

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

NUMBER 25, SPRING 2018

EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

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

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# The Voices of Creative Aging

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

**This is the first book to document the movement.**

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

Sage-ing is about seeking – satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to Know Thyself and contribute that

knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and wellbeing

for the individual and to our culture. Creative Aging brings together more than 50 essays and galleries of images that showcase the power of the imagination expressed and enjoyed.

## CREATIVE AGING

STORIES FROM THE PAGES OF THE JOURNAL  
SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE  
SPIRIT, GRACE AND GRATITUDE  
EDITED BY  
Karen Close and Carolyn Cowan





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GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE

**Okanagan Institute**

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Cover image by Dale Mathews

## FROM THE EDITOR

We are delighted to be back online with this Spring 2018 issue. I hope you are glad to hear from us and will find this as excellent and thought provoking an issue as I do.

Many years ago, when I began my teaching career, my enthusiasm was ignited by a book written in 1921 by Robert Henri, a great teacher and American artist - *The Spirit of Art*.

"Through art mysterious bonds of understanding and of knowledge are established among men ... Every student should put down in some form or other his findings. All any man can hope to do is to add his fragment to the whole. No man can be final, but he can record his progress, and whatever he records is so much done in the thrashing out of the whole thing. What he leaves is so much for others to use as stones for stepping on, or stones to avoid." - Robert Henri

As I received articles for this issue of *Sage-ing* I reflected on Henri's words, the mission of *Sage-ing* and the mysterious sparks from ancestors informing what we call art.

This 25th issue has been incubating for an extended time, and we have been joined by other individuals embracing our mission and reaching out to assist. The opening article, painting and poem are by Johanna Beyers, a psychotherapist with a Masters of Social Work. She is inspired by the psyche and nature. She is the author of the volume of poems, *Sandbar Islands*, and a nonfiction book on a life with dreams, *Wearing My Feathered Hat: Engaging Change Through Seven Dreams*. We are delighted to welcome her wisdom, creativity and skill as a final copy editor.

Early in 2018, JoAnn Restoule approached with a proposal to include stories of Aboriginals reaching out to expand understanding of Reconciliation. To

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be a sage and to be an Elder have always seemed fundamentally similar to me and I have felt an envy for the creative spirit that enlivens Aboriginal ceremonies and rituals. JoAnn's article PADDLING TOGETHER TOWARDS RECONCILIATION initiates the Journal's intention to link hands with Aboriginal Elders as our country unites along the path of Reconciliation.

We are determined to continue bringing our readers stories of those who have discovered the joy of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. "What he [each of us] leaves is so much for others to use as stones for stepping on, or stones to avoid." We urge you to join your creative voice in this place where each of our stories builds our mutual understanding and moves our culture forward. Sharing the gift of your creative endeavours and wisdom is a responsibility we treasure.

– Karen Close, Editor

## SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

• **Article is to be related to aging and creativity, in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining wisdom and self awareness and/or the act of harvesting life's wisdom as a legacy for future generations.**

- Article to be attached as a document in .rtf format;
- 500 to a 1500 word maximum;
- Photos: Please attach each photo separately including: the writer's headshot photo and four or five photos, related to article. All photos should be attached in high resolution jpg format with a caption;
- Insert the word "**photo**" with its caption within the article where you would like each image placed (we'll try to honour this request as layout permits).
- Please include brief bio information (one or two short paragraphs) placed at the end of your article; this is meant to give the reader an idea of who you are, your passions and/or what you do and have done with your life that feels relevant to the article. Include contact info: email, website, blog address – whatever you want to include. For each journal, due date is the 10th of the month preceding release date. We release around the equinoxes and solstices. **For next issue due date is May10th, 2018**
- Email the article and photographs to [karensageing@gmail.com](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com)

Antiquity identified a sage as a wise person ... wisdom is a form of goodness, and is not scientific knowledge but another kind of cognition.

– Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b

# PSYCHOTHERAPY

## CULTIVATING A POETICS OF LIFE



### Johanna Beyers

A cherished companion in my musings about art and therapy is Rainer Maria Rilke's Letters on Cézanne.\* They were written to Rilke's wife while the poet was in Paris in summer and fall of 1907 for the memorial exhibition of paintings by Cézanne, who had died the previous year. This quote is from a section I return to often:

"Works of art are always the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, to where no one can go any further. ... So surely we have no choice but to test and try ourselves against ... that singularity in us which no one would or even should understand, and which must enter into the work as such, as our personal madness, so to speak, in order to find its justification in the work and show the law in it, like an inborn design that is invisible until it emerges in the transparency of the artistic" (pp. 4-5).

Although Rilke is speaking of what is necessary for an artist to give birth to a work of art, the subject could just as well be a person seeking therapy. After all, chances are that what brings him or her to that point is an inner sense of being in danger. Literal, physical danger is relatively rare, I suspect; the threat being registered is actually to the inner being, to the psyche or soul-life, and this threat manifests as an unconscious, existential fear. In our techno-industrial and materialist culture, soul-life – even the idea of it – is under considerable pressure and more or less unavoidably compromised, for the materialist way of thinking is suspicious of invisible psyche and distracts us from experiencing it for ourselves. The soul's refreshing but tender ecosystem, with its singular rhythms and uncommon desires, is easily outshone by the external world's messages about success and what to value. It is in an agony of longing for its own true tones, with their strange star-dust rills and untamed utterances, and to rest, centred, in this beauty. It is the soul, that persistent traveller, who finds the narrow lane, shows up at the gate and pulls the bell cord for therapy.

Techno-industrialist culture, while immersing us in a steady stream of "prescriptive" technologies, which Ursula Franklin\* tells us are "designs for compliance," works hard to suppress our personal madness, and to make it seem as if everything, if it is of this world, is inherently understandable. That is the logic of the machine and of things out of relationship. Desolation, anxiety, anger, grief ... these become, in the contemporary lexicon of mental health, 'disorders' attributed to 'chemical imbalances.'

In reality, there is little chance of transformation unless each day we strive to meet our danger and pain as far as we can, unless we receive our madness like a guest and discern its unexpected, ecosystemic rightness – a

(Reprinted with permission from the Therapy Toronto Network website. First published September 14, 2012, and revised.)



Lake (Study in Blue 2) (2017)

distinctive and necessary thread in the living work that is our own consciousness, our own becoming. For the task is to become what one is. When we labour to eradicate our difference, to prune the non-compliant tangles, the part in us that chagrins and we cannot stand, then we are at odds with the singularity of our inner being. Therapy worth the name must dare to approach what Rilke referred to as the inborn design that longs to be made visible, experienced and embodied. The therapeutic way is to meet inner conflicts on their own terms. Any pruning and untangling that then occur will seem almost effortless. In time, something like a new substance, a quality of being, emerges quietly from our inner ecosystem, the way everything new in nature appears: whole, resilient, often surprising. Conflict and madness mature into a capacity to be with ourselves, to weave our singularity into the fabric of the world.

As long as humans have existed, our tribe has given shape to soul's journey. It is not accidental that today's surge in serious mental disturbances is correlated with the Industrial Revolution (see Iain McGilchrist\*): the more the techno-industrial mindset gains on us, the more radical becomes our separation from nature, and simultaneously the more acute the need to attack the singularity of a genuine soul-life. What we get is a kind of collective numbing: the song & dance we know as efficiency, sanctioned normalcy. The age-old expressive arts, such as painting, music and stories, can still initiate into a soul-life. Traditionally, therapy as healing ceremony never strayed far from them. Art and ceremony reveal what perceptive scientists learn too, that we dwell within a great mystery, which is not reducible to bits and bytes, nor quite knowable.

Sooner or later a person in therapy may be astonished to find that, as the original goals – for example, a relationship that works, confidence or liking oneself – come into tantalizing reach, there appears to be more to them than the hoped-for improvement in quality of life. It can seem then that our distress was an instigator and a guide, as if it was motivated by a goal of its own: to situate us once again in the wider web of life, beyond the personal. The paradox is that the more we become our genuine, singular self, the more we come to feel that we belong to something larger, something that seems to be at once outside and inside ourselves.

The odd sense of becoming linked into a greater reality can be frightening: the ego protests, it is not accustomed to the possibility of such an inner presence. It seems this is our true terra incognita, the unknown terrain of the soul, hinting at the totality of being that Jungians call the Self. It may take repeated experience of it before its truth can anchor us sufficiently to bring about that sense of belonging that leads to peace and healing. In women's dreams, the interior presence may show itself as a beautiful, loving stranger; in men, the compelling soul figure is apt to appear in female form. They

represent the Self's inexhaustible mystery and demonstrate how to participate in the treasure rather than try to possess it.

To lose one's soul-life is to lose everything. As therapists we stand up for that life, if we mean that it should have depth and resonance. What is birthed will not be art in Rilke's sense, but a work all the same. Critics frequently mock the idea of becoming oneself, yet the profound changes in self-understanding and conscious relatedness that ideally result from therapy can readily be described with that phrase. Becoming oneself announces a strange mix of new and old, something that, as Rilke said of the artistic process, cannot be grasped. Explanation might kill it. What a person in therapy creates is an instrument for a poetics of life. Like art, it grows from a rich exchange between inner and outer worlds at the threshold of paradox.

\* Rainer M. Rilke (1952/2002). *Letters on Cézanne*. Translated by Noel Agee. New York: North Point Press.

\* Ursula M. Franklin (1999). *The Real World of Technology*. CBC Massey Lectures. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

\* Iain McGilchrist (2009). *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the Western world*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

## ZYMOETZ BIRTHDAY

Johanna Beyers, August 2016

On her forty-first birthday  
Amanita packs bear spray, GPS,  
maps, water, the boombox with bird calls  
and Diesel the dog into the Toyota Tundra,  
collects Mitch's assistant Monica  
though today is not a fisheries job  
and heads for the road into the hills  
along the Copper River.

One hundred and twenty years ago  
these slopes were staked for gold, silver,  
lead, tungsten, copper and moly, marble  
too, tracing an ancient grease trail network  
that linked Northwestern tribes.

It is 8 in the morning. The air is fresh,  
heavy with the smell of thunder  
that never comes, sweet where clover  
nudges the side of the logging road.  
It's in good shape, the washboards  
light and smooth. They see no one.  
The cedar-planked Bailey bridge,  
a relic from the flood of '78,  
takes the truck's weight effortlessly.  
There are no railings. Down below  
the water tumbles milky blue, turquoise  
blue, still glacial all this way out of the high country  
beyond Telkwa Pass.





The Zymoetz River

The road turns north with the river and stops.  
 They clamber through the slash and the wet brush  
 and blueberry bushes to the hemlock forest  
 in their rain gear. Diesel smiles.  
 Weeks ago there'd been a sow with three cubs  
 near here, fishing and eating berries. Amanita  
 talks to the bears when she's in their home  
     but they have all left.  
 They're catching steelhead farther down  
 where the Copper meets the Skeena.  
 Now it's just droppings and moose tracks.

Amo and Monica set up the boombox,  
 play the goshawk loop. Someone reported  
 having heard the birds but today nothing  
 comes back except the mimicking cries  
 of Steller's jays and whiskey jacks.  
 They try again every few kilometres.  
 No luck. If there were goshawks here,  
 they are gone.

The birds' nesting sites lie squalid  
 in a clearcut haze. What's left of intact forest  
 hangs on in places like this, steep crags  
 below the alpine. Black flies eat the young  
 before they fledge.

