of my bands. The rest is, as they say, history. We met in a church band while I was the Musical Director of the Centre For Spiritual Living music team. Neal came in as a piano player. Sparks flew immediately—on and off the stage. We'll celebrate our 5th wedding anniversary in August. We married 08/08/08. We see that as a sign for infinity and the never ending love we have for each other.

The Centre For Spiritual Living is the perfect setting for an unconditional, heartfelt, true romance. It is a place to share, receive and recognize love - our love for each other's talents, love of God, love of music, and the love and willingness to assist others to express themselves through song. Life is really all about love and creative expression!

Our partnership—on and off the stage—is another key to our success. Even though we approach music somewhat differently, we are always bouncing ideas off each other. We do this routine after a performance where we ask the questions: What did you like? What did you dislike? What would you do differently? We debate musical strategies and techniques and we rehash performances, looking for new insights or missed opportunities to grow. Because we share office and studio space together, we are probably together 90 percent of the day. Sharing through music is ingrained in our lives. Respecting each other's talents allows us to really work well together. We have two different singing styles, yet our philosophies are the same. We are truly open to learn from each other.

I think you can feel this attitude in our CD, *Shine On*. There were some very special moments that show up in what you hear on the album. Neal wrote the songs. He wrote them for me to sing. What an honour and blessing to have someone write your life story with the intention of me singing them.

There's a certain kind of vulnerability and surrender that you have to

There were even moments where we started laughing uncontrollably while recording, and we left it in the CD because it's who we are.

embody when someone gifts you with such a creative freedom. Neal wrote *Shine On* for our parents. He wrote *Stand* when I became a minister. The lyrics speak to my heart directly of what I am to do with my life of service. We co-wrote *Easy To Love You*, and that title speaks for itself. There were even moments where we started laughing uncontrollably while recording, and we left it in the CD because it's who we are. We put our hearts and souls out there for the world to hear and share with us.

We included our closest friends and children to share on the album, as well as our choir singing backup. We hope in years to come when we have transitioned, our family and friends will remember the time we shared fully expressing, while being led and directed by the creative spirit and passion within both of us. We trust that we are outside-the-box thinkers and that this attitude manifests in the dynamics of who we are on and off the stage. That's the power of creative spirit when you embrace it into your life. Our goal is an attitude of playing that makes us and our audience feel and stay young. Neal says, "I watch Barb sing and perform and it makes me smile". I say, "I see Neal play and entertain and my heart sings with gratitude that the Universe has brought us together for our greater good, and for the good of all of those around us."

Purchase the CD, *Shine On*, and 'preview purchase' all 11 songs at:
www.cdbaby.com/cd/barbaraneal#

THE RIGHT TO PERFORM

Ruth Bieber

In the mid 1980s, I enrolled in a graduate course at the University of Calgary titled Drama for People with Disabilities. That was when it all began. I was already exploring the therapeutic uses of all of the various art forms in my counselling practice, but my passion to start a theatre company has evolved. By the early 1990, the *InsideOut Theatre Company* was embryonic; thus began a 20-year journey. Ostensibly and superficially speaking, it might seem as though this journey was about disability theatre, but the true appeal of the work more accurately reflects a universal message: we all have the right to be creative, and in this case, the right to perform on a theatrical stage. I knew the message was universal as evidenced by the consistent post-show comments such as, “If these actors with disabilities can perform like that, so can I!” This comment came from people without disabilities; rather from people who didn’t believe they had the *right* to perform.

Ruth Bieber ‘in costume’

But I Like It. *Geri Acting* drama group



This is the message of exclusion we are given in our patriarchal culture. It’s no different than the message we grow up with that says we can’t dance, we can’t sing and we certainly can’t make visual art! The running of the *InsideOut Theatre Company* can be described as a labour of love; one that brought me rewards and challenges alike. When I left the company in 2009, I knew I needed to expand the message by writing a book about my experience together with the contributions made and challenges experienced by a movement that ran upstream from convention. What to title the book was a big question. Although the book’s message was universal, my allegiance was aligned with the countless people who came along to develop the work. They were, at that time, primarily related to disability, or the rehabilitation field in general. My allegiances won out; my book is titled *Disability Theatre from the InsideOut*. As evidenced, however, by the recent work with the senior’s theatre project in Kelowna, British Columbia, the process it explores is universal! See my article in www.sageing.ca/sageing6.html “STAGING MATTERS”.

