

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE  
NUMBER 33, SUMMER 2020  
EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

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# The Journal of Creative Aging

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NUMBER 33, SUMMER 2020  
ISSN 1920-5848

## SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
**Okanagan Institute**

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Cover image by Ellen Ryan

### FROM THE EDITOR

Since my last words to you in the Spring Issue, our world has been turned into chaos. Each of us has sought understanding in our own ways. In this issue, I am delighted to share with you articles by those willing to open honestly, authentically and with vulnerability to share their insights gained from isolating, reflecting and creating. Eckhart Tolle tells us that the infection of fear and negativity in our minds is as dangerous and pervasive as any virus. He advises: "If uncertainty is unacceptable to you, it turns into fear. If it is perfectly acceptable, it turns into increased aliveness, alertness, and creativity."

I thank those contributors who have turned to probing into themselves. Creative spirit opens us to new possibilities, courage and strength.

In REALISING OUR RESILIENCE,

contributor Elaine Hanlon notes, "If the ability to pare down to the essence and deem what is important is usual in this stage of life as a senior, then COVID-19 has given this time to take focus."

"Only art penetrates...the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which without art, we can't receive." – Saul Bellow

Published in 2018, the increasing popularity of *Becoming* by Michelle Obama is such a 'hint' needed now in these times. Its message of encouraging others to find their own passion and follow it, iterates the message of this Journal and its value for these times. Know Yourself. Be Yourself. Love Yourself. Share Yourself. There is power in the voices of our contributors. Finding one's passion and choosing one's particular

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creative voice nourishes the resilience we each need. “Your story is what you have...It is something to own,” states Michelle Obama as she encourages each to speak out, sharing the wisdom gleaned from their particular experiences on our mutual path to becoming. *Sage-ing* contributors presenting their stories of gratitude reaped by exploring creative spirit on this path provide needed support. In SAGE-ING SISTERS IN SPIRIT, poet Penn Kemp lauds, “Poetry’s role in the world is to connect us, heart by heart. Poetry can change the heart as well as the mind in a way that heady argument or debate never can... *Troubadoras!* Let us troop, gathering voice, and voices, as we go...I invite you to join the Muses...”

The time to contemplate deeply has been given. Reading brings us together. It connects us to our commonalities. Those who give voice and those who listen will discover the cooperation this planet needs. I hope you’ll savour this issue.

– Karen Close

## 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 August 10th, 2020**
- 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

# OUT OF THE ASHES

## Cathryn Wellner



The book was beginning to take shape. It was to be a gift for my granddaughters, as they grew into their restless teen years. I envisioned it as a mix of stories and life lessons, a sort of lantern to help them navigate the road to adulthood. It would be part of my legacy, a way of sharing what I had learned on my own journey through life.

It began to take shape. I illustrated each page, anticipating it would be a visual feast as well as an inspirational guidebook. The pages began to accumulate, ten, thirty, a hundred.

And then a new story rolled onto the stage. Its name was icily beautiful, coronavirus. Drawings of its crownlike appearance made it look like a cartoon character. It was a friendly virus, hanging around in people and on surfaces, looking for welcoming hosts. It was a novel virus, its habits unknown, its mutations unresearched, its prevention and cure a mystery.

The crown of sickness and death quickly spread around the globe. Stores closed. Streets emptied. Governments sought ways to protect their health care systems from being overwhelmed by the pandemic.

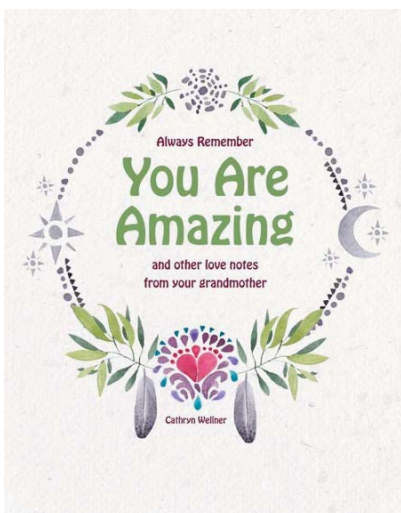
In my own small part of the world, the book so lovingly conceived felt obsolete well before the first granddaughter would reach adolescence. The teens of tomorrow would be dealing with a post-COVID-19 world whose realities might make the book quaintly obsolete.

The enormity of sudden changes halted my progress on the book. I dropped into a deep funk, an admittedly useless state of affairs. After weeks of wheel spinning, and the knowledge that we will be learning the lessons of the coronavirus for months and years to come, I am kicking myself back into gear. In my eighth decade, I am too aware that, if I am to leave a legacy for my grandchildren, I can't wait for the stars to realign.

And so I begin again. I feel like an athlete in training for a marathon on a course whose terrain and length cannot yet be accurately described. My trusty camera takes me by the strap and pulls me out into the nearby marsh, up local hills and along hiking trails. Getting back into the photography groove is the first part of my training.

The next part of my training is to be more selective in my focus. I am as captivated as anyone by the criminals around me. A certain orange narcissist trashes the country of my birth on a daily basis. Anti-Semites in Toronto crash a Zoom prayer meeting to spew hatred at praying strangers. Care homes, prisons and meat-packing plants reveal themselves as perfect disease vectors. A Nova Scotia guy with grudges and an arsenal kills 22 people in a rampage of fire and bullets. The litany is endless and leaves me flattened; so, without

First cover for the legacy book, which suddenly seemed obsolete







**Top:** Arrowleaf balsamroot flowers blooming on Knox Mountain, Kelowna

**Middle:** Part of training for this new marathon of creative efforts is focusing on gifts like this one, watching my youngest granddaughter learn to balance on two wheels

**Above:** Latest iteration of the legacy book's cover

ignoring news of the world at large, I am spending more of my days concentrating on the words and images that feed my spirit. They draw my focus back to this glorious planet and to the many fine people who call it home. They return me to truths and lessons far more universal than the Tweets of a narcissist.

Which brings me to the third part of my training: reflecting on the gifts of my own small life. My partner's children made enormous sacrifices to bring their offspring from Australia so they could get to know their Australian-Canadian grandfather. The children accept my childless self on par with their blood-related grandparents. We live in a high-rise where friends drop small gifts at each other's doors when we are sick or isolated by a novel virus. Local farmers supply us with food of unbeatable quality. Local businesses cater to our every whim, even in isolation. A friend in New York starts a Facebook group to focus on growing ourselves to be the people we want to be. A Facebook friend takes umbrage with something I posted and stays in the ring with me until we sort through differences and reaffirm how much we believe in each other.

Daily writing, free form or as part of some ongoing projects, is the fourth and final part of my training. Two writer friends, one nearby and one far away, give me the special gift of attention. In our long and regular emails to each other, we sort through things that puzzle us, the yearnings of our hearts and the progress of our creative efforts. When my inner demons natter on about my inadequacies, I remind myself it would be insulting to believe the demons rather than my talented friends. And so I dive into writing and major revisions with a lighter heart.

The book for my granddaughters will rise from the fire that turned it to ashes. Globally, we will rise from the fire of the pandemic. In both cases, much that is dross will be burned away. What we do with what remains after the conflagration matters. We will always have lessons to learn. May they be life affirming.

**Cathryn Wellner** has been writing her way out of life's potholes for decades. She has written or contributed to numerous books and been published in newspapers and magazines and online. Her most recent books can be found on Amazon.

In addition to the legacy book, she is working on two memoirs, one focusing on her years as a storyteller, the second on her experiences as a reluctant (but ultimately grateful) farmer. She can be found on Facebook and at <https://cathrynwellner.com>.

# SAGE-ING SISTERS IN SPIRIT

## AN INVITATION FOR THESE TIMES

### Penn Kemp



Penn received the inaugural Muttsy award for Renegade Creator, 2020

Sisters in Spirit: the title invites us to take off our shoes, leave our baggage at the door, and join this circle of word dancers in celebration of the moving phrase. When we enter such a kindred realm, poetry is free to shake her wings and fly. Here we come to the poem where the heart is home, where we meet our self, our selves, and others. That connection in spirit is my loose definition of what a chosen sister is.

What do I mean by spirit? Certainly not some ethereal abstraction handed down from on high. Perhaps more an honouring of matter, which has in so many traditions been identified with the downtrodden feminine. How do our words embody spirit? They trespass across the arbitrary polarities our culture sets up between matter and spirit.

Poetry's role in the world is to connect us, heart by heart. Poetry can change the heart as well as the mind in a way that heady argument or debate never can. What space could be more liminal, marginalized and excluded from the dominant discourse than a mute area of the female body that has not yet been named? We enter the zone beyond words till new words shake down and form the poem that has never been uttered before. Can we dare to express the inexpressible?

Often, a poem is inspired by the imagery of other women's creativity. The connection with others counts: the experience of companionship in community. I'm intrigued by the dance between poets that collaboration allows in these times. Given the wry understanding of sisters, nothing can be hidden. "I dare you" is implicit in every line.

As women/writers/readers, we have become the sounding boards for voices from many different points of view, from generations of Canadian women writers. We celebrate our foremothers, our elder sisters, women poets missing from the canon, fired from the cannon. In dialogue between older poets and contemporary writers, we trace our influences.