Far above the road countless creeks  
 mix their lifeblood with the debris of decades  
 & send it swirling down the mountains  
 into the path of the Copper  
 without reservation.

The sun breaks through.  
 It is hot beneath the rain gear.

"The Zymoetz River, known locally as the Copper, originates in the Coast Mountains of northwestern British Columbia near Smithers, and flows south and then west to join the Skeena River east of Terrace."

**Johanna Beyers**, PhD, MSW/RSW, is a poet, mixed media artist, Jungian-oriented counsellor and certified sandplay therapist with much interest in what blocks the creative process and how to befriend it. Creative process is a pathway into the inner sphere of imagination and out again into the world as we give form and expression to experience. It is at once inspiration and exhalation, being and doing. The creative process is different for everyone. Johanna's revolves around connecting with a deep current of rapture-enrapture with mystery and meaning. Part of the journey to artistic expression is to learn what our true material is and how to be present to it in our own genuine way. Johanna is the author of *Sandbar Islands* (Caitlin, 1988) and *Wearing my Feathered Hat: Engaging Change through Seven Dreams* (Wind Oak & Dove, 2013).



# PADDLING TOGETHER

## TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

**JoAnn Restoule**

**INTRODUCTION by Karen Close**



2018 has been declared the year of reconciliation by engaging Canadians in dialogue and transformative experiences that revitalize the relationships between Indigenous peoples and all Canadians.

“Reconciliation means different things to different people. The elders I am blessed to have had guide me, say that everyone is imbued with unique gifts. We are all medicine. Reconciliation to me means to bring our unique gifts together to change the world to make it a better place for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to come. We must understand the truth of this country’s past, heal together and make sure the things that caused such trauma, never ever happen again.” - Kathi Camilleri

Kathi Camilleri is an Aboriginal woman who has coordinated healing programs in the Aboriginal community for 19 years. She has a Master’s degree in Leadership Studies. Inspired by Jann Derrick’s teachings of ‘The Circle and The Box’ and by many Elders’ teachings she created *BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH UNDERSTANDING THE VILLAGE*©. The goal of these experiential workshops is for participants to explore their personal roles in supporting the revival of the values that worked so beautifully in Indigenous villages for thousands of years and to explore in depth the effects of residential schools and Canada’s policy of assimilation. Kathi’s workshops are geared to solutions rather than recrimination and are forums in which to ask questions.

Kathi was invited to present her workshop on Vancouver Island for a group of nine participants. Among the participants was JoAnn Restoule, Youth Family Support Worker at the Mark R. Isfeld High School, Courtenay B.C. JoAnne felt so inspired by what she heard she contacted me. In this issue

and upcoming issues of *The Journal* will be sharing the stories of these participants with our readers.

Since classical antiquity, to be a sage has been about seeking self knowledge, one’s own uniqueness and the wisdom it manifests. Cultures evolve by the sharing of its people’s wisdom. Indigenous cultures have called this eldering. “Elders are the carriers and emblems of communally generated and mediated knowledge. In the Western paradigm, such relations and processes of knowledge transmission are considered ‘informal’. Yet, these same processes are at the heart and soul of what is ‘formal’ to Indigenous knowledge.” Visit: <https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/elders.html>

Kathi Camilleri



It is time to share the wisdom of the ages, to seek reconciliation and build a strong, unified and resilient Canadian culture.

### PADDLING TOGETHER TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

I stood in a circle watching the slow rising smoke of the smudge, smelling the perfumed scent of sweetgrass. I could feel my heart pounding as I listened intently to the words being spoken by the Elder, in a prayer acknowledging our place and responsibilities to Mother Earth, giving thanks for all of life's blessings and closing with the phrase 'All My Relation'. In that moment I felt my mind and heart become 'One.' All My Relations is an all encompassing statement, opening my mind and heart to the pathway of an incredible life journey towards 'Mino Bimaadiziwin' – The Good Life.

I am Anishinaabe Kwe of the Dokis First Nation. My crests are the Eagle – Migisi and the Muskrat – Wajask. I was born in 1956 to Sylvia Dokis. At that time in our country's history, the policy of assimilation and the Indian Act were in full force. As a result, I was placed into an adoptive home until I was 18 months old. For many reasons, the greatest of which I attribute to the Great Mystery – Chi Manitou, I was reunited with my birth family and went to live with my maternal grandmother. I called her Memere. Her name was Deline Dokis, and my mother was Sylvia Dokis. My Memere gave me the name 'Bedoos-kadoo', Slow Swimming, Moving Turtle. When I was the age of six, my mother married my father, Phillippe Restoule. He was also descended from the Anishinabe of Dokis Bay. I grew up in the small French Canadian town of Sturgeon Falls. I enjoyed a life full of family, extended family and cousins. My father's mother, Mary Restoule, spoke little to no

English and had not fully transitioned to a Western way of life. I have fond memories of her, trying to speak to me in Anishinabe when I would run errands for my father. I found her very mysterious; at a deeper level I could feel that she saw the world very differently and in hindsight I now know that she held the old ways of seeing. In contrast, my mother's mother, Deline Dokis, had assimilated to the Western world, as a means of survival. She had lost her husband to a head injury that left him institutionalized and her children were placed into the convent of *Les Filles de La Sagesse* in Sturgeon Falls. I found out later in my life that both of my parents had been placed in residential schools as the Residential School Act was part of Canada's policy of assimilation.

I am grateful that despite the wounds of their experiences my parents held it together as best as they could. Fortunately, I had many opportunities before the age of 10 to experience the old ways. My father was a hunter, trapper and fisherman. I enjoyed going out with him and have great memories of our times together; it was at these times in his life that I saw his true essence and strength as a human being. My aunts, cousins and

Young JoAnn and family







Top: JoAnn and her family

Middle: The Village Big House traditional welcome

Bottom: No Face Dolls Seven Sisters

uncles were active in trapping beaver, selling beaver pelts and making traditional moccasins and gloves. You might think that I was raised in the early 1900s, in fact this was still taking place in the 50s and 60s.

As a teenager I spent a lot of time with my Memere. Through her life modelling and her devotion to the Church, I began to see the value of ritual and spiritual practice. It was through her support and encouragement that I navigated the intergenerational trauma that was at times destroying our family. Knowing that I needed to survive in this Western world, she convinced me to apply to university. I credit her for giving me my wings ... to fly.

Arriving in the city of Ottawa, I had no strong sense of who I was as an 'Indian'. Most of my life experiences had taught me to keep that identity a 'secret'. Once I was fully immersed into the community of Carleton University, I began to connect with other young people from all parts of the world. I was fascinated and amazed to see the pride they had in their cultural and spiritual identity and I felt something waking up inside me. I was fortunate to begin working with the National Indian Brotherhood (now Assembly of First Nations). Here I began the journey of awakening to the history of our people and the realization of the work that needed to take place to bring about the healing of our nations. Travelling across Canada, I was exposed to the cultural and spiritual teaching of many nations from 'Turtle Island'. As I listened to these beautiful Elders I could feel myself blossoming into a beautiful garden, feeling a sense of place and belonging that I had never felt before.

The Elders' teachings on the Sacred Circle – the Sacred Hoop – the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Sacred Teachings, White Buffalo Calf Woman and the Hopi Prophecies taught me life's important lesson – that all of humanity belongs in the Sacred Circle. The oral history, those sacred teaching stories opened me to a life purpose that I could never have imagined possible.

In the early 80s I moved to Vancouver Island to start a family. Having married into the Kwakwaka'wakw I experienced a deepening of my understanding and awareness of the intense value of spiritual and cultural practice. I was living the dream, married in a traditional wedding ceremony - 'Kadzikla' held at a family potlatch in the ceremonial Big House in Alert Bay. My family and relatives travelled to the ceremony, where my brothers and parents stepped into this sacred space. I witnessed a great healing for my parents and my family. Throughout this time my life was full, spending time with Elders, attending ceremonies, learning more about my own history and those who are my children's people. My blank canvas of identity, belonging and place had begun to be filled with beautiful images.



Top, left to right:  
Mask Face of the Earth 1, 2, 3, 4  
Above left: Jingle Dancer  
Above right: JoAnn and uncle David at her  
naming ceremony

In the late 80s my husband and I moved our family to the land of the K'omoks. Our children descended through their great-grandmother to be K'omoks. With the guidance of Elders and the Great Mystery, Chi Manitou, many opportunities presented themselves. For me the greatest was the creation of the cultural group Oh Toh Kin – translated from the K'omoks language as 'strength from our Ancestry'. Over a period of a decade using the teachings of the Sacred Circle we created a model of

cross-cultural awareness and called it 'Sharing the Spirit'. People came to our Comox Valley from around the world and, through song, dance, ceremony, teaching circles and theatre, my world was filled with the energy of the ancestors. I am immensely grateful for this time. This was also a time in my life when I began to explore parts of myself that had been asleep. I connected with that creative energy that comes from the divine source.

With the teachings of the tradition of the No Face Doll, I worked at deepening my understanding of this healing art form and connected it to the legends and stories of our people. I created interpretations of the Seven Sisters, the Star Nation and the Jingle Dancer.

To represent my connection to the world around me – Mother Earth - I worked on creating a series of masks I regarded as *Voices of the Earth*. Using birch bark, feather, beads, and shells the masks held the teachings that all things are sacred and connected.

As I journeyed through this time in my life I stepped into a deeper relationship with 'All My Relations' and my own connection to the living environment around me. With the support of my uncle David Somerville I began attending and apprenticing to the ceremony of the sweat lodge. This was a time of intense personal and spiritual growth for me.



# WRITING INTO MYSELF



## Melanie Murray

“I don’t write about what I know. I write in order to find out what I know.”  
– Patricia Hampl

I came late to the writing life. Approaching sixty while working on my first book, I was encouraged that one of my favourite authors, Ethel Wilson, had published her first novel at age fifty-nine. As a professor of English at Okanagan College for three decades, I read books, analysed them, and discussed them. Books were my passion, but I had no aspirations to write one. Then a cataclysmic event in the life of my family compelled me to try.

My nephew was killed by a roadside bomb while serving with the Canadian military in Afghanistan. I needed to help my sister survive the loss of her only son and – to deal with my own grief – try to understand why Jeff needed to become a soldier. He was a thirty-year-old doctoral student in sociology when he abandoned his dissertation and enlisted, five days before 9/11. I wanted to create meaning out of Jeff’s life and death, so I had to tell his story. I believed that a story could be as essential as food and water in restoring people to life.

In writing about my nephew, however, I soon discovered that I was also writing about myself, about my own inner journey of understanding. As I explored the events of Jeff’s life – from his birth on Remembrance Day, 1970, to his death on July 4th, American Independence Day, 2007. I began to see a clear pattern, one that Joseph Campbell calls *the hero’s journey*. Jeff was an academic, a student of Buddhism, and a dedicated practitioner of many martial arts. Approaching the second stage of his life, he asked that crucial question: *What am I called to serve?* I realized that becoming a soldier was a culmination of Jeff’s search for higher purpose; it was his way of serving the world. Through writing his story, I came to a new appreciation of what *service* really means.