My book demystifies the world of theatrical performance with a method that leads curious acting sceptics through the process of developing a show and then performing in it. The procedure is reflective, rather than



Where are we? *Geri Acting* drama group

Follow me. *Geri Acting* drama group

I remember. *Geri Acting* drama group

formula based. The shows are revealing in their trickster nature, where humour and shadow emerge. In other words, what you see is what you get, and what you get is often a reflection of something you might have mixed feelings about in yourself. This happens with actors and audience members alike. In spite of a potential low grade discomfort, which is what all good artistic expression results in, we find ourselves coming back for more. Not unlike the recent movement from representational to the love of abstract art, people find themselves feeling entertained by the universal theatrical process. Former sceptics are heard saying, "Can't say exactly what it is, but I like it, and I feel entertained!" In the end, I believe any creative endeavour results in emotional expression, an opening of the right brain; a kind of spiritual awakening.

Faye Stroo, a participant in the Kelowna senior's production by the *Geri Acting* drama group, was eager to read about a process that had so absorbed her creative energy. To my delight Faye applauded the book's universal appeal. "Ruth Bieber's book *Disability Theatre from the InsideOut* has many levels and layers – including personal, interpersonal, societal and more. I am sharing my thoughts and feelings on a few that impacted me the most. I could sense the essence and energy of Ruth and the actors in many of the vignettes included in the book.

Ruth has a very unique blend of compassionate support, truth and humor plus the ability to perceive the greatness of each participant, in spite of any disability. That also was evident in the *Geri Acting* drama group I participated in last fall, prior to reading her book.

At the beginning of the first class, Ruth mentioned that she was going to talk to us about her sight. I thought she meant her web site and was surprised to learn that she is blind.

As a long time councillor I realise that although not necessarily visible or audible we all have disabilities. Those who have the obvious are maybe fortunate. The more often hidden disabilities such as low self esteem, addictions, unhealed grief, shame, abuse, etc. can be very disabling when unacknowledged and not dealt with. Before reading this book and participating in the *Geri Acting* drama class, I hadn't really thought of aging as a disability even though some of my recent symptoms (including difficulty seeing when driving at night, less energy for long biking or walking, some memory changes, etc.) were evident. Although these are often natural symptoms for many, accepting aging can be difficult.

Providing practical applications, Ruth's book encourages and gives direction on how to accept ours and others' disabilities with courage, grace and the willingness to be. She directs us to do what we can to lead creative and meaningful lives in spite of perceived disabilities and thus she helps us discover previously hidden abilities."

Photos by Keith Routley

Ruth's website - <http://www.playwithperspective.com/>
Book is available through Chipmunk at the following site

Paperback (Chipmunka Shop) - <http://tinyurl.com/m88yagv>
EBook (Chipmunka Shop) - <http://tinyurl.com/k9v7zay>
EBook (Amazon.com) - <http://tinyurl.com/lg7x5gv>
EBook (Amazon.ca) - <http://tinyurl.com/lt3679l>
EBook (Amazon.co.uk) - <http://tinyurl.com/lucblkd>

WHY SYLVIA COULDN'T DRAW THE CLOWN

Dr. Dalia Gottlieb-Tanaka



From the editors: This is the first of a special three part series to be completed in the September and December issues of the *Sage-ing* journal. The series is from the thesis paper of Dalia Gottlieb-Tanaka for which she earned her PhD from the University of British Columbia in 2006, in the Institute of Health Promotion Research and the Interdisciplinary Studies Program. Although lengthy, we believe the research presented will open the doors to a new understanding of creative spirit and the role of the arts in dementia care.

In 2011, Dalia completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship with the Department of Psychology at UBC, after returning to school to pursue a new direction in gerontology, specifically in the study of creative expression, dementia and the therapeutic environment. The Creative Expression Activities Program she conceived and developed for seniors with dementia won an award from the American Society on Ageing and the MetLife Foundation. She continues to deliver presentations and workshops demonstrating the program and her research work in the US, Canada, Israel and Europe. Dalia is the founder of the Society for the Arts in Dementia Care in British Columbia <http://www.cecd-society.org>

BACKGROUND

Sylvia passed away on February 9, 2013. I decided to revisit some of my writings and recordings of our sessions together since 2000, when I met Sylvia for the first time. She was age 76. My relationship with her profoundly affected my understanding of seniors with memory impairment and actually led to a change in my professional life. This article was written originally in 2003, after I had known Sylvia for three years as a person with dementia, residing in a long-term care facility in West Vancouver. When she joined my Creative Expression Activities Program, I was surprised that Sylvia could not complete a drawing of a small doll, four inches tall, dressed as a clown. Yet, at the same time, she produced a sophisticated interpretation of the cherry blossom tree, which was in full bloom in the courtyard of the care facility.