Our elder sisters are *skalds*, in an interesting etymology traced from Seer to Scold. In mediaeval Norway, old women were sometimes set adrift to wander from farmhouse to house. They were sure to be fed and housed for the night, because they were thought to possess the gift of prophecy in their poetic rants. Turning them away would bring down the evil eye. We have come a way since then, but it worries me that in this society's appetite for the new, our elders are too often shunted to the sideline and their work ignored.

Perhaps these times are asking us to pay renewed attention to 20/20 vision, a clear look around us, and back to the words of the past. We do not



Ishra Blanca dances as the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis in my sound opera, *HELWA!*

read our foremothers enough. Our sisters' words go missing. So let us honour our mentors by knowing their work. Let us honour difference. Let us reach back through the generations, through the long and live line of women writers; forward to the aspiring young; and sideways to those who have somehow been stopped in time. We sisters explore themes like loss, both of words and in various ways of sister poets, over the years.

Whether we are next door or across the world or alive only on the screen, the worldwide web allows communion for sisters in spirit. We translate each other in many ways. We email, we write, we read to one another. Margaret Mead writes, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Hearing those words, poet Joy Kogawa has indeed effected change. Her Vancouver house, the site and source of *Obasan*, has been transformed into a Writer's Retreat. Now that's politics in action! These times need us. We need women in collaboration, net-working: women creating and re-visioning their own communities through poetry. Mona Fertig's gathered reminiscences of her writing series at the Literary Storefront in Vancouver encourages others to speak up, to tell our stories in whatever art suits them best.

Dare to cross the floor and move out of the left brain into a space where new forms abound, where poetry, healing and magic coincide. Dance among possibilities. Dance among multiple dimensions. Dance between borders, on the verge where being meets being. Stretch mind and metaphor, reaching out to a community of like-minded and love-embodied. These kindred are your true kin, and generously kind. In the safety and spaciousness of such connection, we begin to banter, bandy words and play.

I'm delighted to sing paeans in praise of all these sister poets. Let us claim our name – *Troubadoras!* Let us troop, gathering voice and voices as we go! *La donna e mobile!* in an ever-changing and ongoing dance. Sisters in Poetry and Sisters in Spirit, I invite you to join the Muses and create a new poem to voice these times.

**Penn Kemp**, poet, performer and playwright, has been lauded as a trailblazer, "a poetic El Niño," and a "one-woman literary industry." A keen participant in Canada's cultural life, she was London's inaugural Poet Laureate. Her 2018 books of poetry are *Local Heroes* (Insomniac) and *Fox Haunts* (Aeolus House). In 2019 she released *River Revery* (Insomniac Press). See [www.pennkemp.weebly.com](http://www.pennkemp.weebly.com).



# TAKING A BREATH

## AS WILD CREATURES RETURN

**Susan McCaslin**  
with interviewer **Lesley-Anne Evans**

This interview and poem first appeared on Lesley-Anne Evan's blog for Poetry Month 2020 <https://buddybreathing.wordpress.com/2020/04/26/napomo-poetry-party-25/>



**Top:** Susan McCaslin  
**Above:** Lesley-Anne Evans

“By the end of March 2020, well into COVID-19 stay-in-place protocols, I felt entirely cut off from creative community and my usual creative and spiritual practices. A pervading sense of dread rendered all self-reflection and writing impossible for me. I felt somewhat lost. A friend reached out and asked if I’d share some poetry on his literary blog in celebration of April’s National Poetry Month. I agreed. A tiny shift happened then as I saw that I, like my friend, could offer community to others. I turned to my blog, Buddy Breathing, as a platform for doing so. For the month of April I hosted a series of daily interviews with poets and photographers to whom I was connected in various ways, and invited them to share themselves and their creative gifts. Guests from England, Ireland, Canada and the USA dropped into my virtual Poetry Party, and close to 500 viewers met them there. My energy picked up as I gave myself over to these beautiful connections.

Susan McCaslin was one of my poetry party guests. Though Susan and I have never met in person, she is a most generous and encouraging mentor to me. What follows is the conversation we had on April 26, 2020.”

**Lesley-Anne:** Welcome, Susan. Interestingly, a forest is what first drew me to you, through your poetic activism “Han Shan Project” in which you put out a call to poets to assist in saving the greater part of what was then called McLellan Forest East and is now the Blaauw Eco Forest in Langley from development. And it worked! Over a two-week period, you received over 250 poems from across Canada (mine included), and then you, your husband and other invested souls gently tied the poems in the trees, raising awareness that led to a private donor stepping forward with the funding needed to save this ancient ecosystem. What power poetry carries within.

We often say we wish we had more time for certain things. Are you spending your time differently in view of our current world challenges? If so, how?

**Susan:** The current pandemic in its strange and deadly way has forced me to reflect on time. What is it? How does it relate to what I was taught as a child about eternity, which by definition is timeless? Isn’t it hazardous to ourselves and our planet to live out a dualism that separates time and eternity? How many of the details of our lives do we retain as we move through the cycles

of planetary life, and how much do we eventually shed like a flaked-off skin when we die? What aspects of our consciousness, if any, survive death? What, for that matter, is death, and how are death and rebirth bound together in the cosmic scheme of things? We are certainly more than our ego envelope, the small self, the outer shell. Yet aren't these temporal, idiosyncratic aspects of ourselves, even our masks and socially constructed selves, important too? I have an intuition that the part of us that lives in and through love will continue to evolve in mysterious ways. I am an introvert who needs inter-connection. I have developed a capacity to distance from the world around me when the going gets tough, to escape "elsewhere," sometimes into worlds of thought and imagination. For me, thinking, dreaming, feeling, and being present in my body are not separate, but an interplay of vital faculties. So, I affirm and embrace embodiment, incarnation. Yet I must confess that, like most people at this time, I'm experiencing fear and flitting from one unfinished project to another. So, to return to Lesley-Anne's question, "How do I spend my time differently during the pandemic?" I find myself pausing from our collective ride on the "progress machine" by taking long walks. The Anna's hummingbird sipping from our feeder holds me spellbound. I am transfixed by flocks of Canada geese and the elegant curved necks of great blue herons nesting nearby. I walk each day with Rosie, my canine companion. Like so many others, I try to reach out to friends and neighbours who might need a hand or a "check in." Because I've been "retired" from teaching English Lit. since 2007 and recently turned 73, being alone a good part of the time, writing, reading, thinking, have constituted much of life. Therefore, my days aren't as drastically changed as they are for many others. For the opportunity to reflect, I feel privileged and enormously grateful.

**Lesley-Anne:** Why is poetry/art important?

**Susan:** Poetry and art aren't frills or embellishments to ordinary life. They aren't an elitist endeavour intended only for a few, but essential to our common psychological health and spiritual survival. Poetry and art have been present from the beginnings of human life on earth. The Paleolithic drawings and imprints on the walls of caves in Lascaux and other places in the world suggest our early ancestors opened themselves to vaster worlds, the earthy, planetary and cosmological realms where trees, deer, and our fellow creatures are deeply interconnected. Women, men, and children cooperated to imprint art in the depths of caves, participating in a mysterious cosmic ritual, a visual enactment of the interplay of things. My sense is that everyone has within them this potential to engage a vaster, more inclusive sphere of being, and that poetry, because of its oral/aural origins, is akin to music, enacting a dance between the known and the unknown, speech and silence.

**Lesley-Anne:** What is one surprising thing that happened today?

**Right:** *Taking a breath as the wild creatures return.* Photo by Mark Haddock

## Corona Corona

What kind of crown bears death?  
 What kind of queen hefts quarantine?  
 You're not even alive,  
 just a spikey shell  
 unaware of the damage wreaked.  
 Our economies forged dark streams,  
 pathways for your kind of havoc.  
 We check our devices  
 listen to the newscasts  
 watch our Netflix flicker  
 hunker in the void  
 co-avoiding physical contact,  
 incarnate and encapsulated  
 dreaming new modes of being.

Dreaming new modes of being  
 I wonder why I'm addressing you.  
 You're just one of many sub-streams –  
 Sars, Spanish flu, Bubonic Plague.  
 We sit with storytellers, re-configure  
 Boccaccio's *Decameron*, clutch Julian of Norwich's  
*Revelations of Divine Love*, ponder Dickens'  
 "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,"  
 self-isolate with Camus' *Plague*,  
 knowing *nothing's new under the sun*.  
 Stranded in para-doxology, we give thanks for  
 this contemplative pause  
 from compulsory progress, Gaia's chance  
 to take a breath as the wild creatures return.

Taking a breath as the wild creatures return,  
 we peer through the global membrane,  
 ears cupped to a hermit thrush's spiraling song  
 held in the arc of a great blue heron's flight.  
 When poems interweave  
 with light and dark they sing, stranded  
 between lament and praise  
 thanksgiving and trembling,  
 our vast unknowing graced by love,  
 small acts of compassion,  
 heartwork of the justice imagination,  
 prayers for collective transfiguration.  
 Can we uncrown ourselves as lords of creation,  
 since heavy crowns bear death, not regeneration?