Although I’d respected Jeff’s dedication to help a suffering people, I had not been a supporter of our military’s mission in Afghanistan. I considered myself a pacifist. But I had never been able to reconcile the problem of combatting the evil that exists in the world. What do you do when the barbarians are at the gate? What do you do when the lives of your children are threatened? A pacifist philosophy is fine until people are confronted with real threats to their lives. It’s easy to be a pacifist if no one is holding a gun in your face. The act of writing this book made me realize that it isn’t black and white. I can wear my peace earrings alongside my scarlet poppy, symbols that jointly acknowledge all the men and women who put on a uniform and pay

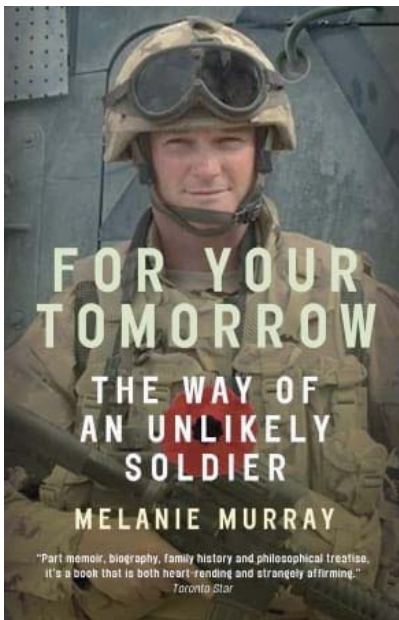


the ultimate price so that we can live in this peaceable country. As Leonard Cohensings, “The dove is never free.”

The creation and reception of my first book, *For Your Tomorrow: The Way of an Unlikely Soldier* affirmed for me the power of story to create meaning out of chaos and provide sustenance. It inspired me to search for my own purpose and propelled me into the writing of my next book. While in Scotland researching my family ancestry, I took a detour down to Ayrshire – Robert Burns country.

In the village of Mauchline, I visited a room in the Burns House Museum where the poet and his wife had lived for a brief time after they were married in 1788.

Sitting by the stone hearth, gazing at a hooded cradle and curtained box-bed, I began thinking for the first time about Jean Armour, born and raised in this village where she met and married Robert Burns. Her story attracted my attention. What would it have been like to be married to the philandering, impoverished poet? Then in the kirkyard, I discovered the gravesite of their four daughters who had died in early childhood. Having witnessed the maternal grief that crushed my sister, I couldn’t imagine what a mother would have suffered with these losses.



Top Burns House Museum

Above: *For Your Tomorrow: The Way of an Unlikely Soldier*

Jean Armour, that small room, and the grave of her baby girls stayed with me. Over the next couple of years, I read several biographies about Burns as well as his collections of letters, poems and songs, attempting to piece together a picture of his wife from the snippets written about her. She emerged as a footnote in the life of the poet, a stereotype of the long-suffering wife – utterly devoted and eternally forbearing. But from the incredible facts I had learned about her years with Burns, I knew this woman was much more complex than the blurry figure sketched in literary history. She seemed another faceless wife of a famous man, never acknowledged for her role in the great man’s achievements. And the more I read and speculated about Jean Armour, the closer I felt to her as a woman whose experiences mirrored some of mine: meeting a poet, falling in forbidden love, then watching your safe, predictable existence veer off course. By probing Jean’s fatal attachment, I began to understand my own. I wanted to give this woman a voice, to let her step from the shadows and into the light.

I knew the book couldn’t be a standard biography since Jean’s only surviving letters were written after her husband’s death and only a few quotations are ascribed to her. I had an outline of facts, but they didn’t tell her



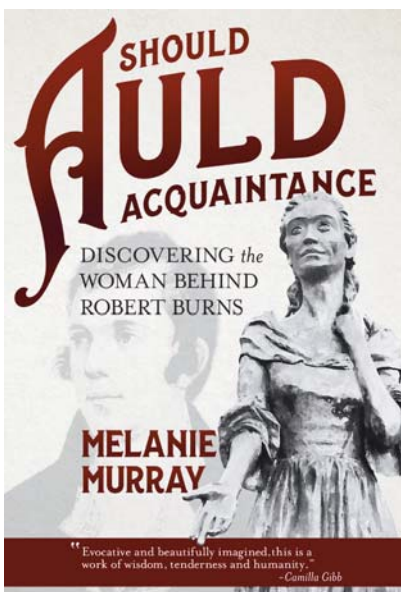


story – it existed between the lines of the facts. So I travelled back to Scotland to follow Jean Armour’s footsteps through the past. I visited the landscapes, the towns and the houses she inhabited while maintaining an ongoing conversation with her in my journal. As this eighteenth-century woman came alive for me in the present, I experienced the flow of time in an entirely new way, more as the thirteenth century Zen master Dgen Zenji explains it: “Every being that exists in the entire world is linked together as moments in time, and at the same time they exist as individual moments of time.” A strong resilient

figure began to emerge: a woman who rose from the ashes of her many losses and allowed the genius of Robert Burns to flourish. The hybrid form of the book *Should Auld Acquaintance: Discovering the Woman Behind Robert Burns* gradually took shape – part memoir, part literary biography, part novelized nonfiction. And like my first book, it evolved into a journey of discovery, not only about my biographical subject but also about myself.

We all have within us a wealth of stories waiting to be told. The process of writing allows us to give these stories shape and find the deeper meaning beneath the surface of events. I have recently retired from teaching, but I will never retire from writing. I have learned that whatever form the words may take, and whether they be published or not, the process itself – creation and self-investigation – is sustaining.

**Melanie Murray** was born in Nova Scotia and studied English Literature at the University of New Brunswick. Drawn to the temperate climate and beauty of the Okanagan Valley, she moved to Kelowna in 1986 and taught English and Creative Writing at Okanagan College for thirty-one years. Melanie is the author of *Should Auld Acquaintance: Discovering the Woman Behind Robert Burns* (Nightwood Editions, 2017) and *For Your Tomorrow: The Way of an Unlikely Soldier* (Random House, 2011). Recently retired from teaching, she now devotes her time to reading and writing as well as editing and evaluating manuscripts for other writers. You can read more about her books at [www.melaniemurray.ca](http://www.melaniemurray.ca).



Top: Burns’ daughter’s graves

Above: *Should Auld Acquaintance*

# AGING BACK TO MYSELF

## Joan Lansdell



As age creeps up on oneself, you tend to look back on what was and what is.

I grew up in Vernon within a family of creative minds and varied talents. I was fortunate to have a wonderful private art teacher throughout my school years. After school I attended U.B.C. and received my BSN in nursing. Then on to Community Health, working in various B.C. communities. At the time of my retirement I also was diagnosed with breast cancer. My two boys (young men) came to me and suggested that I go back to my art.

I had not painted for over 50 years and this was a challenge. I was very apprehensive and I was sure I would fail. A pastel artist from Kelowna was giving a series of classes in Summerland and my husband encouraged me to enroll. I really was hesitant. I had no confidence in my ability as it had been so long since I had picked up a pastel. With trepidation, I attended, brought my old art supplies and started to make art. The old feelings came back. I was actually creating a work and the instructor told me that I had no reason to feel unable to create again. My ability was still there. I felt so good and relieved.

Since that time I have done many pastel landscapes, had a variety of shows and sold a few works. When my husband died six years ago, I didn't continue for awhile, and then I heard of a class offering acrylics. Something new to me; I thought I'd give this a try as perhaps something new could help me accept a new lifestyle.

The paintings I learned to create were completely different from a formal style I was used to. I felt so free and creative. It gave me such a feeling of joy.

Pastel



Onward, I went trying out encaustic painting in beeswax. Again the freedom and joy of bright colours spoke to me.

I am now experimenting in transparent alcohol based inks. During the Christmas season, I was suddenly unable to walk with my left leg due to nerves being pinched. The pain was terrible. Not being able to do anything and feeling depressed I took out my ink paints and started to create bright wonderful paintings. This was so therapeutic for me as it kept my mind on the effects I was creating and not on the pain. Interesting though





Top left: acrylic  
 Above: encaustic  
 Top right: alcohol inks

one day was very painful, but I painted and then looking at the work later I discovered that the colours were darker and seemed mystical.

This experience really showed me how your emotions can be reflected in your colour choices. I have found a great renewal in my life due to painting, and trying out new medium.

Even with my nursing experience and assisting families with problems, I've come to understand that making art is a self healing process that can only come from within one's self.

I think that changing my style of art from more traditional subjects to my own interpretations has opened me up to new feelings of freedom in expression and content. This freedom is a feeling that I have never experienced before.

Group involvement also keeps you young and active. It's important to keep being curious. Now I am trying out pottery at the Summerland Pottery Guild. Working with others, sharing ideas makes for a happy old age. I finally think I almost know myself and have gained more confidence in what I can do. I am very grateful to my family for encouraging me to recreate my youthful enjoyment of making art.

Now in her eighties, **Joan Lansdell** lives with her siamese cat in her home outside Summerland. She enjoys living alone and talking to her inner self through making art. Her cat is her best critic.

# JOIN THE DANCE

## Ellen Ehlers



Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't  
you join the dance?

You can really have no notion how delightful it will be...

– Lewis Carroll

The desire to dance has been with me as far back as I can remember. This dream did not come true until after the birth of my third child in 1977. My daughter's birth led me to Middle Eastern dance. I felt the need to engage in a form of physical activity that went beyond working with mechanical equipment in a gym or, at the other end, hatha yoga. I felt the need to use my body as an instrument to express what oral language could not; I did not have the words. I felt an inner force compelling me to sign up for "Danse Orientale" (also known as Middle Eastern dance) offered through Continuing Education for adults. Memories of olden times flashed through my mind as I recalled the countless myths I had read in my childhood.

As a child I had entered the mystical world of Egypt through films; as an adult my mind explored the ancient mysteries and I pored over book after book on the land of the pharaohs. My imagination crossed the threshold to another realm as I travelled through the pyramids. I entered the Egyptian world of hieroglyphic thought, a visual language. As a university student I followed *The Passion of Isis and Osiris* (Houston, 1995) in their heartrending story, which, according to Houston, is "the most soul-stirring love story in world mythology."

I developed a Middle Eastern dance program for adults and later embraced other dance forms using the nuances of Middle Eastern dance; I taught this program for 13 years, until April 1992, through Ontario's Peel District School Board, Continuing Education. This particular dance form has enabled me to embrace the feminine aspects of my Self and define who I am. I came to recognize the place of the body in my inner and outer landscapes; both permeate my being. My realisation became a stepping stone to entering the dance program at York University in Toronto.

In 1984 I had a dream; I wanted to major in dance at York University with the ambition of becoming a dance therapist. The passion was so strong, I felt I could make my dream tangible. In the summer of that year I took a risk and auditioned. A number was put on my back and I executed the dance steps – literally, ha, ha! Still I had a tiny ray of hope because we each had to perform a two-minute solo. The two-member jury, a male and a female, sat watching, not a flicker of emotion was evident. I had spent weeks perfecting a routine I had choreographed, a one-minute classical veil dance followed by a one-minute body articulation to a drum solo. The outcome: "Take one year of





Ellen Dancing

ballet training and try again.” I was not going to give up; dance – my heart, my soul and my passion – is the very essence of my existence. Another year went by and I received a letter from York University informing me if I did not take a course that year I would have to reapply. I was determined not to let anything stand in the way of fulfilling my dream to attend university full time.

Events in 1991 occurred in my life that made it possible for me to entertain the thought of attending university. I was unemployed and had sold my home. Although I had not taken any ballet classes, I knew I had to try once more; my heart told me there was a way. The secret lay in listening to what my heart had to say. It told me to send in a taped video of my own choreographed dance instead of going through another audition. I needed to be judged on my skills as a dancer, not on how well I performed ballet steps.