Although one could rationalize the discrepancy as part of the physical and cognitive deterioration consistent with this medical condition, some seniors with dementia do not fit the general pattern, especially in their ability to express themselves creatively. To explore this contradiction in Sylvia's ability to produce art, we need to approach her work from various models of inquiry, from a medical, a social and an artistic perspective.

In this the first of three articles based on my work with Sylvia, I will describe Sylvia as an individual before the onset of the disease, based on family reports, self-reports and a brief review of her artwork. I will then describe Sylvia as a person with dementia living in a care facility and my relationship with her in the context of our multiple roles as artists, facilitator, students, teachers and colleagues, always interchangeable and unpredictable.



Sylvia (left) painting with Dalia

In the second article, I will compare Sylvia's art work with other known artists, such as Willem de Kooning, who exhibited symptoms of dementia in later life, and to the artwork of other seniors with dementia. I will examine similarities and differences among various artists with dementia in an attempt to answer the question, Why Sylvia could not draw the clown?

The third article will focus on the Creative Expressive Abilities Assessment Tool designed especially to learn more about the abilities of people with dementia.

SYLVIA BEFORE ONSET OF THE DISEASE

Sylvia was born on April 1, 1924, in North Vancouver; she lived and worked almost her entire life on the North Shore. She studied art at the Vancouver School of Art for four years and in London, England, at the Regent Street Polytechnic School of Art for two years. Following a year at Teacher's College, she taught art classes to students from elementary to high school. Before retirement, she taught art at Carson Graham Senior High School in North Vancouver.

Sylvia's study of art continued over the years. She worked in various mediums including watercolour, Chinese brush painting, ink sketches, print making, video making and photography. Sylvia spent many summers painting in Hawaii and on the local Gulf Islands. Travel was one of her passions and she painted as she traveled-around the world. Sylvia never married. She devoted her life to her mother and sister, who both died of Alzheimer's disease. She enjoyed the company of a male friend who continued to visit her in the care facility. Her former students, who visited the exhibition on Creativity and Dementia at the Ferry Building Gallery in West Vancouver, left comments that expressed their fondness and appreciation for Sylvia as a teacher and an artist.

UNDERSTANDING SYLVIA IN THE CONTEXT OF CREATIVITY AND DEMENTIA

DEFINITION OF DEMENTIA

Dementia is a clinical umbrella term used to describe acute loss of cognitive and intellectual functions. In dementia, there are many types of diseases: Alzheimer's is one type, while another is Frontotemporal dementia (FTD). A definite diagnosis can be achieved only post-mortem, while diagnosis of



Sylvia shares her art with a volunteer

We can never know who may develop new creative skills unless we provide them the opportunity to express their creativity

dementia in living people is more probable. This article examines Frontotemporal dementia (FTD), a type discovered separately by two groups of scientists, Dr. Sebastian Crutch and associates in England, and Dr. Bruce Miller and associates in the United States. I am interested in exploring the behavioral expression of FTD in patients, in particular, those who demonstrate enhanced artistic skills as documented in these scientists' literature.

An article, "Enhanced artistic creativity with temporal lobe degeneration," published in *The Lancet* (1996) by Dr. Miller and colleagues, showed the emergence of new skills in people with dementia. The article suggested that loss of function in one brain area can release new functions in another area of the brain. This finding has significant implications when working with seniors with dementia. However, as important as it is to work with those who engaged in artwork before the onset of the dementia, it's equally as important to work with those who did not exhibit artistic talent earlier. We can never know who may develop new creative skills unless we provide them the opportunity to express their creativity in spite of the presence of dementia and lack of previous, sophisticated artwork.

To support the view that creativity is a basic human trait that manifests itself in many forms of expression, the following definitions of creativity clarify the connection between creativity and dementia:

DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY

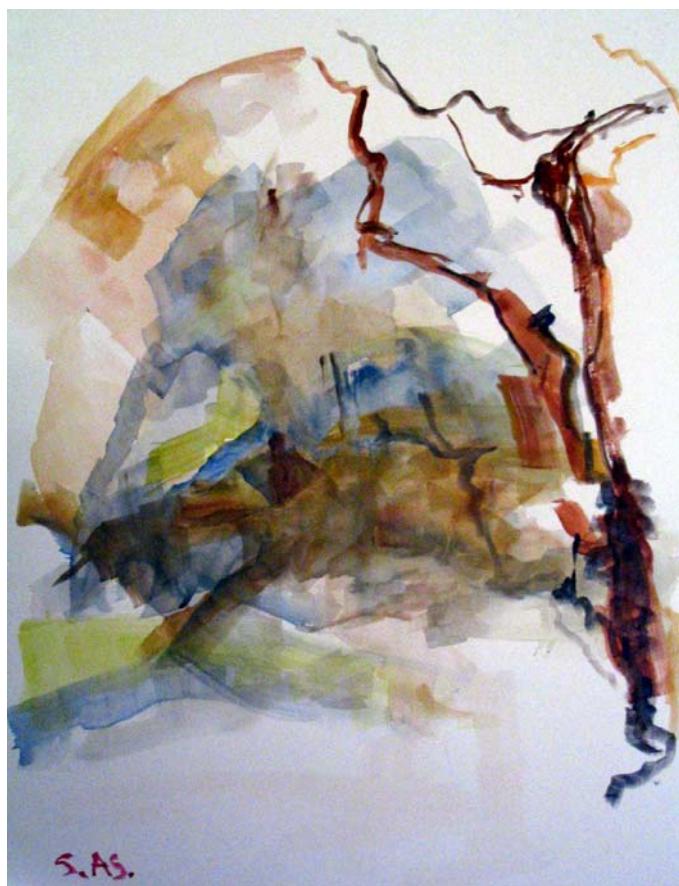
The research on creativity is fragmented and provides several lenses for viewing creativity or creative expression. In the past, creativity was understood within the framework of mysticism and the works of eminent individuals. Later, the definition focused mainly on theories from psychology. Today, a budding body of work indicates a new direction for understanding creativity. The following definitions of creativity from the most recent works on social-personality approaches will be used as a guide:

"Creativity is universally recognized as a basic human attribute. Just as ageing is a journey and not an end, creativity is a process or an outlook, not a product. It is a distinctly human quality that exists independent of age and time, reflecting a deeper dimension of energy capable of transforming our lives at any age". (Cohen, 2000)

"Coping with and adapting to life ... Creativity can be both a means for artistic or symbolic expression ... [and] a tool for personal growth". (Rhodes)

"... an attitude towards living, which may or may not be associated with artistic talent, originality, or other typically creative endeavors". (Pruvser, 1987)

Research has shifted from seeing creativity as the possession of a very



Sylvia's interpretation of a wooded area

researchers who support the idea of everyday creativity say that creativity manifests itself in being curious, in an ongoing process of self-evaluation and personal growth.

few, very talented individuals, who were touched by divine intervention, to a quality that manifests itself in every human domain and occurs in everyday life. Instead of testing for creative traits, researchers like Sternberg (1988) began to explain creativity in cognitive terms, as a process.

LINKING CREATIVITY WITH AGING

Creativity in later life takes on a different meaning than in childhood. Miller and Cook-Greuter (2000) in their book, *Creativity, Spirituality, and Transcendence, Paths to Integrity and Wisdom in the Mature Self*, explain that mature creativity is a result of life experience, mental and emotional maturation. They describe mature creativity as "one's capacity to simultaneously use and enjoy the rational mind and to be mindful of its limits and trappings." In their writings, Miller and Cook-Greuter support Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) approach to creativity that manifests itself in "A profound absorption into the subject of inquiry, accompanied by self-forgetting, timelessness, and the experience of profound joy".

LINKING CREATIVITY WITH DEMENTIA

Exploring creativity and dementia is a difficult task, especially in the absence of literature that focuses on the connection between these topics. At first, one might think there is no connection; they may contradict and work against each other. To some, creativity represents a state of wellness, potential, innovation and motivation, while dementia represents illness and a decline in all functions over time. As a result, creativity or creative expression has not been encouraged among the elderly, especially among seniors with dementia.

Both the fields of creativity and dementia are relatively new areas for research and in the last two decades a major philosophical rethinking has taken place. Researchers on aging and dementia shifted the focus from the medical model to a model that focuses on the person and the person's remaining abilities and strengths, and not on the illness itself.

So why is creativity important to seniors with dementia? The consensus among many of today's researchers is that creativity enhances the quality of life at every stage in human development, from cradle to grave. Some researchers connected creativity to health promotion in the population of seniors with mental disorders, including dementia. However, Eisenman (1990) suggested that physical illness reduces creativity: the stress that makes the person focus on feelings blocks the ability to produce anything of an original nature. By contrast, researchers who support the idea of everyday



Sylvia's bird

When Sylvia talked about art, no one would have suspected that she had moderate dementia.

creativity say that creativity manifests itself in being curious, in an ongoing process of self-evaluation and personal growth.