**Susan:** A dear friend of mine, and fellow poet, Antoinette Voûte Roeder, contacted me by email to remind me of a book I had read several years ago by the poet Stanley Kunitz (in cooperation with Genine Lentine), *The Wild Braid*, in which he discusses the relation of gardening and poetry:

"The poem is not just language; it is in itself an incarnation . . . . When I'm reading Hopkins aloud, I feel I am actually occupying his selfhood and speaking out of it, not simply reciting the words, but somehow merging into his bloodstream and nervous system."

During my daily walks during the pandemic, I sometimes reflect on how reading a poem invites union with the consciousness of the poet who wrote it, and also becomes for the co-creator, the reader or hearer, a re-enactment of the presences and processes that inspired the poem. A poem so received can become a reservoir of healing and regeneration. It lives. This is what makes poetry at its best what my friend Antoinette calls "a sacred art."

My poem "Corona Corona" is titled as such because it is in literary terms a "crown" of sonnets, a traditional poetic form in which the last line of one sonnet becomes the first line of the next, and so on. The final line of the entire sequence repeats the first line of the first poem. I have contemporized the form by foregoing iambic pentameter and a rhyme scheme and using word and sound play instead. Also, my first and last lines aren't exactly the same, but echo similar concepts and words.

**Susan McCaslin** has published fifteen volumes of poetry, including her most recent, *Into the Open: Poems New and Selected* (Inanna, 2017). She has published a volume of creative nonfiction with fellow poet J.S. Porter, *Superabundantly Alive: Thomas Merton's Dance with the Feminine* (Wood Lake, 2018). Susan lives near Fort Langley BC, where she can often be found walking near the Fraser River with her dog Rosie. [www.susanmccaslin.ca](http://www.susanmccaslin.ca)



# A NEW 'ONCE UPON A TIME' FOR ME



## Josephine Kwik

When I began to appreciate that fairy tales matter because we can discover ourselves within them, that they are a part of us because they are related to our inner psyches, I became deeply intrigued. The more I researched and thought about fairy tales, the more I wanted to explore this magical world where stories have enamoured humans for centuries. I decided I would paint a triptych of a fairytale. Creating and making images has always been a source of pleasure for me. I wondered what I would discover about me now.

My creativity helps me understand myself and how I fit into the greater pattern of life. During this lifetime I have had a near-death experience and out-of-body experiences that have deeply shaped me. I have always clearly remembered the feeling of being out of my body, and there was such love and beauty that I didn't want to come back, but I always did. I seek an embodied search to re-enter that state of awe. My life has had beauty and suffering, but I have focused on what I could learn and be inspired by with my experiences. I use all my senses to become involved in what is happening through the events I am living. When I am making art I explore many different mediums that will engage my senses, particularly my sense of touch. Libraries are special places. Books are also very important to me. I can travel anywhere and follow my imagination and discover the magical wonder of this and other worlds that I live in.

Just after I turned 70, I had a lower back surgery. During recovery I had to reinvent myself. My love and passion for the outdoors/nature, hiking and camping, was altered as I require a walker to continue walking. I knew I needed to keep my mind and body strong and alert. With a strong constitution, healthy attitude and resiliency from my ancestry, I set forth on a new path in my life. I could foresee many adventures, and was eager to embark on them. I find I gain more understanding of myself by moving past my comfort zone. Regardless of the season and weather, I and my trusty walker walk up to five miles a day, enjoying the outdoor splendour of where I live in Kelowna, British Columbia. I am present with nature, and embrace this slower path in life where I am immersed in nature's aliveness and energies. During my walks this spring my mind has been deeply engaged. I feel ignited by the sights, sounds, smells and images surrounding me. I love to touch the tree barks and roots, even bumble bees (when I can get close enough), feel grasses on the soles of my feet and breathe the fecundity of earth. It's been a pleasure to encounter many others on these daily outings. I have made



**Top:** Working on my triptych of *Rapunzell*. As I begin to translate how I see the tale and take time to create details, my hand inspires my heart, and I feel the tale differently.

**Above:** My progress is slow as I take time for detail, but my reflection deepens

friends I am privileged to be learning with. I feel extremely rich with the lively conversations and friendships I have. Each person has their own strengths and life experiences to explore and learn from; each is a necessary human being on planet Earth. This planet is where we come to truly meet ourselves.

I make frequent visits to the library, to Opus – my local art supply store – and to markets and stores that provide healthy local foods. These places give me my personal medicine for how I help my own well-being. I see we are moving from the third dimension into the fourth and fifth dimensions where we can appreciate that we are each more than we have thought, and that we can make uplifting and healthy changes for the better of the whole world – and not just a few. This present time is giving us time to reflect. In reading about fairy tales I liked the idea that “Stories animate human life. That is their work. Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing or best avoided” (Arthur Frank, 2010, *Letting Stories Breathe*). What insight might I find in reexamining fairy tales during this remarkable time in history? Through our personal choices and willingness to meet ourselves and look into our shadows and imperfections, we each can review our lives and examine our values.

As I worked on my personal fairy tale project, I shared my faith in the power of storytelling with all who would listen. Our local library and Opus caught my enthusiasm and agreed to help me. The library suggested that I develop a display for their front window. I asked my friends at Opus to join me. They too would illustrate in some format their favourite fairy tales. I was pleased by their enthusiasm to make this into the project it will become. Others I told also joined in. An exhibition was forming, and a date was set for mounting the display at the library just after my 74th birthday on April 30th. We would create from the tales we had chosen to read, and from how they affected us as we interpreted them according to our lives.

To accompany our works, each will write a brief narrative of what their creation means to them. When the works come together in the display there will be a message from us, as a group, for the world. I imagine our interpretations will bring forth a group consciousness. I was in awe of what we could create when I had a dream that told me, “A project you are working on will have a time change.” I was concerned but trusting, and then two weeks later my community began to be shut down by Covid-19. As I write this article, the date of our display is on hold, and all participants are in isolation in their homes, exploring themselves as they create.

*Rapunzell* was not one of my favourite fairy tales when I was young, but I did marvel at her hair. How long did it take to brush it? Did it hurt when it was climbed on? As a younger child living in the country I was mostly alone, and I admired Rapunzell’s strength living alone in a tower surrounded by nature. However, as I reread the story at age 73, it showed me new realizations tempered by my life’s experiences. It was the witch or enchantress who drew my attention. I saw her as an aged woman who had developed



**Top:** The second panel of the triptych. I incorporate the new experience of a linocut with my love for embroidering. With each methodical stitch, I gain more insights into myself.

**Above:** *The Golden Goose*, by another participant

a true mother's heart, who'd learned tough love and survival as a female. Rapunzell's parents stole the witch's sweet-tasting rampion out of self-interest and greed. They readily promised to relinquish their first-born when the enchantress offered to give them all the rampion they wanted.

I question their values. Now I see the old woman not as a witch, but rather as a crone with a mother's heart. She saw the parents' poor values, and encouraged Rapunzell to learn to be happy in stillness, to take care of herself and develop her beautiful singing voice. Ultimately, these traits would give her endurance and bring the prince to her. While creating my triptych, I chose to explore and learn new techniques. This approach required me to open my mind to new ways, and thus led me to make new realizations. My process brought me to a readiness to inquire, a state of mind essential to evolving as a human. Reading this fairy tale and interpreting it through my creativity brought me to a richer, truer, realization of myself.

"I was unfamiliar with the fairy tale *The Golden Goose* but, when I decided to participate in this project, the tale seemed to call to me from the list of titles available. Reading the tale, now in my seventies, I was immediately taken by the lumberman's generous youngest son. His family called him Simpleton, and he was mocked and treated poorly by them. Unlike his brothers, he acted with heart when he met the hungry little old grey man in the forest. Of course this son would share his lunch with the hungry stranger. I was delighted when Simpleton discovered the goose with feathers of pure gold at the root of the tree the old man directed him to chop down. Like the princess, I laughed loudly, imagining the innkeeper's daughters and the townsmen becoming stuck to the goose when they tried to steal its feathers, its uniqueness. I felt satisfaction that the parade of covetous people brought the princess gales of laughter and made her fall in love with, and marry, Simpleton. I am a lover of metaphor. As I reflected on my experience of this story, I interpreted the golden goose to be the authenticity in the roots of the tree and in each of our hearts. Our uniqueness is ours alone and cannot be taken by another for their use. Selfishly trying to use another's talents will make the usurper look like a fool. Behaving according to the truth in our hearts will be rewarded."

This time of Covid has given me, and those who have joined me, a way to re-experience a fairy tale, and the time to let those tales work with us, to breathe with us and to make the message of our display come alive. Our message will be birthed in a new time of human evolution after Covid-19 – a new "once upon a time." Our fairy tales will inform us and breathe with us into a new tomorrow.



# LISTENING WITH MY BRUSH

## Geri Thom



**Geri Thom** was born and raised in Prince George, B.C. She enjoyed a long career in mechanical drafting and design, starting with her father's logging equipment designs, then on to pulp mills, Western Star Trucks and, finally, aircraft modifications with KF Aerospace. She retired about 12 years ago to concentrate on travelling down new paths with unknown adventures. Now there is time for gardening, travelling, entertaining Airedales and reconnecting with family. In past years she enjoyed doing stained glass, running and hiking. She has participated in a number of community volunteer efforts, most extensively around suicide intervention and youth suicide prevention and education.