In order to produce a video I needed to locate suitable space. The search for studio space began. Nothing. I became frantic when I couldn’t find anything and kept on trying to calm myself with positive thoughts, there had to be a reason for all of this. It all came together when I had a dream in which I saw myself dressed in white dancing on beautiful lush green grass with a purple veil draped around my shoulders. I had been to the home of a dance student of mine who had the ideal location. The property behind her home backed onto a green belt, with no fences. It was wide-open space – a verdant carpet of green grass decorated with a variety of pine and deciduous trees. By chance, a friend played a selection of music for me to listen to, and I heard it – the song, “Dancing Birds” by Himekami, a Japanese composer.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VF\\_tYF\\_gvo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VF_tYF_gvo)

Birds serve as messengers between two realms: earth on which a person dwells and the cosmos as reflected in a person’s unconscious mind.

The stage was set. I danced on the lush green grass under a sapphire blue sky, a smiling radiant yellow sun, and birds, singing birds, that warbled to their heart’s content. I delivered the videotape on the final submission date. When the vehicle Sundance pulled over in front of my car while driving home, Ra the sun god in Egyptian mythology came to mind; in Greek mythology he is known as Apollo. I read this as a sign and intuitively knew I would be accepted into the dance program at York. Time passed. The acceptance letter arrived later in the summer.

I entered the wonderland called *education*. In 2004 – thirteen years later – I received my Ph.D. in Holistic and Aesthetic Education from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, O.I.S.E., University of Toronto. Ontario



Fluid Mindscapes Workshop, Mexico

#### Institute for Studies in Education

Over four decades have passed since 1977 but my interest in the bodymind connection has not wavered. I love being in my body ... my body is the instrument that I play as I express who I AM.

A two-year teaching engagement in Nanjing, China (2009 - 2011), gave me the opportunity to apply my educational knowledge; I integrated the arts to teach the many facets of language and literacy in both English and German. Following my heart back to Canada, I decided to design a course utilizing the arts to facilitate self-development. I believe that everyone has a gift although they may not know it.

My plans took time to germinate. In December 2015 I woke up three times during the night to write down words that were in my mind, I knew they were important. Next my challenge was to find images to go with the text. Fluid Mindscapes [www.fluidmindscapes.ca](http://www.fluidmindscapes.ca) came into being. In my program participants have the opportunity for self-expression as they experience a variety of art forms. I know, and am aware, that all forms of creative and artistic experience provide a testing ground for values, personal growth and change, leading to transformation of the *self*. The arts are interrelated and connect to our senses. The human being is multisensory. We each have different ways of expressing ourselves.

The Universe works in mysterious ways. Fourteen years have gone by since I last taught Middle Eastern Dance at Hart House, University of Toronto, and I have relocated. By chance, I ended up in a conversation with a woman at my local YMCA in Kelowna just before Christmas this past year; we both participate in the Fit for Life 50+ class. When Rina discovered that I had over 20 years' experience in teaching this dance form, she became increasingly excited at the prospect of taking private lessons with me. She wanted to honour her *self*. She felt that it would be ideal to reconnect her body and mind and help to heal the brain injury she had sustained from a concussion back in April 2017. When Rina joined me in dance, she kept a journal and shared it with me. Here are her words:

*"How did all this come about?"* she wondered

In November 2017, I saw the Dipp Dancers in Kelowna and was overcome with a strong desire to join them. I also realized that my age was against me ... I physically would not be able to perform such quick choppy movements. But, I felt a strong pull of desire; a need to dance on my own, and increase my repertoire of moves, filled my being.

I had taken a two-hour belly dancing workshop in December; it was so much fun. I knew it was important for me to learn a new dance form and belly dancing was perfect. When I met Ellen and talked to her, I knew that she was the answer to my learning this dance form. Energy had rushed through different parts of my arms and legs as we talked; I could feel my body





Rina dancing

unblocking.

My lessons began on Friday, January 5, 2018. The first class was hard, but I do love a challenge. I love the sexiness of the moves. For my second class, on January 16, I felt tired and vulnerable. I even began to worry that belly dancing might be too difficult as a result of my tiredness. But the class was fun. I felt that I was starting to pick up some isolations and movement combinations. Ellen suggested that we work on choreography next time. At the end, even though I was still tired, I felt energized and looking forward to putting these moves together next week.

*In our third class, we started working with veils. Dancing and playing with the veil made me so very happy. I have hooked into my sense of freedom – the joy of being engulfed in dance. This is where I belong. I feel energized, sexy, cheeky, and so totally me. As I continue with my lessons, I look forward to expressing myself again and experiencing the sheer joy of moving freely with grace and passion. I feel that I have joined the dance of life.”*

**Ellen Ehlers** began her storied life when she entered university as a mature student. She was particularly intrigued by the body-mind-spirit interrelationship and undertook extensive research across multiple disciplines. Segments of her findings were presented at international conferences. Ellen’s doctoral thesis in curriculum development is written as a narrative based on life experiences. She had noted that the self is not part of the curriculum. In her doctoral journey, Ellen examined the role of the arts (Fine Arts, Creative Arts, and Expressive Arts) as a means of illuminating the many layers as observer of self, and the multiple ways of knowing. The title of her dissertation is: *Je suis: Danza del Sol*.

In 2005, Ellen relocated from Toronto to Kelowna. Here she strives to establish her niche in the Arts and has realized that the best way to do this is to create an arts-based course for self-development. She follows her intuition, knowing that this is her soul’s path.

Contact: [ellen.aquarius@gmail.com](mailto:ellen.aquarius@gmail.com)

# TRANSFORMING GRIEF INTO CREATIVITY

## Marc Dansereau



It is a great privilege, honour and joy to be a husband and the father of six children. Like most fathers, I have taken particular pride in providing for and protecting my family. Thus, it is especially painful for me to accept that I cannot protect my family from suffering, death and grief. Our family has spent much time on the beaches of Shuswap Lake building sandcastles. I never expected that building sandcastles would become so therapeutic and take on such deep meaning in my life.

In October, 2014, my wife discovered a lump about the size of a golf ball on the tummy of my 6-year-old daughter, Bernadette. We took her to our family doctor the next day where an ultrasound showed there was a tumor in her liver and we immediately went to the B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver for further tests. While spending many long days with my wife and daughter at the Children's Hospital, wading through all the medical tests needed to obtain the official diagnosis, numbness set in. It is very painful to hear these words from a doctor: "Bernadette has stage 4 cancer. There is no cure." We asked how long she had to live and the answer was shocking: "There is no way to know for certain; we are guessing months, not years."

After receiving the diagnosis from the Children's Hospital my wife and I took Bernadette and our two other daughters to spend a weekend at the Canuck Place Children's Hospice. We were surprised to discover such a place existed. The team of doctors, nurses and support staff have created a place of refuge for families. They took the time to provide us with advice, encourage-

ment and support. Together, we came up with a plan of how to best care for Bernadette and the staff continued to journey with us until her death. We regularly called the hospice when we had questions. It was reassuring to know they were ready to help any time of day or night. After our weekend at the hospice we then brought Bernadette back home where we cared for her until she died three months later.

This traumatic and devastating event brought me to my knees and led me down completely unexpected paths of discovery. The biggest surprise was that Bernadette became my best mentor. Her illness and death have led me to live in ways I didn't believe were possible and had never experienced before. For exam-

Bernadette, Tappen beach on Shuswap Lake







**Top:** Bernadette's Castle

**Above:** Sandcastles at the local mall

ple, for the first 50 years of my life I had rarely shed tears. In fact, I avoided tears whenever possible. I didn't believe they were valuable or desirable. Bernadette's short life provided me with an opportunity to receive the gift of tears.

Losing Bernadette was especially difficult because of the feeling of a complete loss of control. The most difficult part of this journey has been watching the rest of my family suffer and feeling completely vulnerable and powerless to alleviate their vulnerability and anguish. It is impossible to put into words exactly what this experience feels like. In some ways, this journey and experience have been a living hell, but we have received the love, prayers and support from so many people, many of them complete strangers. It is humbling to have so many people love us so much.

After surviving the journey of Bernadette's illness and death, I felt a growing desire to do something meaningful with all my pent-up energy and emotion. About six months after her death, that inner desire propelled me into action. I decided to build what I call Bernadette's castle. It would be something special and something grand! Normally, I would build a small sandcastle at the local beach, take a picture and then walk away. Before building Bernadette's castle I needed to find a safe building site where I could go really big and know that it would not be disturbed; I had 10 cubic yards of sand delivered to my driveway. I then spent about three weeks transforming the pile of sand into something big and beautiful. Most of my know-how came from YouTube videos and practice. As I worked on it, I imagined how Bernadette was now certainly in a safe and beautiful place and maybe that place was a castle of refuge. I allowed myself to just create what came to mind. I was surprised at the result because I didn't consider myself an artist. I believe that many of us hold on to a negative self-image and remain reluctant to discover our inherent greatness. In my experience I can see that I have been held back most often by fear, negative thinking and bad habits.

In the past few years I have continued building sandcastles in my community and have been asked to build castles in local parks, for music festivals, for Canada Day and in the shopping mall in Salmon Arm. I've discovered how much healing I'm getting from expressing this creativity. I enjoy getting questions from people and the interaction with total strangers. One of my greatest joys is when people approach me while I'm working and they open up and share their stories of grief. I have received so much support from Canuck Place Children's Hospice and the local hospice society, my hope is that others might also experience healing by sharing their grief. One of the goals of these sandcastles is to raise awareness about hospice and to raise funds for hospice. The way I see things, every project I work on is giving



Top: Sandcastle in Marine Park, Salmon Arm

Above: Bernadette

Bernadette's life and death deeper meaning. If you want to see more pictures you can visit the photo gallery found at <http://thedansereauden.ca/gallery-sand-sculptures/>

Bernadette has given me the greatest gift a man could wish for. She was only with us for six short years but her story has touched so many people. I've developed the habit of regularly pulling out a picture of Bernadette that I carry with me in my wallet. That picture is a reminder to me that her life is very real and this wasn't just a dream. When I take the time to remember Bernadette's life I find that I am better able to focus and live in the present moment as I encounter

other people. As I work on the sandcastles I imagine people being touched and inspired by the story. I imagine that people who are having a really bad day, a bad week or a lot of painful events in their lives might find a place of refuge by taking some time to enjoy the sight of a big beautiful sandcastle. Bernadette has helped me to mature and see things in a new way. My tears are a mix of sadness for what we have suffered, but also include many tears of joy to know that I am the daddy of this amazing little girl. I am convinced that the gift of tears has improved my vision. I no longer immediately focus on other people's flaws and faults, but rather take the time to consider how much they might be suffering. The irony that too many people miss is that the way we treat others is exactly how we treat ourselves. Healing and growth can only come when we learn to stop doing violence against ourselves or anyone else.

I sometimes imagine, while creating another sandcastle, that Bernadette is talking to me, giving me advice about how I might mature more quickly. In the past, my normal way of thinking and responding was usually, "I am not buying what other people are selling." I recognize that I've been too much attached to that way of thinking. The biggest reason I'm a little smarter today is that my mentor Bernadette has helped me develop a more docile heart – a heart that loves to connect with other people while I build sandcastles!