SYLVIA IN A LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY

When Sylvia moved from her family home to an independent living facility, she may have already developed dementia, with probable FTD and/or Alzheimer's. My first contact with Sylvia came when her situation deteriorated; she needed increased care and was moved to the care side of the facility. She was more forgetful, losing her way on several occasions going back to her room, upset with her memory loss, wandering around looking for things to do. In spite of all that, Sylvia did not lose her sense of humour nor her artistic insight. Her artistic talent was apparent, although there was a significant change in the quality of her artwork. Sylvia started to lose her social skills, not realizing when she needed to stop interfering, although her interference was motivated by a desire to help or teach. Unfortunately, her efforts to help were not always welcomed by her peers. When she lived on the independent living wing, Sylvia was a

very popular resident. When she moved to the care side, she lost all those friends who were reluctant to visit her on the *other* side, a common occurrence. With no appropriate studio space or staff initiation, her painting activities were limited to once-a-week sessions with me.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH SYLVIA

I was told that one of the new residents who moved into the care facility was a very talented painter and that I should make an extra effort to include her in my group. That person was Sylvia. It took weeks and weeks to convince her to join us. She made sure to be out of the facility on the day I held my program. Then one day, she changed her mind. It didn't take long for Sylvia and me to become fond of each other. I loved her sharp humour, keen artistic eye, and her supportive and encouraging way when other members of the group had difficulties with their artwork. Although her memory span lasted about 20 minutes at a time, she could express her artistic concepts in the most exquisite way.

Not everybody understood her or had the patience to hear her out, but coming from an artistic background myself, I knew what she meant and was captivated by her imagination. When Sylvia talked about art, no one would have suspected that she had moderate dementia. Within a short time, I was calling on Sylvia to help me with artistic advice in the class. There was no

doubt in my mind who was more skilled and experienced in teaching art. Each session brought her back in time to the periods she taught art in school. It was not a situation of just reminiscing. Sylvia truly relived her teaching days. At times she was talking to her peers as if she were talking to a class of young children. Every once in awhile, she would call me over to share a special moment she saw in her work or the work of the others.