Her latest path led her to painting with oil. It has become a passionate journey filled with challenges, love and learning. This path will be a long, enduring journey.



A portrait speaks. It immortalizes one's unwritten novel reflecting the triumphs, defeats and resulting belief systems that make us remarkable. Every portrait I paint becomes a personal journey of growth and opening for me as well as a quest to understand and honour another's unique soul. My process becomes a relationship.

When we love someone we touch their face with our hands, cheek, in a hug or a kiss. Touch becomes the mirror into a loved one's soul. Painting a portrait is stroking a face. Every brush mark and layer reaches deeper into the essence of the subject's being.

The first layer defines the basic facial structure and expression. For this introduction I use my brain and am outside my subject. I feel the trepidation of a new relationship. Can I reach inside? Will this portrait live? Will it be real?

The subsequent layers are strokes of feeling and intuition. I am listening with my Brush. Each layer reaches deeper into the soul. I am taking time to absorb, understand and grow into a relationship with my subject. So it was with Josephine Kwik. When I started Josephine's portrait I did not know her. However, I became deeply intrigued with her while we have been isolated from each other.

I had one brief 'socially distant' meeting with Josephine to take her photograph, but was unable to develop a sense of who she is, although I knew about her fairytale project. My first layer was, of course, structural in nature and uninvolved. It was a basic outline. The second layer added colour and shadows to her face and there I stalled. I did not have a sense of her spirit and was uncertain where I would go next with her face.

We began to communicate, and I began to develop that so important sense of Josephine. Her affinity for nature and her gratitude for any treasure she receives, no matter how simple, are grounding. She is a complex philosophical woman not to be taken lightly, nor instantly known.

I now felt inspired to continue building her portrait and once again turned to my intuition and brush to guide me through to completion. The colours and strokes that spoke to me from my heart were *red* with its energy, daring and passion. The strength and sincerity of *blue*. Followed by *purple* for vision, spirituality and the magic of fairy tales. My painting was becoming a dance of impulse and inspiration. *Green* added its harmony, compassion and love of nature. Mother Earth's *brown* grounded this portrait and *yellow* brought in warmth, and finally the portrait was completed in light, hope and balance with *white*.

Finally, this multi layered and complex woman has come to life on my canvas. I feel privileged to have touched her face and soul.

For me, this portrait lives.

# ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

**Stephen Buck**

“All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.” – William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Being now halfway through my seventh decade the words of the great bard resonate, particularly in this time of heightened awareness of our own mortality. My introduction to the stage came early. At Northdale Public School in the suburbs of London, Ontario, 1964 was a glorious year. The Beatles had just performed on the Ed Sullivan Show one Sunday night and on Monday, as soon as the lunch bell rang, it seemed the entire student body thronged to the concrete playground outside the main doors and spontaneously sang “She Loves You” and “I Want to Hold Your Hand.” Those songs forever indelibly imprinted on my eight-year-old psyche, reinforced by the surge of dopamine coursing through my body from the overwhelming sense of being one of the group. Beatlemania was our collective ecstatic abandonment to the thrills of music and the beginning of my lifelong quest for more.

We forge our own identities, and our creative spirits, from the many possibilities of our ancestors and the experiences of our environment. My grandmother was the first person who sang with me. We listened to records of Peter, Paul and Mary and Paul Robeson and Joan Baez and sang along. The singing bound us tightly together in a shared magical experience. But anyone

Stephen Buck and son Alex



who has listened to me sing knows that that is not my greatest gift. Fate kindly intervened. At the beginning of Grade 7 a local high school music teacher named Mr. Potts came recruiting for twice-weekly beginner band classes – thirty-five dollars per term, instrument rental included. My parents agreed to pay, but what instrument to play? We had a record at home, titled *The Unforgettable Freddy Gardner*, which I loved to listen to, but I didn’t know what instrument Freddy played. On the back cover it said alto sax, so away I went to Mr. Potts and proclaimed that I was to play the alto. Thankfully, he started me on the clarinet instead.

My grandparents met at the Ontario College of Art in the 1910s and then eloped. My grandfather became a history teacher and my grandmother taught Latin. After retiring my grampa was able to spend even more time with his art and eventually started painting sets for the productions at the London Little Theatre. Sometimes he would take me backstage when he was working on sets, and I can still recall the smell of the wet paint and the thrill of exploring the empty theatre. My grandparents would take me to productions there featuring his set painting, and so I was introduced to proper theatre. I joined the junior players' acting classes, of which I can only remember one production, where I was cast as the hind end of a donkey, blind in a costume bent over with my hands on the back of the young actor in front, trying not to trip on stage.

I guess the classes finally paid off when I joined a school production of *Guys and Dolls* in Grade 10. I was singing in the chorus when a new teacher showed up at one of the rehearsals. He took a liking to me and we became good friends. Lansing MacDowell was the Supervisor of Music for the Board of Education, the organist and choir director at Bishop Cronyn United Church, and the first person besides my high school music teachers who talked with me sympathetically about music. He became my musical mentor. We would listen to records and discuss the music and the composers. It was great to be taken seriously by a real musician. He expanded my listening and took me to my first live opera and orchestral concerts. Halfway through Grade 12, Bob Martin, a local high-note trumpeter, asked me to play second alto in his 16-piece dance band at the old Stork Club in Port Stanley. At first I sat in awe soaking up the playing of the great alto of Harold MacNaughton, who had played in the BBC Big Band after the war. When he and Bob had a falling out Bob took me aside and demonstrated how he wanted me to play lead in the band. He believed in me and gave me my first professional work.

In our last year of high school my band director, Donald Clarke, decided to stage a production of *Hello Dolly* and asked me to play the reed one part, which featured the alto sax, clarinet and flute. I had never played the flute before, so he gave me one, and I went home and started practising, playing along with music on the radio and with a record of Jean-Pierre Rampal performing Bach flute sonatas. I immediately fell in love with the flute, and it later became the mainstay of my professional career as a woodwind doubler in theatre orchestras.

Looking back on those early years, I can still feel the nervousness of those first performances, but also the warmth and camaraderie of the older musicians. Often I was the youngest on stage, and the old guys would play tricks on me and at the same time share their personal stories, and their love of music and their instruments.

Now, almost 50 years later, the tables have turned. Being the oldest guy in the band has become my role, although I often still feel like the enthusiastic kid I once was. When the Rotary Jazz Jam, at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna, is really humming, I am riding on a wave of music,





propelled by the young players on stage. The gamut runs from first-time Grade 7 students struggling with their instruments, the music and their nerves, to the accomplished Grade 12s, some already playing at a professional level, destined for greatness. Now, after nine years in existence, many musicians who got their start performing in public at the Jam return to Kelowna at Christmas or in the summer to visit family and friends, reconnect and show off their prowess. They dazzle the younger players and provide a role model of what is possible if you practise hard and go for the dream. The audience is there for the performers too. There are parents and local band teachers and many groups of fans who have met and become friends at the Jam. Some have been coming since its inception! They are a loyal group and unstinting in their support of the music. For the long-time fans the greatest experience is being able to follow the development of the musicians over the years, seeing and hearing the transformation from shaky beginner to polished performer. Terry Champion has documented many of these musicians in a wonderful album,



**Top:** Spencer Dean, James Bayford, Bernie Addington, Craig Thomson, Kolton Wiczorek, Simon Buck, Stephen Buck, Austin Nichol, Nolan Thorn  
**Above:** Alex Buck, Zach Griffin, Alex Argatoff

with photographs and entries from the students. He makes these available at the jams.

Although I usually play a few tunes to start things off, my role is to facilitate the action, to convince the nervous first-timer to get up and play, and to make sure the environment is supportive and positive. I remember how so many wonderful musicians listened and talked to me as if it mattered. They shared their passion and knowledge and gave me the opportunity to perform and develop. I want to pass this along to the next generation of players.

The Rotary Jazz Jam session takes place every Thursday from 5 to 7 at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna. The first performance took place on July 7, 2011, and was organized by Craig Thomson, the true soul of the Jam, and Shelly Vida from the Rotary Centre. The original players were Craig Thomson, Simon Buck, Alex Buck, Stephen Buck, Jonny Karroll, Kolton Wiczorek, Corey St. Pierre, Spencer Dean and Sam Griffin.

Stephen Buck can be contacted at [sbuck56@gmail.com](mailto:sbuck56@gmail.com)

# THE ART OF BEE-ING



## Jennifer Krezan

*Hiveology* isn't just a honey company based on proven scientific methods. It's my artwork. It's a reflection of me. I chose the name – or created the name – *Hiveology*, based on my own personal principles in life. Be a good person, be kind. Be kind to each other, to ourselves, to animals, to nature. If we take care of these things eventually that good energy makes its way around the planet and comes back to us.

