

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

NUMBER 38, FALL 2021

EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

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

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT

www.sageing.ca



ARTS & AGING DAY CANADA

September 24, 2021

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE

devoted to highlighting arts-based activities for older adults.

We invite you to share your own home, community organization, and/or workplace's arts activities, creations and experiences through social media. From choirs to poetry, visual arts to dance, we want to highlight all the ways the arts are engaging and supporting Canadian older adults, both in-person and virtually. This day is a great opportunity for you to learn from colleagues across the country and find new ideas to bring back to your own workplace.

Inspired by the work of Arts in Care Homes in the UK, Arts and Aging Day Canada aims to use social media to highlight the amazing work being done in long-term care homes, retirement communities, seniors centres, and community organizations across the country. This day is a chance to promote the positive effects of arts-based activities, learn more about what different organizations are doing, and create nation-wide connections in the field of arts, health, and aging.

<https://the-ria.ca/events/arts-and-aging-day-canada-2021>

The Journal of Creative Aging

EDITOR: KAREN CLOSE
COPY EDITOR: JOHANNA BEYERS
DESIGNER: ROBERT MACDONALD

NUMBER 38, FALL 2021
ISSN 1920-5848

SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE
Okanagan Institute

Copyright © 2021 Okanagan Institute.
All rights reserved. No part of this publica-
tion may be reproduced in any form
without the permission of the publisher.

This publication is available for online
viewing and downloading at:

www.sageing.ca

Email karensageing@gmail.com

Cover image: *Dad and Girls*
by Silmara Emde

FROM THE EDITOR

The first issue of this Journal came online in September 2011. With this issue we enter our second decade. For me our evolution over these 10 years has manifested my conviction that creative expression brings people into harmony with themselves and each other as we share our stories. I introduced our first issue with the words of Thomas Merton: "May we all grow in grace and peace, and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being. It is the voice of the creative self waiting to be called to speak." I wanted the Journal to be that caller. As we have evolved together through this past decade I am very grateful to those who have projected their voices and to those who have heard the call. Both our contributors and readers are very important to bringing the harmony of understanding that initiates change and growth.

Realizing the importance of our stories and sharing them is paramount to evolution. This issue bursts with that

life force and the opportunity to discover and connect to like-minded seekers, beginning with birthday wisdom from two 90-year-old women celebrating well-being and that contentment that Jon Kabat-Zinn describes as "Arriving at your Own Door." Self-discovery is the gift of authentic creativity. As the Journal moves into its second decade we hope to dig deeper into the human well of stories about the knowing within each of us urging creative rebirth and connection. I imagine *The Dance* by Henri Matisse. My heart surges with the symbolism that, of all places, it hangs in Russia at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The painting and its placement embody joining in creative community. We will change the world when our heARTS sing the messages seeded within us waiting to be released. Collaborative creative engagement invites communion as it nourishes the self-awareness that inevitably leads to a recognition of our shared human condition and how to foster it.

ISSUE CONTENTS

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>5. TURNING 90 DURING COVID
Rajja Lavanti Gaskell</p> <p>8. AS 90 OPENS TO ME: Roslyn Franz
Karen Close</p> <p>11. AGING WITH GRIT AND GRACE
Katharine Weinmann</p> <p>15. MYTHO-POETIC KINSHIP
Johanna Beyers</p> <p>19. FROM CLIMBING THE RAIN
Marvyne Jenoff</p> <p>22. BECOMING AN ARTIST
Silmara Emde</p> <p>25. ART IN MY LIFE
Erika Lambert</p> | <p>29. START OVER: Playing Bach in the Alzheimer's Ward
Jannie Edwards</p> <p>32. STIMULATING CREATIVITY WITH SEVEN PREDICTABLE PATTERNS
Eleanor Deckert</p> <p>35. WHEN I WALKED OUT
Jacques G. LeBlanc</p> <p>38. ARRIVING AT YOUR OWN DOOR
Penn Kemp, Suzanne Chavarie</p> <p>39. THE LAST ARTIST
Robert MacDonald</p> |
|---|--|

The Dance is a beautiful metaphor. When we 'feel' the hands of another, deep sensitivity and transformation within and without is initiated. Erika Lambert, contributor of "Art in My Life," sent me these words by Nikolai Berdyaev, Russian political and Christian religious philosopher: "Creativity is a spiritual action in which a person forgets about himself, moves outside of himself, absorbed by himself." Erika was reading *Gardening the Soul*, which suggests "Creativity may be the richest source of answers." My dream is that, in the years to come, *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude* will be 'the garden' of answers we cultivate together. Imagine a breathtaking bouquet of creative souls finding their places within our pages.