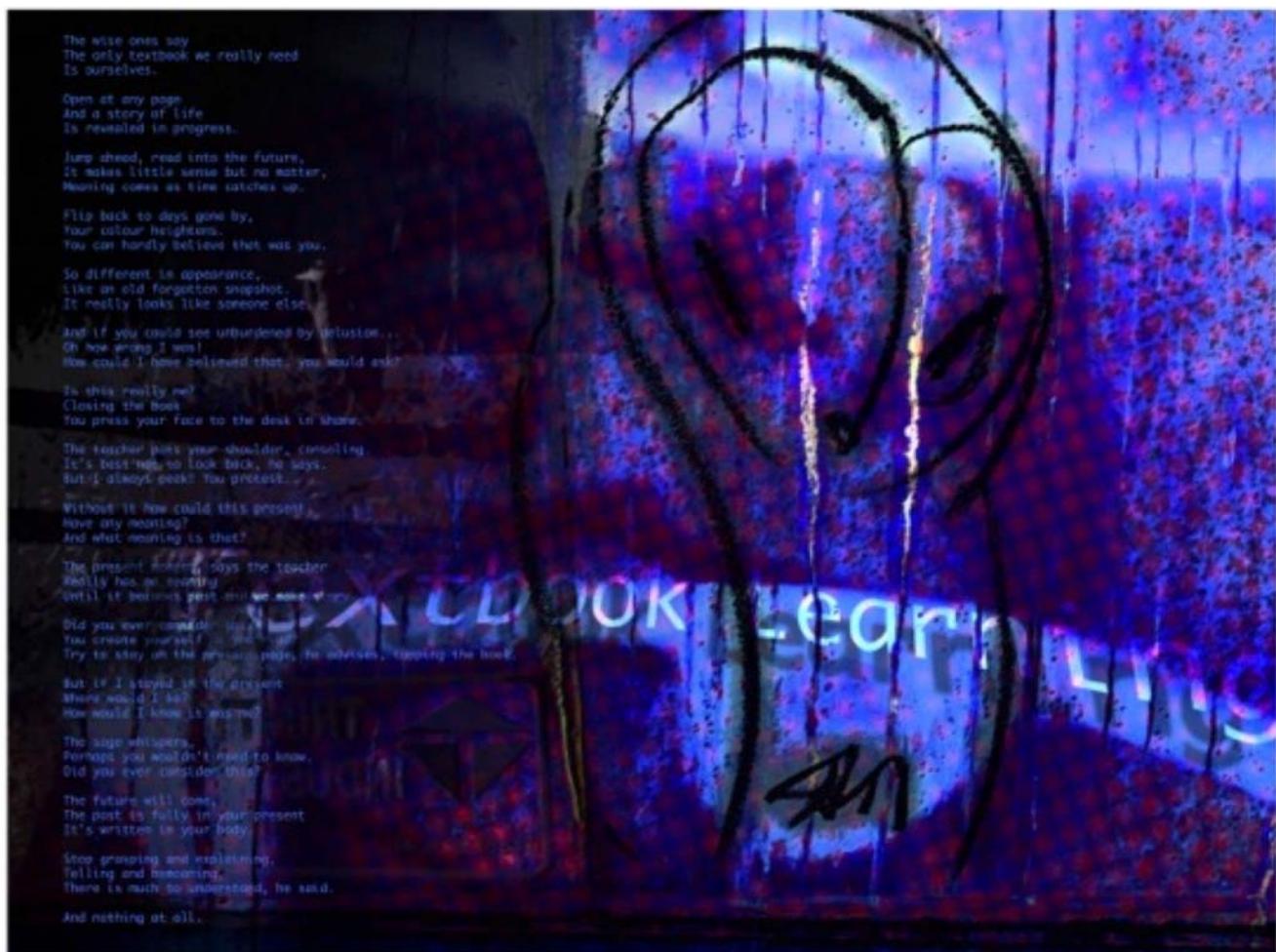
Working with Sylvia and others changed my perception of the seniors' abilities to express themselves creatively. Before I knew it, Sylvia was teaching me how to hold the paintbrush for Chinese style painting; Sylvia elevated the class discussion to a higher level of art critique, and involved other seniors in the group who then rose to the occasion. Sylvia reminded me that photography is art too. Perhaps more significantly, as a session came to an end, Sylvia would part from me with a hand wave and while walking out remind all of us to keep on painting and how important creativity is for our souls. At the same time, it was Sylvia who asked me after she had spent 20 minutes working on her painting that stood on an easel, if that painting was hers. She was still holding the brush dipping in paint.

I was intrigued by Sylvia's awareness of her own memory loss and her willingness to discuss it very openly. I was also intrigued by her ability to draw abstract images and conduct logical analysis of others' behavior and art production despite being diagnosed with moderate dementia. In one of our most touching conversations, Sylvia indicated that she knew that loss of memory could loosen inhibitions. This comment surprised me since I never discussed it with her.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The most important message I learned from working with Sylvia over the years was that the human spirit is an amazing regenerating force. Like water in a river, our brain will seek an outlet and find ways to communicate and to express. We need to provide opportunities and means for everyone, especially people with dementia, for communication in its many forms. We need to listen to the unsaid and to what may be missing. Add to this a genuine dose of sincere caring and we can successfully cross the bridge into the amazing and the uncharted world of forgetfulness.

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TEXTBOOK LEARNING

Kim Lake

The wise ones say
the only textbook we really need
is ourselves

Open at any page
and a story of life
is revealed in progress.

Jump ahead, read into the future,
it makes little sense but no matter,
Meaning comes as time catches up.

Flip back to days gone by,
Your colour heightens
you can hardly believe that was you

So different in appearance,
like an old forgotten snapshot.
It really looks like someone else.

And if you could see unburdened by delusion
Oh how wrong I was!
How could I have believed that, you would ask?

Is this really me?
Closing the book
You press your face to the desk in shame.

The teacher pats your shoulder, consoling.
It's best not to look back, he says
But I always peek! You protest.

Without it how could this present
have any meaning?
And what meaning is that?

The present moment, says the teacher
Really has no meaning
until it becomes past and we make story.

Did you ever consider this?
You create yourself as you read?
Try to stay on the present page, he advises,
tapping the book.

But if I stayed in the present
where would I be?
How would I know it was me?

The sage whispers,
perhaps you wouldn't need to know.
Did you ever consider this?

The future will come,
the past is fully in your present
It's written in your body

Stop grasping and explaining,
telling and bemoaning.
There is much to understand, he's said.
And nothing at all

This poem is incorporated in Kim Lake's
painting, of the same name, above..

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www.sageing.ca

Email sageing4@gmail.com

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

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

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