*Hiveology* is a sustainable apiculture company located in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. Our practices are organic, with animal welfare and conservation first and foremost. We use gentle, yet science-based methods, to improve the health of our local honey bee population. We harvest only what is in excess of required honey stores for successful overwintering of *Hiveology* colonies, which, in turn, will restore balance in nature. Always pure and raw, *Hiveology* honey and beeswax is derived from our organic apiaries with minimal intervention. Certified organic farm location, biodiversity and regenerative farming are integrative solutions informing our approach to help correct soil fertility. Together, by supporting local transparent sustainable companies like *Hiveology*, we can help solve the planetary-scale problems we are currently facing.

I grew up on a farm in the Lower Mainland where we also had a beautiful garden. I always felt so connected to nature and animals. As I pursued education, I thought my journey was to become a veterinarian, and, after trial and error, I transitioned to a position as a veterinary consultant. Still, my interest in entomology called to me. I decided to continue my studies once again and entered into a degree program in agricultural science with a major in Sustainable Food and Farming. That program led me to complete studies in Hawaii and learn about coffee farming, production and natural energy resources (solar, wind power, etc.). Sustainable and organic farming is the norm there, and I was very inspired to bring organic farming back to Canada. I just wasn't sure what that would be specifically until destiny stepped in. While completing a course in Pollinator Habitat and Biology, I learned how important all pollinators are, and that they include birds, bats, butterflies and of course ... bees. I took advantage of an Independent Study elective to explore the endangered Hawaiian Kamehameha butterfly and the dangers posed by the loss of pollinator habitat, disappearing at an alarming rate for various reasons that we face here in the Okanagan too. My mind bubbled. I couldn't stop thinking about the connection of pollinators to our food, and remembered all those butterflies and bees that came to my garden as a child.

Within the agricultural science program there was a beekeeping course available, so I went for it. It was quite intensive, and I really had to apply myself



Our hives. The white pails you see on top are feeder pails and contain a lemongrass vitamin supplement that the bees love!

to gain the knowledge I needed if I was going to pursue my attraction to bees as pollinators. Fortunately, I had a lot of time on planes, flying across Canada and to Hawaii to visit my veterinary clients. I studied, studied, studied. I worked on a project and designed what would eventually become my company *Hiveology*. I received a mark of 100 per cent on this project, and the professor asked me when I would be opening my business. It seemed as though it would be a distance away, but then I decided to go for it at the end of 2018, and by spring 2019 I had launched the company. Life has not been the same ever since. I really had no idea how much interest there was in bees.

Fast forward one year to today and you can find me caring for my bees a few days a week at various locations. Prior to the Covid-19 virus, when I wasn't with the bees throughout the week, I made my products available at farmers' markets in the Okanagan Valley.

Our food supply needs bees. Without bees there would be much less food available, and therefore prices would increase exponentially. The alternative is to pollinate every fruit tree and vegetable by hand. Bees are the key to how much food we get to eat. One in three bites of food we eat is food that has been pollinated by bees. Farmers depend on pollination services by beekeepers; bees are an integral part of a farm's spring management and budget. I'm working on a much smaller scale than the commercial beekeepers do. I have under 50 hives whereas a commercial beekeeper has at least a hundred, even thousands of hives. You might say I practise boutique beekeeping.

We never pasteurize or add heat because this destroys the beneficial enzymes in honey that make it a superfood. Once filtered, honey goes directly to bottling. It can remain in bottles for many years without any problems. Honey never expires. It is indeed a superfood.

Much of one's success as a beekeeper is dependent upon the ability to observe, assess, diagnose and treat in a timely manner. I have found that timing is everything in beekeeping. So there are days when I plan to complete other projects, but those are immediately put on hold if I see something that needs to be tended to and then rechecked in a few days. For the love of bees, it can always be better as far as I'm concerned.

From hive to house we have carefully curated *Hiveology* provisions for our customers. Our coveted Reusable Beeswax Food Wraps have been a very popular and sustainable household item this year. These wraps are intended to replace single use plastics that ultimately end up in our landfills and pollute oceans. A feature of the *Hiveology* beeswax provisions is that I only complete a gentle filter process once. This keeps a lot of the propolis and honey active in the mixture. Propolis is antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal. Using our wraps will preserve your foods for longer than using single use plastic wrap, which does not have these benefits. The wraps are available in many stunning patterns and sizes to suit all of your food storage needs. Another benefit of *Hiveology* Beeswax Wraps is that they are compostable at the end of their life cycle, after at least one year of regular use and washing. I believe that the unique formulation of our beeswax and hive products line has made our wraps' superior adhesion one of the





With my bees

best on the market today.

*Hiveology's* methods use minimal intervention to provide the highest quality products closest to nature. The smell, taste and colour depend on the types of flowers visited by the bees in their location. We currently have three varietal offerings: Wildflower, Sweet Clover and Buckwheat. Honey has so many great health benefits and can be used in your teas instead of sugar or sweeteners, with the advantage that honey is twice as sweet as sugar. Use honey in your kitchen recipes, as a soothing for a sore throat and cough, or as an excellent skin treatment (buckwheat honey is nearly a perfect match to our own skin's pH).

Local bee pollen can be eaten daily to supplement allergy medication or as a stand-alone treatment in preventative measures for seasonal allergies. Pollen is cumulative in nature, therefore regular intake of local pollen can improve the immune system and provide great relief from seasonal allergies. Currently I am collecting and processing pollen when there is a pollen flow. I am mindful to gather only small amounts from my strongest colonies that are collecting an excess, so as not to damage or disrupt their natural balance. Pollen has 50 per cent more protein per unit than beef, and is a bee's primary source of protein for provisioning its cells to raise brood (future generations of bees). Food is medicine and bees create super medicine.

Our special creation is Honey and Lavender Simple Syrup, truly a taste of the Okanagan. This decadent sweet treat is made of *Hiveology* honey and a lavender tea steep. This syrup is one of our most popular products. It can be used to sweeten your tea and coffee (my fave is a London Fog). Pour it over your breakfast oatmeal, toss it up with some olive oil for a salad dressing, and of course shake it up in cocktails! I love an Old Fashioned, but don't love sugar, so this is actually why we made this product.

The Covid-19 virus has pushed us into a day and age of paying attention to food security. This requires measuring the availability of food and an individual's ability to access it. There wasn't the same concern before the shortages and price increases that Covid has caused. I have seen increased interaction between farmers and locals concerning their food, and it's very encouraging. People are becoming much more educated. Now people are learning about how the foods we local farmers produce differ from foods that are imported and exported. Consumers want to learn more about their foods, and this desire will create demand and change for the greater good.

A gift of Covid-19 is that it is alerting our attention to many aspects of how we interact with nature as we conduct our lives, individually and collectively. If we each focus our attention, as our interests direct us, I believe our human species will evolve in better harmony with the universe. Perhaps we were losing direction.

At the end of the last century, Canadian artist Mary Pratt advised, "Art is about lookin', lookin', lookin'. Puttin' it in your own filter and makin' it come out different." That is *The Art of Bee-ing* as we practise it at *Hiveology*.

Hiveology Est. 2019  
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# REALISING OUR RESILIENCE



## Elaine Hanlon

Going for solitary walks provides an opportunity to really observe spring's timetable and its time of new growth. Walking through a nearby vineyard, I encountered a deer approaching me on the same path. We stopped in the stillness surrounding us, observed each other, and respectively turned away to allow the other their space. Inspiration and the awe and marvel of nature has been one of the many gifts received as a result of this current pandemic lockdown. It gives an opportunity to see my place in the scheme of things.

For those fortunate enough to have a safe refuge to shelter in place, and enough security not to worry about making ends meet, this enforced isolation is rich in rewards. If the ability to pare down to the essence and deem what is important is usual in this stage of life as a senior, then COVID-19 has given this time to take focus even more for me and others I know.

Over the past number of weeks, I have read theories of aging from renowned figures in their respective fields, including neuroscience, on how aging affects our outlook and behaviour. The overlap of research findings from various scientific viewpoints demonstrates that aging does give us more resiliency and capacity to deal with uncertainty, a fortunate result, particularly as it applies to our present circumstances and unknown future.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung thought there was more to aging than inevitable decline in the "afternoon" of our life. This time was deemed a valuable opportunity to come to greater personal understanding and self-awareness, accomplished through self-reflection in conjunction with our unique life experiences. Lars Tornstam, a sociologist, said as we age there is a natural and uniquely personal move towards maturity and wisdom, commonly associated with increased satisfaction with life, with new ways of understanding it and oneself. There is a tendency towards self-reflection, along with self-awareness, spirituality, transcendence and a greater ability to cope with uncertainty. These traits, according to neuroscience, come about as a direct result of the way our brains age. We can, therefore, build on prior knowledge and experience, compare and see a pattern, allowing us to see how things fit together, and predict outcomes. An ability to see the bigger picture emerges.

The current government imposed restrictions on our movements and activities to help flatten the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has given many seniors the time to slow down and ponder current events, sort out priorities and determine what is important. Many of us have reflected on this before, but this epidemic seems to have clearly focussed our minds a little more. This unique time is real, not an abstraction.