"Darkness is a better teacher than light! Great love and great suffering get us to see correctly." Richard Rohr

**Marc and Patti Dansereau** and their six children have lived in the Shuswap since 2002. For over twenty years Marc has worked in software development for various clients including healthcare, life insurance and telecommunications companies as well as a few government agencies. The entire family's understanding of the need for hospice care grew through the journey of caring for their 6-year-old daughter Bernadette. She was diagnosed with terminal cancer and died of the illness less than four months later in January 2015. Marc's life has changed for the better because of the generous support received from so many including hospice. Marc has joined the board of the Shuswap Hospice Society and brings a desire to improve the services available in his community and to help families and individuals in need. Marc can be contacted at [marcpauldansereau@gmail.com](mailto:marcpauldansereau@gmail.com). The website is [www.TheDansereauDen.ca](http://www.TheDansereauDen.ca)



# CREATING CULTURE



Sarena Parmar – photo by David Cooper for Sarena’s head-shot.

Season’s handbook poster: photo of Sarena Parmar by Peter Andrew Luszyk. Design by KeyGordon.com.

## Karen Close with Sarena Parmar

Last spring while walking to an opening of one of the performances at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, I heard the click of someone running in high heels on the pavement behind me. I was impressed and curious. I turned to meet a beautiful young actress, Sarena Parmar. We introduced ourselves and discovered a wonderful connection. Sarena was born in Kelowna, British Columbia, where I now live, and of course we both have a passion for the arts and the importance of creative expression. Quickly our conversation became a beautiful sharing. Sarena was open and giving:

“I remember saying I wanted to be an actor before I understood what it meant to be an actor. Looking back, I think that speaks to a calling or inner truth that I understood at a young age. I introduced myself to Neal Facey a year before I was eligible for his drama program at Kelowna Secondary School; I was that eager to learn! Without a gifted mentor like Neal, I doubt my calling would have manifested into a reality. It was through Neal’s passion for the theatre that I learned about my own passion for the theatre.

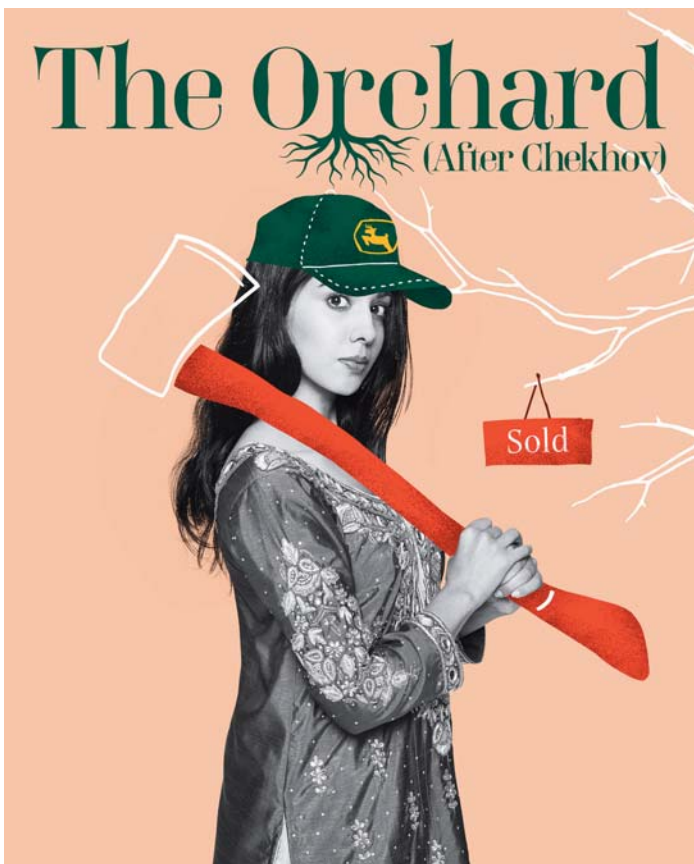
I learned about discipline, work ethic, curiosity and joy for the stage through his example. I continue to rely on those early tenets to guide me in my career today. And even though we only meet for lunch once a year—I live in Toronto now—Neal continues to be one of my biggest cheerleaders.”

I smiled at her enthusiasm for beliefs I hold dear about teaching, in the arts in particular. Teachers who deeply understand how to foster creative expression in their students are precious resources for our cultural heritage. As a former English and Visual Arts teacher, I believe the most important lesson a young person receives is the sage wisdom to ‘Know Yourself.’ and the drive to manifest that Self through dedication and formal, and informal, education.

“No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half-asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.”  
Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

Later last fall I received a note from the Shaw





Sarena's grand parents in front of their orchard

letting me know that Sarena had written a play about her family's orchard in the Okanagan and it would be performed at The Shaw in the 2018 season. The set is an interpretation of the Okanagan.

**38. Photo:** sketch of the Okanagan setting

Sarena and I began corresponding and this article is a sharing of her words:

"I really connect with the idea that you must know yourself in order to share yourself. I think that encapsulates my journey of writing the play, *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*. My primary discipline is acting, and I entered playwriting without any formal writing training. So it took me years to find the confidence to call myself a playwright. Eventually I realized that I was the only one who could tell my story. Once I understood the power of my personal perspective, *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* started progressing by leaps and bounds. Being a self-taught writer wasn't easy; there was so much learning to be done, so much failing, and so much humility. Throughout that process I also learned to embrace grace and gratitude."

Sarena's script explores love in its many cloaks. The Shaw performance is directed by her husband, Ravi Jain, and the story is richly personal to Sarena.

"My family immigrated to Canada in 1967. My grandmother's brother, who already lived in the Okanagan, sponsored my grandparents and their children. My grandparents lived in Westbank, working at the lumber mill and Byland's Nursery. Three years later they bought our orchard in North Glenmore. They worked their regular jobs during the day and farmed in the evenings. Eventually they opened a fruit stand, which is where I worked as a child. Unlike my play, our family never faced foreclosure. But like any other farming family, our livelihood was dependent on so many factors outside our control like bad harvests, unpredictable weather, and fluctuating market prices.

"The orchard was always a place of joking and laughter. There was a lot

of hard work, early mornings and manual labour, but the way I remember it – and my family re-tells their stories – chores were a way to spend time with each other, a way to bond as a family.

“I’ve been working on *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* for five years now. I actually began writing it because of a dear mentor, Nina Lee Aquino, who is Artistic Director of *Factory Theatre* in Toronto. I told her about my idea for this adaptation, but because I had never written anything before, I wanted to wait a few years until I was ‘ready’. Nina said very clearly and without pause, “I think you should write it now.” She gave me some seed money and a spot in the Cahoots Theatre Playwriting Unit. I am eternally grateful for the push. Mentors are such an integral part to the growth of an artist. I realize that now more than ever.

“I think the most beautiful thing about Chekhov is how well he observed life, with all its randomness, joy and sadness crashing up against each other. I think memories are the same way; they are melancholic and utopic all at the same time. It was liberating to honour both sides, the light and the shadows, with an irreverent humour and heart.

“I am so proud a piece of our region’s history will be shared with the rest of Canada. The play shines a light on the people of colour, who helped shape the Okanagan Valley and continue to live here today. I hope Okanagan residents will be able to learn about their contributions and celebrate their impact on our community, especially within agriculture. “

Chekhov is often described by the infamous stage direction, “laughter through the tears.” I think of a slightly altered sentiment from American poet, Max Ehrmann: “With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams it is still a beautiful [life].” For me, my play is about family, loss, and identity.”

The warmth, sincerity and passion of Sarena’s words describing her play have filled me with high expectations for opening night in Niagara-on-the-Lake, June 7th 2018. The run will end September 1. The venue is a small intimate theatre named in tribute to former Artistic Director, Jackie Maxwell.

To me, the birth of Sarena’s story into a play at The Shaw Festival and the experience woven into this story create a beautiful cultural portrait of all that is uniquely Canadian. The Shaw Festival was born in 1962 in Ontario’s historically significant Niagara-on-the-Lake, when local lawyer and playwright Brian Doherty parlayed his love for the work of Irish playwright Bernard Shaw into a summer theatre festival. From this singular act of passion for theatre and culture, the Shaw Festival has grown into a renowned venue for theatre visitors from around the world.

**The play shines a light on the people of colour, who helped shape the Okanagan Valley and continue to live here today.**



# MY STORY OF SELF INQUIRY INTO SELF-ACTUALIZATION



## Jacques LeBlanc

Over the many years that I worked as a physician, I came to realize that one of my deepest beliefs about medicine, and about being a doctor, had slowly changed. Finally, it no longer matched my core personality. When I became a surgeon, I believed that I was doing something important – i.e., saving children’s lives. This belief guided the course of my personal and working lives, but started to erode following a series of adversarial events in the latter part of my career. Under the scrutiny of life in retirement, I saw that it was no longer holding up anything at all.

When I retired, I first tried hard to shed my identity as a physician and capture a dream I’d had when I was young: to be a beach bum on Laguna Beach. I bought a house in Palm Springs and toured the beaches, bicycled around and enjoyed the warm and sunny skies of southern California, trading my suit, shirt and tie for a T-shirt and shorts. For about a year and a half that did the trick, too. I had gained the freedom to explore a sense of self that was more than ‘pediatric cardiac surgeon’.

I came out of the inebriation of this beach lifestyle when I remarked to myself that in my attempt to live my dream I had been too quick to dismiss my contribution to the lives of many of the patients, friends, family and colleagues I had cared for and worked with for over forty years. I was at an impasse, and felt the old tendrils of dissatisfaction creeping around me again.

I’ve never been one to sit around and wait for things to happen, though, so I looked for some ‘new clothes’ to wear. The T-shirt style no longer fit so well, and I really had thrown the suit and tie far away, and happily. I was initially at a loss, but I was still a doctor after all, and I had a career of accomplishment. How could I bring it to fruition? I decided that exploring new life opportunities with a psychologist would be a possibility, although a scary one.

From that tentative decision I began a two year-long professional relationship with a psychologist, which led to analyzing my career, my personality, my desires and my plans and to build a new plan for the future. The self inquiry of analysis was a great awakening, that helped me to understand how I could be a doctor again, just a different one – the man I was searching for and looking forward to grow into. And I did.

Writing is not my most developed skill and English is not my first language, but I dove in and wrote a book called *Medicine for Life: A Practical Guide for Success*. All of my career knowledge and more were now under one cover. This felt good. The book led to a series of lectures for doctors and

**I am exploring the power of the soul, the feelings I kept buried, and the process of transferring emotions into words.**

students. Lecturing was an experience outside of my comfort zone, but researching and writing without the stress that had been such an integral part of my surgical life put me in a peaceful frame of mind. I loved it.

Soon I considered another idea, which arose from discussions with my father-in-law: the influence of my father on my life. From that spark, I began a second book. This one is a reflection on my relationship with my father, before he died in 1980, and up to the present day. In this process I am exploring the power of the soul, the feelings I kept buried, and the process of transferring emotions into words. I have found a wonderful editor with the capability to question and challenge my ideas and emotions. The process is positively pushing the boundaries of my creativity as never before. In writing with the support of my editor, I have touched more deeply my sense of humanity in the practice of medicine and come to a better understanding of empathy.

In collaboration with my wife, I transformed my previous company under which I practised medicine, to *LeBlanc Wellness Consulting Inc.* [leblancwellness.com](http://leblancwellness.com). It is our way of showcasing the work we are doing for ourselves and offering what we've discovered to those who are interested.

I believe in this work. As a thought leader in my profession, I have learned the hard way the importance of identifying the forces that lead to physician burnout and disengagement, and the importance of removing the barriers that prevent solutions. These barriers are both within the system and in the ways we choose to deal with them. Regardless of our professions, we alone have the power to change our minds and our lives, and to dispel our barriers. I know from experience how good a thing it is to accept both the challenges and rewards of that power.