So what have I observed among friends and acquaintances and their



**Top:** *Lady In the Rain*, Clare Fitchett

**Above:** *From my oven*, a photo from my Angela Bearman

responses to the situation? Well, a lot more phone calls and long discussions about what is happening and how they are feeling. Many of my fellow seniors have openly talked about their wishes should they face choices with medical care, and many have revised their representation agreements and talked with their families about what interventions they want or don't want, many for the first time.

I have noticed that friends and acquaintances in my age cohort, those who are self-aware and have spent time developing both spiritually and personally, appear to be coping better with all of the uncertainty surrounding the fallout from this disease. In the not so distant past, for many of us, we learned about resiliency and coming together in adversity from the stories shared by our parents or grandparents who lived through the Depression of the 1930s, followed by the deprivations of a world war. The belief that humans can thrive and learn from hardships was clearly demonstrated during those hard times. So the resilience and ability to cope with uncertainty as we age seem to be at work with this older group. For many, the paring down to the essence of what matters has

resulted in decluttering and giving away things that are no longer valued, along with a renewed sense of gratitude regarding our relationships and connections to others. These new perspectives might also encompass how each plans to live life once a vaccine or therapy emerges – making life choices that fit with new values and priorities.

The creativity that is ascribed to aging is evident in the everyday activities of seniors I am acquainted with. Psychiatrist Gene Cohen, author of *Mature Mind* and *Creative Age*, says that one of the “gifts of age” is the acquisition of wisdom, along with late life creativity. Cohen describes these qualities as the development of a capacity to accept opposing views, an “it all depends” perspective, dualistic thinking, and the ability to hold opposing views at the same time in a larger framework. We move towards an ability to see the big picture without getting caught in all the details. The tendencies Cohen identifies commonly add up to wisdom. They are valuable resources to have at this moment.

Today I received a picture of a loaf of sourdough bread lovingly made from scratch, taking seven days from start to finish. Everything, from making protective face masks to coming up with inventive recipes using what is on hand, paintings, drawings, landscaping projects and planning gardens, is being undertaken by seniors I know. This increased spurt of creativity is a happy coincidence of our isolation.

By modelling our resilience, our ability to deal with uncertainty, seeing shades of grey, not just black and white, the ability to see beyond the now into





Poppy, Clare Fitchett

a future world, we are displaying attributes and traits that will serve those coming up from behind. We can provide some stability and calm to younger generations. The gifts that come about from the accumulation of wisdom over a lifetime harmonize well with what it takes to face the reality of this pandemic. The following quote from Gloria Steinem, feminist and founder of *Ms. Magazine*, exemplifies best how we can pass on our experience and wisdom. “People often ask me at this age, who am I passing the torch to? First of all, I’m not giving up my torch, thank you! I’m using my torch to light other people’s torches. If we each have a torch, we have a lot more light.” Her sentiment regarding the passing on of wisdom to those following embodies the true spirit of “sage-ing.”

“As individuals, as community members, as a society, it is in all of our best interests to help construct a culture that embraces the gifts of the elderly, weaving

cross generational interactions into the fabric of everyday experience.” These prescient words of Daniel J. Levitan, author of *Successful Aging*, seem even more poignant now. Sadly enough, our wisdom and our worth is often undermined by a disturbing trend towards ageism. It is up to us, therefore, to share the wisdom from lessons learned and be more vocal about our value and place in society. What better time to do that than now?

**Elaine Hanlon** was born and educated in Ottawa, Ont., but has called Alberta and British Columbia home for the majority of her life. She worked in various capacities for the Alberta government in Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto; however, her stint working in London, England, was a particular highlight because of her exposure to the arts, theatre and cultural scene of the capital. She worked in the career counselling and employment field for college and government sponsored agencies in Kelowna, B.C., where she still resides as an active and flourishing retiree.

# MY CREATIVE JOURNEY



## Bernice E. James

When we were very young, crayons in hand would likely result in creations characterized by reckless abandon. We drew what we felt, even if it simply looked like a lot of scribbles! As we matured a bit, we were given colouring books and were taught to colour precisely within the lines. Perhaps that was a metaphor for learning life skills, the importance of rules, the need for recognizing boundaries. But, if we were lucky, a time would come when we could once again approach our creativity with a freedom defined only by what we were feeling, what was real for us in the moment.

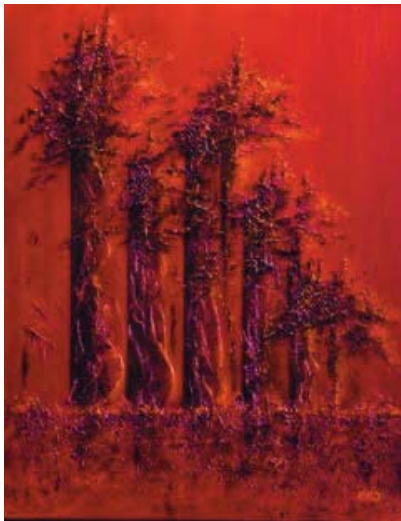
I grew up in rural Saskatchewan where, on a clear day, you could almost see forever. When I was a child, I drew pictures and had colouring books, as most children do, but I think I was too impatient to spend a lot of time sitting still. That fell to my older brother who was the “designated artist” in the family. Through my childhood and teens, I found my artistic expression singing solos in music festivals, in acting roles at school dramatic productions, and through participating in public speaking competitions.

In the mid-sixties, I shared an apartment in Toronto with my artist brother, while he was attending the Ontario College of Art, as it was then called. One evening I lamented that I was bored. Without even a hint of sympathy, my brother said, “Well then do something creative.” My response was pretty much a derisive, “Fine.” Nonetheless, using the magazines we had in our apartment, I created a collage, a somewhat abstract depiction of trees. The critique from my brother was positive. Interestingly, still when I feel a creative block, my default position is to return to some version of trees.

While I dabbled in various art forms over the years, life happened, and I became preoccupied with work and family responsibilities. After moving to Kelowna in 2007, time and circumstance provided the opportunity to explore my inner artist. My process evolved with time and experimentation, enriched through classes with various instructors, interaction with other artists and participation in painting groups and shows.

In my journey of artistic discovery, I have continued to move to a freer, intuitive process and style. The work comes from what I am feeling, where I am at a given point of time. The freedom of feeling the work as it evolves is invigorating. My artistic endeavours are influenced by my love of music, the world around me, the people and events in my life, by their collective emotional impact whether positive or negative.

Working primarily in acrylics, my art is increasingly in an abstract or contemporary style, a study in colour blending combined with the strategic use of texture. One of my instructors described my use of texture as



**Top:** *Endless Sunset*. Acrylic on canvas, 12'' x 12''

**Middle:** *Sizzle*. Mixed media with acrylic, 16'' x 20''

**Above:** *Passages*. Mixed media with acrylic, 20'' x 20''

“sculpting on canvas.”

I avoid the use of “source pictures.” When I have used them, my brain has wanted to simply replicate the image it was seeing. Abandoning such reference points has been a great benefit in my evolving style. There is a talent needed to be a good illustrator, and I’ve done it in my experimentation, and with some success, but that isn’t me.

Committing to the use of quality materials to produce my art and using established methods to protect the finished product is important to me. While I am fully aware that I won’t be around in a hundred years to answer for my choices, and it may seem terribly presumptuous, thinking my work will stand the test of time, I feel it is a necessary measure of respect owed to those who become the owners of my works to ensure they have the best possible finished product.

Clearly the positive feedback I received from my brother in the 1960s was important, since I still have that piece of artwork! These many years later, after study and practice, I understand what was positive, particularly in terms of the composition and use of colour, in that early endeavour. But more important than the positive technical appraisal, the psychological support any artist receives is even more valuable. Putting ourselves out there for the world to see is a risk. Like most artists, I tend to be my harshest critic, always second-guessing what I have done, always hoping for that perfect result, even if it is a happy accident!

Art appreciation is very personal. Happily we don’t all like exactly the same things, even if every artist might wish that everyone would love everything they have produced. In the final analysis, we do the work for ourselves, it is our therapy, it feeds our soul. For me the moment has arrived where I enjoy challenging my own assumptions, pushing the boundaries of my skill and technique. But my larger fundamental purpose is to give pleasure to others, rather than to challenge them. It is a great joy when, through my own process, I am able to connect with those who experience my creations. The connection completes the circle.

My works have been shown in various venues in and around Kelowna and have found homes across Canada and in Europe.

**Bernice E. James’** father’s work meant frequent moves across Saskatchewan, a reality that instilled a willingness to accept others and to be open to new experiences. She is convinced the prairie landscape significantly influenced her philosophy of life, giving birth to a restless spirit and a desire to see beyond the horizon. The landscape itself was a vast space for imagination and a fertile grounding for growth. A graduate of the University of Saskatchewan, work and life ultimately took her to Ontario, Alberta, London (England) and finally to Kelowna, British Columbia. Travels to more of Canada, Europe, Asia, the Caribbean and the USA broadened her world view. Bernice is certain each chapter in our lives has a purpose, an opportunity to explore new realities and challenge boundaries. In this moment, her art is significant to how the current chapter is evolving. [www.berniceejames.com](http://www.berniceejames.com)



# MY PILGRIM SHADOW

## IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT THE LIGHT



### Ellen B. Ryan

As a retired professor of gerontology, I promote resilient aging through my writings and presentations to community groups. My personal path towards resilient aging features regular walking, community involvement and contemplative creativity.

Contemplative creativity started for me twenty years ago when I started journalizing to cope with health problems following a whiplash injury. This journal writing led to my inclination to write poetry. I had read little poetry since high school and certainly never contemplated writing poems. But I was experiencing difficulty reading lines of text for more than a few minutes, and the white space in poetry beckoned. I took a course, listened to poetry, joined a writing group and practised. By the time my vision improved, I was captivated by the process of following inner whispers to create something beyond myself and my expectations.

About fifteen years ago, I began to use a digital camera. First, I snapped family activities and travel destinations. Gradually, however, I became interested in close-ups of flowers and trees; and then my shadow entered the pictures. Soon, I fell under the spell of a new calling: follow the light to photograph my shadow, anywhere.

And now, of course, I am writing to understand the nature of this calling.



### My Reckless Shadow

takes stairs head first  
no way feet can catch up

steals through locked gate  
teasing me over bars

scales lone pine on ridge  
clutching curvy cones

leaps giant hay bales  
hundred metre hurdles tackled

dances along split rail fence  
mourning doves undisturbed

walks on water  
rippling in boat's wake

Sun slips behind cloud  
my daring double slides away

### Origin of My Shadow Photographs

Why do you keep taking photographs of your shadow?" my writing friends ask.

"Is it about the darkness, the shadow side of life?"

"No," I reply. "It's not about darkness."

It was only through journaling that I eventually found my answer:

"It's always about the light."

I am a walker. In recent years, I walk with a camera. Originally, I would photograph my husband along the trails and within landscapes, as I know that images that include a human are more appealing. But what about those many solo walks when I really have time to meander – to use the camera whenever I like and to wander off the path for a good photo? I began to capture my solo walking companion – my shadow or my reflection.

I record my shadow walks in local neighbourhoods and across national borders, on city sidewalks, on country lanes, at the seaside and along nature



**Top:** *My Spanish Padre*

**Above:** *Tree Spirit*

trails. Even on cloudy days or evening walks, I imagine how my shadow would lie across cherry blossoms or ocean surf. Sometimes, the goal is the setting; sometimes, it's the shape, texture or colour of my shadow.

As I follow the light, my shadow focuses attention on the here and now. My head often percolates with ideas while I walk, leaving me oblivious to my surroundings. But the camera grounds me. Watching the variation in light, especially on partly cloudy days, and the way the light highlights or subdues colours connects me to my body on the trail or in the garden.

Each shadow photograph serves as both 'selfie' and 'un-selfie.' I am nervous when a camera is pointed towards me; somehow, I prefer to think I am invisible in the world. Yet, I have no qualms about sharing my *shadow self* over and over again. The shadow photo shows that I have substance, but without the facial features. No concern about my crooked smile or blinking into the blinding sun. Key signs of aging are invisible – grey hair, wrinkles, sagging neck, eye pouches.

### Pilgrim Shadow Images

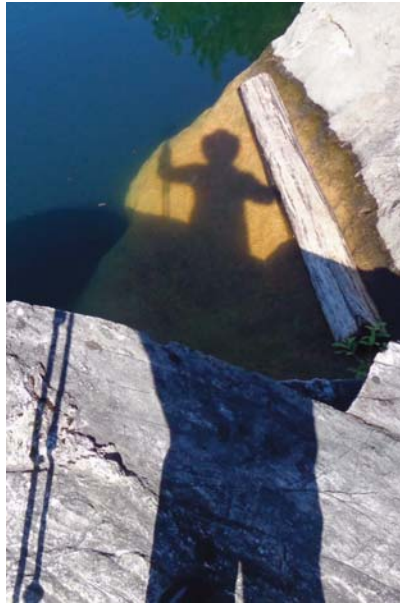
As I mentioned, I started out using shadow images to insert a human figure or two within a special scene.

Over the years, I have photographed my shadow with my husband's in many settings as we travel. The best surprise is *My Spanish padre*. We climb the steps of the Cathedral de Santiago de Compostela after completing a portion of El Camino, a pilgrimage across northern Spain.

There I am with my Tilley hat (a Canadian trademark) holding the camera. Transformed by a trick of the light, Patrick is an ancient padre with skinny neck, wide-brimmed clerical hat, a clerical cape and crooked walking sticks as if made [or sculpted...] from tree branches gathered along the way. In fact, Pat holds my straight hiking poles while I take the shot. The angle gives Pat a cartoonist's thin neck, while his Tilley hat becomes squat with a rolled rim. The impression of his backpack creates the cape. In that midafternoon light, our shadow presence stamps those venerable steps with mystery.

I experiment with my shadow. My shadow can engage in different activities, in different contexts: my long sunset shadow walking on stairs, in autumn fields or at the beach. Increasingly, I search for intriguing textures and colours – on grass, flowers, leaves, branches, ocean waves, sand dunes, patio stones and in cobblestone lanes. Surprises abound. A rock behind me





**Top left:** *Sandcastle Stance*  
**Top middle:** *Explorer to the Self*  
**Top right:** *So Many Selves*  
**Above:** *High Fashion in Stone*

can look like a parasol, and cracks between patio stones can dress me up in a jacket and skirt.

Occasionally, the shadow surprises with sunset glow, separation across water/rocks or multiple selves. The photograph *So many selves* intrigues because it shows my shadow, my reflection and the reflection of my shadow.

## Epilogue

Reviewing my shadow images leads me to reflect on resilient aging. A walker, I exercise my body, mind and spirit. A photographer, I follow the light to deepen my walk through mindfulness and to discover images lying in wait. Seeking my shadow is a response to a mysterious pull—stretching my creative spirit. A writer, I use creative nonfiction to explore the meanings of walking with my shadow. This genre includes personal essays, poetic captions and poetry on how my shadow dares jump over locked gates and stretch my head to the bottom of steep steps.

I aim to live with grace, using my pen and camera to dance between light and shadow.

**Ellen B. Ryan** is professor emerita at McMaster University, member of Tower Poetry Society and The Ontario Poetry Society, co-editor of *Celebrating Poets over 70*, and host of the Writing, Aging and Spirit website. Her interests in the psychology of aging focus on resilient aging in community and writing memoir. Currently, she leads a local Aging in Community initiative to create mutual support networks and to promote housing innovations. Along with talented colleagues, she fosters writing of life stories and poetry among older adults. Ellen also practises mindfulness in nature with her camera. Her specialty is selfie/unsselfie shadow images. Email: ryaneb@mcmaster.ca.



# BACK TO THE NEW NORMAL



## Lynda Norman

I admit that these days, as we shelter in place and practise social distancing to stay safe and try to figure out next steps, I am increasingly grateful for the less hectic pace and the time to breathe deeply of the things that bring me comfort and joy.

The past year has been filled with heartache as we lost our youngest grandson, my dear brother-in-law and five lovely friends. I hold them in my heart and honour them by reflecting on the beautiful moments that have and will continue to fill my life. I revel in these slower days, allowing space to remember, more deeply appreciating my family, friends, my art, music, my home.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not oblivious to what's going on all around us, but for now, at least, I choose not to engage in debate over medical or political issues. I'm content to leave that to the experts. I'm taking this time as a gift, recharging my creative batteries and focusing on filling each day with as many positive and creative things as I can. I am grateful to be able to sit in my garden sipping my coffee, and take the time to reflect on the path that has brought me to each day.

Lately, my memories of growing up in the Okanagan during the '50s and '60s are finding their way through. Although I wasn't able to recognize it at the time, those days were quite magical. Kelowna was a small town then with a population of less than 10,000. We incorporated the knowledge from their experience our parents and grandparents shared with us. We celebrated our culture in stories, recipes, music and songs. Stewardship of our land and homes was second-nature, as we grew our gardens and raised our chickens and livestock. This was a time when we sewed our clothes, quilted our quilts, grew and preserved our food that we proudly served when we gathered to share a meal over stories that helped us know our family – and of course, we always had music to express our joy.

The creativity that was evident in everything we did seemed to come so naturally – no one ever questioned anyone's ability to create because there was an understanding that each and every one of us is born creative, and that fact was celebrated always. There was pride in the telling of each other's accomplishments – we learned from each other, and were encouraged to put our own energy and personality into whatever we were doing. A pretty special way to grow up! When I reminisce during this time of reflection on what I've been given, I hope my community and indeed the world are entering a 21<sup>st</sup>-century renaissance.

As I grew up, the world in which creativity simmered throughout our

slower paced, family-centric life was changing at an incredible pace. The role of creativity really began to be tested by the increased availability of information, particularly through television and advancing technology. For me, that meant more learning, more music and art, and ideas to explore and adore. I felt empowered knowing I carried so much of the essence of my ancestors with me as I embraced the new and wondrous adventures that were coming our way. While I was excited to have so much to share, not all shared my roots or my perspective.