# THE ART OF BECOMING

## MY JOURNEY OF SELF-INQUIRY AND WELL-BEING THROUGH CREATIVE EXPRESSION

### Susan Leblanc



My story is not particularly unique or special. I believe it is quite common, perhaps average, but precisely because it is ‘average’ it has the potential for influencing anyone feeling uneasiness or anxiety about themselves and the future, even if they are comfortable in their lives overall.

The process that has led me through self-inquiry and self-understanding to a sense of well-being as a form of conscious and committed creative expression. Creativity has helped me to come to terms with, and to deepen and develop, my sense of self. The result is a deep appreciation of the complex and conflicting aspects of being human in this day and age.

My journey of becoming fully individual is a personal journey *and* a collective one. I have done it within a collective of family, friends, acquaintances and strangers. I have particularly fond memories of my paternal grandmother on Bowen Island. She was a teacher and painter who allowed me the freedom to place bold strokes of paint on canvas without judgment or expectation. In my act of painting, she saw a beauty resonating deep within me, a place of creative essence and unconditional love. Little did I know at the time how fleeting that experience would be in my life, nor how it would lay down my current path.

Years later, I reflected on this experience with amazement and wonder at how as children we know of and listen to our creative essence. In his 1945 book *The Gift*, Lewis Hyde described this capacity as “the hidden coherence of our being [to] feel the fullness of our lives.” Children know this coherence without question, doubt or worry. As adults, we seek to find it, think that we have lost it, or perhaps even think that we never had it at all. The truth is that we have simply forgotten it.

Fortunately, we can remember again through our own creativity: the source of our being and the means we use to discover that essence.

“Every child is an artist. The main problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.” - Pablo Picasso

I grew up in a family where independence was fostered and success was all about education. I found myself, unsurprisingly, following a conventional path. In 1986 I completed my Bachelor’s of Science from the University of British Columbia, and in 1990 a Master’s of Health Sciences from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. I did not come to nursing with a strong sense of ‘calling’ or purpose. It was more of a practical choice and one I questioned repeatedly, until I found myself immersed in adult and then





Abstract Self

pediatric oncology. It was there amidst the very sick and those struggling for life that I found a purpose in healing and a place in the world.

Because I am an explorer, I took on many roles within healthcare over the years, from bedside nursing to teaching, administration and healthcare finance. Throughout, I fulfilled my love of travel and adventure whenever I could. This natural tendency to step into the unknown and create my life was well developed by the time I met my future husband. I had been through the ups and downs of relationships and jobs a few times; I was reluctant to shift out of a comfortable life that I had created where there was just me at the helm. True to form, however, I stepped up to the edge of change, that deep well of the unknown, smiled and continued walking forward into marriage. This choice soon placed me directly on the path of further self-inquiry. Our lives were meaningful and fulfilled, but they were draining our energy and leaving us listless, stressed and with a variety of health concerns.

Because I married later in life, and because I married a pediatric cardiac surgeon, I was particularly sensitive to the, 'wear and tear' of our professions. My thoughts were repeatedly drawn into an increasing sense of uncertainty about my own purpose in life, and particularly about my husband's health and sense of well-being.

Innately, I knew our individual and collective well-being was within each of us to create. It was not something I would find in someone or something else. It was not someone else's responsibility. So I began an ongoing exploration into my own creativity as a way of understanding the current beneath the surface that kept bubbling up in unexpected ways.

The art of intuitive painting was introduced to me in 2006. While working on a contract, I met another consultant who was heading off after work to an intuitive painting workshop. That chance encounter piqued my interest. It resonated with my desire to paint and offered a way to do so without expectation or judgment, much as I had experienced with my grandmother as a child. Through it, I began to see patterns in my life which were more than their surface appearances.

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." - Pablo Picasso

Intuitive painting is the process of choosing paint colours, then freely applying them to a canvas or paper with no intention and no predetermined idea of what you are creating. It is an experience in moving paint onto a canvas, and across it, to express yourself, without judgment from yourself or from others. It is a simple act, yet it's often not simple to do. You soon recognize thoughts and beliefs hanging out in your mind that may be



influencing or shaping the sense of who you are and how you feel about yourself. These thoughts may range from light and expansive feelings to dark and uncomfortable ones, and back again as you explore your sense of being.

At some point, you will want to stop and consider what you've put on the canvas. It is here that the opportunity to see into your *self* deepens. The painting is placed upright for viewing. You choose whatever direction you like: upright or horizontal. You then look at your work in much the way you put names to shapes in the clouds, identifying any images, feelings, shapes or forms you can see.

There is no emphasis on representing

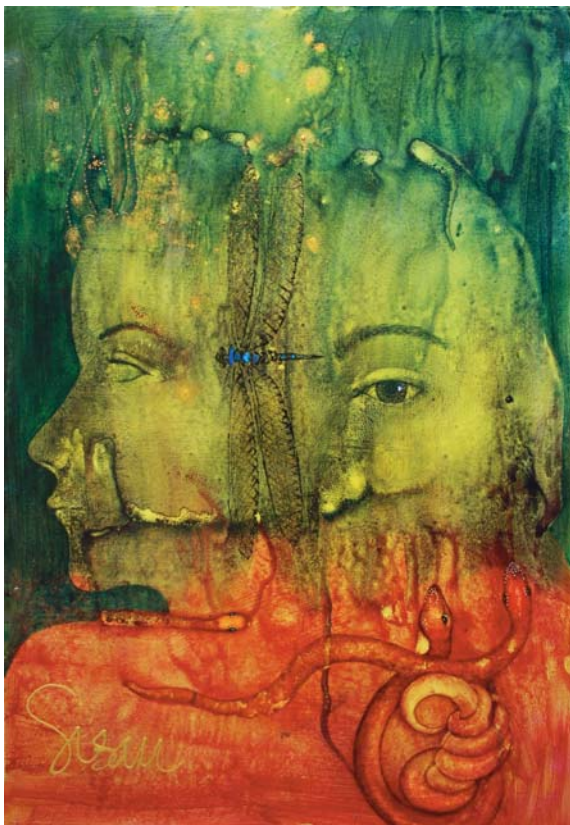
anything, or on having the images make sense. You have complete freedom to imagine what is within the brushstrokes and colour. This exercise is repeated by rotating the painting until it has been viewed from from all possible directions. One direction will resonate, and may inspire further development of the images. Such development is welcome, but it is not required. That's the process of intuitive painting.

Over time and with consistent practice, this process became easier and easier for me. Gradually, I developed my ability to observe, sometimes called to be a witness to, my gestures as I simply allow my hands to move paintbrush and paint regardless of any thoughts and feelings. Under the guidance of a skilled painter, I was able to learn techniques that helped me bring my works to life.

I have now come to understand the resulting extensions of my paintings as first expressed them, as 'musings' made by my Self. Patterns in my thoughts, beliefs and behaviours began to emerge in the images, drawing my attention to how they were showing up in all aspects of my life. I could see that some patterns were no longer serving me, while others were patterns to build upon. One of the greatest challenges was in asking and

answering questions of my Self when I looked at how I formed in colour, strokes and shapes. What did I see of my Self in them? How were the images coming to mind serving me? Did I derive a sense of well-being from them, or was I in such a limited pattern of understanding, of being, that I couldn't see or was afraid to change?

The resulting process of self-inquiry and self-understanding through



Top: Creative Spirit

Above: More Than One Me





Hidden Beauty

painting opened me to a fuller sense of my Self, a sense of being that was more whole and loving. There is a harmony in my being now. My inner and outer expressions are more unified and cohesive.

I believe that in one form or another we are all on a journey of becoming. My realizations and experience have ignited in me a passion for sharing intuitive painting and what it can offer to the evolution of Self. Three years ago my husband and I developed *LeBlanc Wellness Consulting Inc.* to provide a forum for our creative interests. I began to offer Intuitive Painting sessions for people seeking self-understanding. It has been an enlightening and gratifying experience to see the healing that takes place as an individual sees his or her Self in a new way and comes to a greater understanding of the life they are creating. The goal is not to become a painter. It is to become.

“There is only one way to see things, until someone shows us how to look at them with different eyes.” - Pablo Picasso

“Imagine your SELF as a living paintbrush, what will you create?” - Susan LeBlanc

**Jacques and Susan LeBlanc** moved to Kelowna from Vancouver BC in 2017. Jacques has been an adult and pediatric cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon at British Columbia's Children's Hospital in Vancouver. He retired eight years ago after 35 years of practice and found himself looking to understand and develop his interests beyond the practice of medicine. In so doing Jacques realized that he had a lot to give back to his profession in the way of experience as a doctor, a teacher, a student of life, a husband and a human being seeking wellness in this rapidly changing world.

Parallel to Jacques, Susan began an ongoing exploration into her own creativity through the art of intuitive painting or what Susan now calls, *The Art of Becoming*. It has been a journey into the deeper reaches of her soul that has nourished her heart and opened her being to creative potential. Susan's journey has shown her the importance of recognizing and developing the creativity that dwells within each of us and how that can be central to our sense of well-being.

LeBlanc Wellness Consulting Inc. is the merging of Susan's and Jacques' passion for creating personal and professional growth. They are grateful for the opportunity they have to create, to work with and to share their experience with those who are looking for more in their professional and personal lives.

[leblancwellness.com](http://leblancwellness.com)



# THE GIFT OF PURE RECKLESS ABANDON

## Vikki Drummond

Painting has affected my life profoundly.

I began life with two very young parents. My mother, a sheltered only child, and my father an Italian immigrant who moved to Canada with his family as an impressionable boy. His parents, though loving, stayed close to the Italian community and so I was raised in a household neither Canadian nor Italian, but a bit of both. Unfortunately for me, I was a free spirit in a household that had very limiting ideas of what a girl could do or be. My father found my independence frustrating, and while I was a dreamy, happy child, I grew up feeling stifled.

My parents taught me to be hard-working. My mother added the lessons of thoroughness and efficiency. When I graduated high school I enrolled in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program at Okanagan College. My parents knew it was my dream to be an artist, but I had been told that I could not earn a living being an artist and that I was better off being an accountant. Did they know me at all? Their approval was important to me and I know their advice was well-meant. Sadly, I think I was affected by what they believed. I left the Fine Arts program after one semester. I had met a boy in the Business program; being the impulsive creature I am, I switched to business. Surprisingly, I excelled in the program and graduated with a job working for a multinational company for the next 10 years. My work ethic and efficiency served me well. I was now a restless, but successful business person. I continued to work in the business field for the next fifteen years in a few different positions, but I could never satisfy that anxious energy that seemed to almost always be there within me. I always felt like a fish out of water.

One day I went out and bought supplies and began to paint on our kitchen table. That was the first day I started to really feel like myself.

I am told that the first time I ever said I wanted to be an artist, I was 4 years old, but I did not pursue a serious painting practice until 2011. It took me almost 40 years to realize what I knew in my heart as a small child. I have to believe this circuitous route was a necessary one. Because my painting comes from the centre of me, I needed to live my experiences, learn my truths and feel my joys and sorrows in order to have my wealth of material to draw from. Exploring all of who I am provides depth and knowing to my work.

When I began my practice in earnest in 2011, I quickly gravitated to pure abstract expression. I still enjoy this form immensely and I believe it allows me to stay loose and light. I think the reason this type of painting resonated



In her opening at the Tumbleweed Gallery, Penticton



Left to right:  
 Bad Ballerina  
 Louis  
 They stare at me in disbelief

with me is because it suggested to me a sense of letting go. I think this act - of letting go - has been my life's greatest lesson. I have come to realize that the restlessness in me was a need for freedom. My painting practice has allowed me to release any preconceived ideas of self and experience true freedom. It has shown me that creative expression is the only way to quiet that life-long agitation in me.

Recently I was encouraged by a well-known artist, to be brave again and take the next step in my work. Pretty scary! I was actually in a sort of comfort zone with my abstract work. I knew I had more in me to express, but I was afraid. So I took myself to a little house we have in the mountains with my paints and my dogs and my dresses. I hiked and painted for 30 days. It was nothing short of glorious - pure reckless abandon! It was the first time since I was a child that I had time all to myself, and only this project to focus on. What I noticed was even though I was spending hours and hours in my makeshift garage studio - the first week produced precious little. Well I laughed, and just accepted that there was something for me to learn from this - that it was all necessary. After that, I seemed to find my groove, get into my zone and the work just poured out of me. This lesson was further reinforcement for me that "you can't make art in the cracks". I finally understood daily practice - something, incidentally, that I had rebelled against up to this point.

Surprisingly this new work was very figurative: people, creatures and all these characters. This work made me really uncomfortable. It was so alien to what I had done in the past and who were all of these people? And why was I painting them? Was this even art? I confess I still do not have all of the answers, but I have found some. I realized that these were the people in my head - those ones whispering loudly, and laughing. Theirs were the voices calling from within me from a young age. They were the testers of my sanity. As I looked at these people, I also had memories and realized where some of my influences came from. Painting them was like finding hidden treasure and it made me want to paint more. I think also, it has merged my love of abstract



with my intense curiosity and relationships with people. My paintings are helping me to understand myself a little better. I have also come to believe that my paintings have wisdom to impart upon me and on those viewers who connect with them. I believe the reason for this is that my creations are coming from the centre of me. I am learning to access this place in me, this expression of myself - even if I cannot explain what comes out.

I did not come by my abilities through heredity. I have read many lovely stories of a writer's visceral memories - sitting with a parent or grandparent, being captivated by their craft and finding their future. I cannot find anyone in my family on either side, going back generations, who utilized any artistic abilities. It seems I am forging my way on my own - following the path I see in my mind's eye.

Painting is my calling, but also my therapy. It is the quiet hippie on the shore of some magical sea who serves me tea and quietly speaks to my soul. Painting keeps my attitude positive, and fills me with light. It reminds me that this moment is all there is and keeps me in it. I am undoubtedly improving my well-being through my painting practice and often this is more important to me than my dreams and goals as a painter professionally. No matter where my life takes me, I will always paint.

**Vikki Drummond** was born in Burnaby BC, and moved to the Okanagan with her family in 1973. She always loved the sound and feel of a pencil. Drawing became an outlet. Paint and more primitive line work came later, when a high school attempt at Drafting proved too structured. Vikki spent many years in sales and marketing until she finally left to have her second child. At this point, she realized she had gone a bit off track and found her way back to exploring art.

Vikki lives in Kelowna with her joyful actress daughter and her funny, obnoxious husband. Oh and their dogs Henry Higgins and Stella. She is currently represented by ARTE Funktional Gallery in Kelowna, Ashpa Naira Gallery in Vernon BC and Tumbleweed Gallery in Penticton BC.



Yop: Pink Lady  
Above: His shy smile



# CELEBRATING 90

## Yvonne Morrish and Karen Close



Yvonne Morrish CSPWC/SCPA

Last fall I had a call from a delightful Kelowna long and eminently established artist.

“I turned 90 this year and I want to celebrate by sharing my art and what it’s meant to me. Would *The Journal* be interested in my story?”

“Certainly,” I replied, and made plans to meet Yvonne Morrish at her home.

Her home is a gallery filled with her works.

Yvonne Morrish started painting in her late sixties, in about 1992 she recalls. Her neighbour did commercial art for the newspaper and one day she told Yvonne that she should start painting. ‘Come to my place,’ she said. ‘I have all the paints. Maybe start with drawing your cat.’

Yvonne did, and loved the experience. She remembered how she had sketched way back in school, drawing when the teacher wasn’t looking. When she left her neighbour’s, she took some watercolours home, started playing with them on more drawings. She was hooked. Through the years her cat has made an appearance in drawings and paintings but her active imagination has also led her to explore a large variety of media and subjects.

“I’m daring and stubborn and always trying new things. I love putting modelling paste on the surface and then responding. It’s very exciting. It’s a challenge. I love abstract and I love trees. I always see shapes of trees. Really, I just see shapes and go with them. When I put colour on, I don’t even remember the names of them anymore, but they just seem to flow together. So many things inspire me, but I paint from inside me. My work comes from the heart, having lost a daughter. She was an artist. I have some of her work, and when I’m making art, I feel my connection with her.”

Yvonne’s dedication to her art has been highly rewarded through the years. She was selected into the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour <https://cspwc.ca/> and is a founding member of the *Federation of Canadian Artists* local Kelowna chapter. With pride of accomplishment she values placing their letters after her name.

Her works are in private collections in Canada, the USA, United Kingdom and Europe. In the Okanagan she was represented by Hambleton Galleries

for eight years and the Barn Gallery in Lake Country. In 2014 she was given a solo exhibition at the Penticton Art Gallery. Being determined to celebrate her art this year she was very pleased to have four of her works selected to go into the Peachland Gallery Art Show. For many years she was an

Below: Yvonne’s studio sign by the door  
Bottom left: Yvonne’s living room  
Bottom right: watercolour on Yupo





active participant in Lake Country's ArtWalk but stopped about ten years ago. This year in celebration she submitted again and sold a work.

As well as making art Yvonne enjoyed writing about it and through the years has had articles published in the *Watercolour Gazette*, *Event Magazine*, *Showcase*, and the *Capital News*. She wrote an art column for some years in the *Kelowna Daily Courier*. Her feelings run deep: "Art is a

healing tool because it transcends everything that we are. It helps us rise above the daily things of our lives. It brings our highest dreams and aspirations to life. When we are angry or hurting, it gives us a safety net for letting our emotions out and helps us to really 'see' what we are feeling inside. For me art is a road, there are no wrong turnings. Living and painting are always works in progress and I am grateful for the opportunity to live as an artist on the threshold of the unknown as it is the ultimate gift. Art levels souls and baffles brains ... art is LOVE!!!"

In creating, Yvonne found pleasure, purpose and vitality. "I am still drawing nearly every day as I watch TV and I call them my doodles. Drawing is like our signature and we emotionally translate a visual symbol onto paper. I travelled to many countries and a sketch pad was a must to capture memories."

Perhaps Yvonne's biggest sharing this year was an exhibition at The Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna. Her bright lively canvases were a perfect contrast to the cold snowy days outside.

Looking back at her personal celebration of turning 90 Yvonne laughs. "I've had a lot of aches and pains this year, and I guess that's to be expected, but looking back at all my works and getting them out for others to see has been a gift to myself. I'm getting a last piece ready to submit to the *Federation of Canadian Artists'* juried show. Maybe I'm competitive, but I still enjoy a challenge. It keeps me going."

Please visit Yvonne's site to see more of her works.  
<http://www.yvonnemorrish.ca/>

Top left: After the Fire, acrylic  
 Top right: Past or Present, work sold in ArtWalk  
 Middle: wall 1 at RCA  
 Above: wall 2 at RCA



# EXPERIENCES AND CREATIVE BALANCE



## Dale Mathews

Reflecting on a balance in life's journey through creative endeavours started at an early age for me and has brought me pleasure ever since. In grade five the teacher asked us to draw and colour a picture of a potted plant that sat on the edge of her desk. Some of the better sketches were then put up on the wall; mine was one of them. I was very pleased and deep in my undeveloped brain the thought formed that I could be a Rembrandt in the making.

Around this same time I saw two artists painting landscapes with watercolours while they were overlooking a beautiful valley of autumn colours near my home. It was fascinating to watch them create this miracle on paper. I was inspired and started my lifelong love of watercolour painting, as well as all other media. I knew I wanted to make art.

High school art classes dominated my interest while I just tolerated the other subjects in order to graduate. An art teacher in the last year of high school persuaded me to apply to the Vancouver School of Art, now Emily Carr University. Having no money I ignored the thought until she said she would help me put together a portfolio of work, send it to the art school, and help me to secure some scholarships. Some money in hand, accepted at the art school, with a place to live and a part time job too, I left Rosalind BC. and

was off to Vancouver.

Art school was a major eye opener to me and I liked it. I was now associating with people from different backgrounds, the approach to learning was different without the regimented high school discipline. The expectation was on you to complete and hand in your assignments on time. I took the drawing and painting courses with the idea of holding up in a garret and painting to great success. Reality set in near the end of the third year in a four year program. I would have to get a job to survive as an artist. Fortunately the sign industry gave me

My Colourful Valley In Autumn







Top left: Cowboy life in a valley  
 Top right: Wooden Headstones  
 Above: Orchard Ladders

my start, but I created a future. I became a sketch artist for a neon sign company in Vancouver; that led to a transfer to the Toronto office to run the art department there, and eventually on to Edmonton in the same capacity. This is where my career took flight in new directions. Edmonton at this time was lacking

artist designers, and this gave me an opportunity to freelance after hours, first with an architect who taught me to read working drawings and do architectural renderings for him. I did the same for some engineers and often assisted in the elevation designs of the buildings. Another project was preparing working drawings and layouts for a store interior contractor.

It is amazing how something happens that leads to the next step; often choices are made at this stage and making the right decision is mostly luck or intuition. The process had worked for me to that point, but three winters in Edmonton were cold and I was now married. We wanted to get back to Vancouver.

Luck or intuition again? While visiting Vancouver in warm April I read an ad in the local paper that a firm in Vancouver was seeking a designer with all my qualifications and experience. It was a strange ad. I applied, got the job and moved back home to begin a new career as a designer for a development company building the Guildford Shopping Centre in Surrey.

I still did some painting for the artwork in the office, but it was not enough for me. I needed my personal painting and sketching. The next big move in my career was getting into my own business with my wife looking



Kearney, Nebraska

after the books and allowing me to think I was in charge. Unfortunately, with business comes stress. A friend who shared an office with me was a runner and suggested that I start running. I found a special balance. Running relaxed me enough that I could solve design problems as I ran. I became a competitive runner and did much of my creative planning while I ran.

My commercial contracts were varied. Most were shopping centre interiors and retail store plans and decor, but one of my very first clients was BC Ferries. They had never used

a designer before, and I had never designed ship interiors before so we learned together. The cruise ship Sun Princess was to be refitted in Victoria and they asked the BC Ferries if they knew of someone locally who could assist them. BC Ferries turned to me. I naturally accepted the commission to work on this ship without knowing that it would become 'The Love Boat', seen for years on TV. I was led to that labour of love that led to many commissions on other cruise lines.

My exciting career has ended, but I've enjoyed my experiences. In retirement we moved to the Okanagan Valley where the real balance of life is fulfilled with family, friends and rendering the beauty around me anytime I feel its call.

I have time to ride my road bike in summer and to cross country ski and alpine ski in winter. My passion for local history is reflected in much of the subject matter in my art and my need to paint has led me to share my skills in workshops throughout the Okanagan.

I'm realizing the gift of 80 is reflection. I can look back at all my experiences with gratitude for what life has presented and my creative spirit that urged me to give those experiences a try.

Visit Summerland artist **Dale Mathews** online. <http://dalematthews.ca>

# TAKING TIME

## FOR ART IN THE OKANAGAN

### Suzanne Chavarie



It's the little things...