My family first arrived in the Okanagan in the late 1800s, and I grew up with such a sense of pride and belonging here. As our town grew rapidly into a city, however, that sense of belonging soon faded. There was a new focus on bigger, shinier – a desire to appear more professional, polished and competitive in the world – and with that, in my opinion, our grassroots creatives suffered.

I was hearing from many creatives who felt there wasn't a place for them to sing their songs, display their art, perform their dances, share the words they'd written. Many felt they needed to leave the Okanagan to 'make it' in the art world. The more I heard these concerns, the more I realized we needed to make a better effort to support the people who are the heart of our creative community.

In 2012, I invited a group of local creatives to come together to find out how we could encourage and celebrate our grassroots arts and culture. In November of that year I filed the paperwork, and Artists for Creative Alliance, a not-for-profit society, was formed. That same month we created OUR Coffeehouse, an event that offered open-mic opportunities for musicians, for spoken word, movement and dance, showcasing local artists and

artisans. From that first Coffeehouse to March 2020, we have seen over 1,200 local creatives present to an attentive and appreciative audience. We were creating community, and I started to feel the magic again!

By 2015 most communities in the Okanagan were creating their own arts councils. So as to better serve the creatives in Kelowna specifically, Artists for Creative Alliance opted for a name change to Kelowna Arts Council, an organization that continues to serve local creatives through collaboration and partnership throughout the community.

To say that being surrounded by artists keeps me inspired would be an understatement. That inspiration, combined with a lifetime of observing the incredible beauty of my surroundings and the strength I carry from

**Below:** *Peace Prairie.* Watercolour on 16" x 40" Exhibition Deep Canvas.

Inspired by time spent visiting family in the Peace Region of northern Alberta

**Bottom:** *For Elara.* Watercolour on 16" x 40" Exhibition Deep Canvas. Painted in March 2020 for an auction fundraiser for Elara, a sweet baby who has had surgery to remove a tumor from her tummy and is now facing rounds of chemotherapy





my ancestors, has brought me immeasurable joy and a great deal of peace. That is my story, but we each have our own, and I hope that others, given this time of isolation and the opportunity to reflect, will feel themselves drawn to their creative spirit. I create daily and teach from a small home studio now, and stand firm in my belief that we are all born creative – and that should be celebrated every day. My paintings are created from an instinctive response, rather than a detailed study of my subjects, and I prefer to use colour to enhance or understate certain elements in my work. Exploring the possibilities of colour, form and perspective in this way often results in an abstract look and feel, and invites viewers to experience their own feelings and thoughts.

Now, as our world is changing once again, I see that many are looking at how to get to a 'new normal.'

I believe the best way is through the 'old normal':

through kindness, building community and celebrating ourselves and the creativity our lives inspire. Reflecting on history, it seems to me it is time for a new renaissance, a revival in the world of art and learning.



**Top:** *Kaslo Bound*. Acrylic on 24" X 24" canvas. Inspired by a recent trip through the Kootenays

**Above:** *Aggie*. Created with alcohol ink on 11" x 15" Yupo

**Lynda Norman** was born in Kelowna, British Columbia, and is a self-taught artist. Her body of work primarily includes watercolour, alcohol ink and fibre arts.

Lynda has always known that creativity is a natural part of being – that we are meant to fully participate in life on earth, and that we are meant to express, share and celebrate our creativity. Her workshops are offered to both groups and individuals, and her Art Demo sessions at Opus Art Supplies are very popular.

Ban Draoi (pronounced Ban Dree) Studio is an extension of her vision, to create opportunities for each and every person to experience the benefits of creativity in ways that are meaningful, fulfilling, healing, positive and essential to personal well-being and a thriving community.

<https://www.bandraoistudio.com/gallery-watercolour>

<https://www.facebook.com/bandraoistudio/>

<https://www.instagram.com/bandraoistudio/>



# CREATIVITY AND STILLNESS

## IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

### Jacques G. LeBlanc



The current coronavirus pandemic is bringing worry and scary times. At the same time, the national policy of stay-at-home is challenging all of us. Uncertainty is often considered to be an incentive for creativity, but the complete uncertainty we are facing would daunt even the most resourceful of people. This benefit of stay-at-home time is not enjoyed by everyone. The brave workers on the front line – from doctors to people in the supply chain – have less free time, not more. People whose jobs are at risk (or lost) are focused on more immediate needs. But many who are working from home, with no commutes or in-person meetings, and all others like retirees, find themselves with more time on their hands. That's undeniable. The novel coronavirus, Covid-19, has dramatically altered the structure of our everyday lives with orders of social distancing, curfews, quarantines, lockdowns and more.

The higher-level creativity we see in quarantine times is very interesting. Some renowned actors, singers and comedians are using their gifts to do at-home performances that are lifting people's spirits. Some accomplished individuals, such as inventors and businesspeople, are shifting gears to try to make masks or ventilators using fewer resources. Most essentially, the top doctors and scientists around the globe are working towards treatments and, ideally, a vaccine. All these activities are creativity at work.

It can feel easy to fall into despair. However, as vital as it is to act with responsibility for the good of everyone, since we are actually in the midst of a pandemic, it is equally important to search out the potential silver linings for our own sanity and mental well-being. Creative activities can help reduce stress, handle trauma and improve our mood – all of which are particularly helpful at the current moment. A lot of messages are being thrown at us during this pandemic, such as the value of optimizing our time and seizing the opportunity to be productive.

Constraints, such as stay-at-home guidelines, are a force across the country that removes the many obvious and mundane solutions and activities available on a daily basis. With these current constraints, we're forced to recalibrate our life and search for new ways to solve problems. Constraints may create boredom, but boredom may create moments where our mind begins searching. The ability to tolerate boredom is correlated with creativity. We are hungry for stimulation, and so we begin to search into the recesses of our minds, reaching out and hoping for new ideas. This searching is what inspires creativity.

O.A. Acar, M. Tarakci and D. Van Knippenberg conducted a meta-analysis of 145 studies on constraints. According to their article in *Harvard Business Review*, “Why Constraints Are Good for Innovation,” they found that while people tend to intuitively believe constraints stifle creativity, they actually have the opposite effect. In situations without constraints – for example, pressures on time, money, process, etc. – “complacency sets in, and people follow what psychologists call the path-of-least-resistance – they go for the most intuitive idea that comes to mind rather than investing in the development of better ideas.”

In this pandemic, mindfulness helps us to maintain focus, to remain calm, build resilience in the face of uncertainty, setbacks and difficulties. Mindfulness speaks of things the chaotic mind has no awareness of. Out of the constraints of boredom and stillness comes clarity and inspiration, which beam the light of wisdom onto the moment.

Creative people use stillness and silence to access their inner resources, including their imagination. The business of life and constant thinking means we are rarely still or silent, and as a result we cut ourselves off from creative insight. Jon Kabat-Zinn also reminds us that exploring what we do not know or understand is the beginning of learning and creative solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a clarifying effect as we prioritize our lifestyle choices. Many are choosing to pursue creativity and art making. People all around the world have found authentic meaning by taking time to truly express themselves in new ways, whether through painting, singing from a balcony or baking.

The coronavirus-induced isolation that we have all experienced to some degree reveals the importance of this type of psychological creativity. Creative engagement fills us with joy, while opening space for expressing and reflecting upon our present emotions and feelings. Coming up with something that feels valuable to us, no matter the quality of the product, can be an effective way of healing and well-being.

As we all plunge into a state of deeply constrained boredom, despite our losses, maybe, when we emerge from this pandemic, we will be holding the new ideas we need to create a better future. That’s our silver lining.

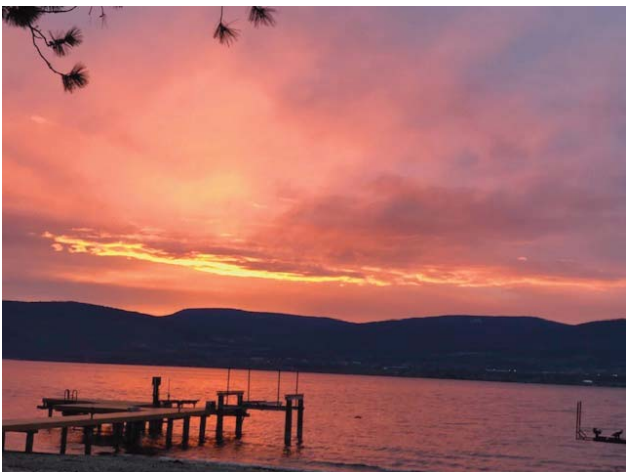
**Jacques LeBlanc** has been a paediatric and adult cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon at B.C. Children’s Hospital in Vancouver. He retired eight years ago after 35 years of practice and found himself looking to understand and develop his interests beyond the practice of medicine. In doing so, Jacques 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.

# WITH MY LENS



**Rose Sexsmith**

**“With my lens I breathe inspiration.  
When I look up, nature’s heART is what I see.  
I am never alone.”**



**And this too shall pass**



# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

## The Journal of Creative Aging

Edited by Karen Close

NUMBER 33, SUMMER2020

ISSN 1920-5848

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A PUBLICATION OF THE  
OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT

[www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca)

*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.