The little things in life become the cornerstone of our days and they create the life we live. They gradually paint the masterpiece that is life.

### The Pianist

While having a bite to eat in the Bistro at the Rotary Centre for the Arts, located in the vibrant Cultural District of Kelowna, we were approached at our table by Alexandra Babel inquiring if we minded the piano being played and the three of us nodded with approval. Alexandra is the founder and Artistic Director of Opera Kelowna. The Rotary Centre's piano is known for its excellence and she often uses it for auditions. Today she had a special guest.

The music was excellent and after our table left I decided to approach Alexandre and her group at the piano for an on the spot interview and to take a few photos. All agreed.

The Pianist Irina Gaivorowskaia was excited to share her story. She had recently relocated to Kelowna from Russia and was delighted to be auditioning for Opera Kelowna.

I glanced at her sheet music and it read, "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante" – Aria from *Carmen*, George Bizet (1838-1875. English version by Theodore Baker. In English it is titled: "I say nothing frightens me."

I smiled, told her that I felt she had played the piece beautifully, and thanked her.

Seated at the table with Alexandra was the composer Sherilyn Fritz. Their friendship went back to the days when they had attended the same university and Sherilyn had written a piece for Alexandra to perform at the end of their graduating year. She too felt the pianist had a lovely touch.

I smiled and thought how wonderful for these two women to have such a strong lifelong friendship and connection through music. Thank you, Irina and Alexandra, for the music floating in the air of the Rotary Centre on a wintry day.

Photos are by **Suzanne Chavarie**. Paying attention, savouring all she encounters and sharing her special finds with others is Suzanne's specialty. Filling with enthusiasm for everyday and the art filled encounters she anticipates is her creative expression.

Alexandra and Irina





# CREATIVE IN OLD AGE

## LESSONS FROM CÉZANNE AND BOURGEOIS



### Robert MacDonald

Published in 1953, Harry Lehman's *Age and Achievement* remains the most ambitious empirical study of the relationship between age and creativity ever undertaken by a psychologist. Based on his analysis of the life spans of important practitioners of scores of different activities, Lehman summarized his results by observing that "it remains clear that the genius does not function equally well throughout the years of adulthood. Superior creativity rises relatively rapidly to a maximum which occurs usually in the thirties and then falls off slowly." Old age does have some positive attributes: "the old usually possess greater wisdom and erudition. These are invaluable assets." Yet these invaluable assets do not lead to creativity: "But when a situation requires a new way of looking at things, the acquisition of new techniques or even new vocabularies, the old seem stereotyped and rigid. To learn the new they often have to unlearn the old and that is twice as hard as learning without unlearning."

Even today psychologists continue to believe that practitioners of most intellectual activities reach their creative peaks relatively early in their adult lives. Wisdom and creativity are concepts that psychologists do not generally consider to be closely associated. But these psychologists have failed to recognize the variety of creativity. It is true that bold and brash leaps into the unknown are an important source of innovations. But there is also another, very different form of creativity, in which important new discoveries are the cumulative product of gradual and incremental experimentation. Ignoring this latter type of creativity has caused a misunderstanding of the diversity of creative life cycles, for whereas the first type of innovation is usually made early in an innovator's career, the second type is generally made by older individuals. It is within this second type of innovation that we can discover the link between wisdom and creativity.

Five important experimental painters were central figures in the advanced art world of the late nineteenth century. These five – Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir – were the five greatest artists who exhibited at the epoch-making Impressionist exhibition of 1874. All were born within an 11-year span, and all lived beyond the age of 65. They were friends as well as professional colleagues, and shared a common artistic milieu for much of their lives.

Cézanne's art grew steadily in importance over time, with his greatest work in the final decade of his life. Monet was greatest early, in his 20s and 30s, but he also made important contributions in both his 50s and his 80s.



The Boy in the Red Vest, Paul Cézanne

Degas was at his greatest from his 30s through his 50s. Renoir and Pissarro were both greatest before the age of 50, and produced little of importance thereafter.

The most pronounced case of creativity persisting into old age among these five artists is that of Cézanne, who was a latecomer to Impressionism. In 1872 he left his native Aix-en-Provence to live near Pissarro, and during the next few years he spent a considerable amount of time working with Pissarro to learn the new techniques. Cézanne never fully adopted the methods of the Impressionists, because he did not share their goal of portraying the momentary effects of light and atmosphere, and he was more committed than they to creating solid and timeless images. But his apprenticeship to Pissarro was the key turning point in Cézanne's art, that allowed him to begin the quest for a new style that would occupy the rest of his life.

Our knowledge of Cézanne's career after the mid-1870s is clouded by considerable uncertainty. As he grew

older he became reclusive: he spent more and more time in his native Aix, and even on visits to Paris he appears to have avoided contact with other artists. The evolution of his style can be traced through his paintings, but even here there is much uncertainty about timing, because he sold few works, and rarely dated his paintings. He appears to have worked on many of his paintings over extended periods, for his perennial dissatisfaction with his achievement appears to have led him to feel that even individual works were rarely definitely finished.

Cézanne exhibited in the Impressionist group shows in 1874 and 1877, but there were no further exhibitions of his work in Paris until 1895, his first one-man show. His reclusiveness helped make him a mysterious and even legendary figure in Paris' art world. The power and novelty of the paintings in the exhibition surprised even Cézanne's old friends. Pissarro wrote that there were "exquisite things, still lifes of irreproachable perfection, others much worked on and yet of even greater beauty."

In Cézanne's letters, and accounts of his conversations, he used a

**In Cezanne's opinion artistic progress could come only through the study of nature.**

distinctive vocabulary to describe his artistic practice. A famous element of this was his stated goal of “realization,” the meaning of which has been debated by art historians because of its ambiguity - an ambiguity that inevitably resulted from Cézanne’s own uncertainty, since this was a visual goal that he could not preconceive. Less remarked is his recurring use of language that portrayed him as a student or scholar, as he consistently used such words as study, education, and understanding to describe what he did in the process of working.

In Cézanne’s opinion artistic progress could come only through the study of nature, and the nature he came to prefer ever more strongly was that of his native Provence. He returned again and again to the same motifs. Specifically, his meticulous attention to vision made him consider the effect of the inevitable slight changes in the artist’s point of view that occurred in the process of working, as he looked back and forth from his canvas to the motif. The problem these changes posed to creating a discrete image became a growing source of concern to him over time, and they gave rise to the celebrated inconsistencies in the contours of many objects in his late works that resulted from his explicit incorporation into a single painting of several different viewpoints. A month before his death, he wrote to his son of his preoccupation: “Here on the bank of the river the motifs multiply, the same subject seen from a different angle offers subject for study of the most powerful interest and so varied that I think I could occupy myself for months without changing place, by turning now more to the right, now more to the left.” The small numbers of marginal changes in viewpoint that Cézanne represented in individual paintings were seized on and multiplied by the young conceptual painters Picasso and Braque, whose many extreme changes in viewpoint created the faceting of objects that was a central feature of early analytical Cubism.

Cézanne expressed a number of beliefs that appear related to his extended creativity. He was consistently dissatisfied with his work, and frustrated by his inability to achieve his goals. Cézanne repeatedly returned to the theme of how slowly and painfully he advanced, as in a letter in 1904: “I progress very slowly, for nature reveals herself to me in very complex ways, and the progress needed is endless.” The year before, the 64-year-old artist had written plaintively: “I have made some progress. Why so late and with such difficulty? Is art really a priesthood that demands the pure in heart who must belong to it entirely?”

Cézanne spent his entire career pursuing a single elusive and imprecise visual goal. In 1905, he complained that “My age and health will never allow me to realize my dream of art that I have been pursuing all my life.” A month before his death he wondered, “Will I ever attain the end for which I have striven so much and so long?”

Cézanne repeatedly turned theoretical discussions of art back to the need to learn by working: “The artist must be a labourer in his art ... He becomes a painter through the very qualities of painting itself.” He devoted himself



entirely to his work, as two months before his death he confessed to his son that “I live a little as if in a void. Painting is what means most to me.” Just a week before his death, he wrote to his son that he had become weak, but “I must carry on. I simply must produce after nature.” Cézanne wrote in 1904 that he believed that he was attaining greater realization every day, explaining that “Because, if the strong feeling for nature - and certainly I have that vividly - is the necessary basis for all artistic conception on which rests the grandeur and beauty of all future work, the knowledge of the means of expressing our emotion is no less essential, and is only to be acquired through very long experience.” Later the same year, he wrote that “In order to make progress, there is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her.” The next year, he said “It is very painful to have to state that the improvement produced in the comprehension of nature from the point of view of the picture and the development of the means of expression is accompanied by old age and a weakening of the body.” Yet he believed that his practice yielded results: “Time and reflection modify little by little our vision, and at last comprehension comes to us.”

What Cézanne understood from an early point in his career was how he himself learned. He recognized that although other, conceptual artists could benefit from formulating and applying theories, he could not, for he was an empiricist, who could learn best from his own experiments. This recognition appears to have been a key in turning experience into wisdom. He used his dissatisfaction as a constant spur motivating him to improve his art, but also recognized his progress. His self-critical ability allowed him to separate successful experiments from failures, and this enabled him to make his trial-and-error methods the basis of an improvement in his art over time. This improvement might be painstaking and slow, but he understood that over long periods its cumulative effect could be very great.

This recognition is enormously important. We often tend implicitly to assume that radical innovations, in art and other intellectual activities, are necessarily the result of dramatic actions.

But this is incorrect. Instead, or at least in addition to, the successful realization of such extended campaigns is the triumph of great experimental innovators.

Recent studies of individual innovators in the arts have revealed numerous instances in which great artists have made their most important contributions late in their lives.

A striking example appears in the career of one of the greatest women artists of the twentieth century, the sculptor Louise Bourgeois. The period from which Bourgeois' work is most likely to be illustrated in textbooks of art history is the first half of her 80s. In view of the fact that art historians judge that the most important work of her career was made in her ninth decade, it is perhaps not surprising that Bourgeois believes that artists improve with age. In 1995, when she was 84, Bourgeois told an interviewer that she could

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Red Study, Louise Bourgeois

not have made one of her recent works earlier in her career, because “I was not sophisticated enough then. You know, artists improve. I mean, we are supposed to be better today than we were twenty years ago. Otherwise, what’s the use of working?” When the interviewer inquired about the source of the improvement, Bourgeois explained that “you become better in every way, morally, intellectually, physically – no, not physically. You become better, which is really the Chinese philosophy – the wisdom of the elders.”

Studies have shown that artists who make important contributions late in their lives are almost invariably ex-

perimental innovators, whose uncertainty about their goals causes them to proceed more gradually and cautiously than their conceptual counterparts. Bourgeois is an archetypal example of an experimental artist. She does not plan her forms in advance, but finds them in the course of working. The finished work is often a stranger to, and sometimes very much at odds with what the artist felt or wished to express when she began. She is never satisfied that a work or a problem has been fully resolved: “That’s why I keep going. The resolution never appears; it’s like a mirage.” Making art is a struggle: “I have no fun at all – in fact everything I do is a battlefield, a fight to the finish.” Progress comes from adversity: “My style, the way I work comes from all the failures, all the temptations I have resisted, all the fun I didn’t have, all the regrets.”

There is little doubt that Cézanne would have identified completely with a statement Louise Bourgeois made about her art: “I am a long-distance runner. It takes me years and years and years to produce what I do.”

# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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

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

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