In gathering that bouquet for future issues, I will be joined by Katharine Weinmann, contributor of "Aging with Grit and Grace" in this issue. Reading Katharine's blog <https://awabisabilife.ca> will build your anticipation for sage-ing with us into the Journal's second decade.

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 November 10th, 2021**
- Email the article and photographs to 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

TURNING 90 DURING COVID

Raija Lavanti Gaskell



I am ninety years old now. Indeed. During those younger years, who could have thought that possible? When I reached 80, I unexpectedly ran across a possibility to learn once more a new skill: Japanese art calligraphy. This is something you cannot start just on your own; you need a teacher to get you started. Some years earlier I had met with a Japanese artist, Noriko Maeda, who had settled in this area and was now teaching classes in her home. With a trembling heart I entered her class one day and, although the brushes and the ink did not want to move the way they were supposed to, I was thrilled. In a short time I was hooked. 80 years old – this is the age everybody is supposed to start sitting down and quieting down and I was brushing black ink onto white paper – and am still doing that... My world now is Black and White. I have replaced my previously colourful paintings with the stark contrasting black and white creations and love it.

Some years passed. The class met in the teacher's house. There was a long table covered with a black felt cloth; everybody had an inkwell, water and a black 'stone' to rub on the bottom of the inkwell to make the Japanese ink. White paper was waiting and some candles, giving a feeling of calmness, and we all were happy to do our work. Years passed and then: The Corona! It changed everything. Suddenly no weekly get-togethers, no samples for exercise: just the floor, four walls and ceiling. Our world, while alone, is shrinking to almost nothing.

That was the time for turning inside, to start to think what I could do with the time of loneliness. I found my acrylic paints, brushes and canvas. I found my imaginary world in this harsh time. In no time I had painted two bigish paintings about the pandemic. Corona. To my biggest surprise the paintings had a quite new look. I noticed that the Japanese simplicity and formality had taken over my old style.

When I noticed the unbelievable truth that I could create something individual and ME, the black ink found the way to the white paper. I started painting my Corona

Series alone without any encouragement or criticism from anybody. I made a small, black painting surface, organized my brushes and was ready every morning to try something different about the pandemic.

There is a very nice, simple figure in Japanese art, called *ensō*: a round movement with the brush dipped to the black ink, which can be done in so many different ways. That simple figure has many meanings, from people to family to extended family, to mankind and more. That symbol and its meaning were my starting point for my new work.

Left: *Ensō*

Right: *Broken Ensō*





Top: *Covid*
 Middle: Raija's beads
 Above: *We Will Win*

In my quiet little corner I sat and tried to create something meaningful to me, bigger than I had ever tried: the pandemic, and how it affected me, my life and every person in the world, turned out to be subjects in my work. There was a big fear in everybody's mind: Am I the next in hospital? How are my relatives all over the world coping? Are my friends close to home faring well? All that went on the paper in different ways – in black on white ...

The nice, pleasing circle of the *ensō* broke into pieces that curled together as if looking for some protection. I saw in the drawings I began to make. For me, creating these images was a way out of my frustration and fear – and loneliness. However, at the time when I was creating these very powerful paintings I encountered another difficulty. Previously, I had been in hospital to have first one and then the other socket in my hip replaced and had just learned to walk again when, one morning, I woke up with severe pain in my back and had to relapse to the walker without any hope for help because all the physiotherapy clinics were closed. I am still suffering from this relapse and learning for the sixth time in my life to walk. I have not given up yet, but exercise and practising walking every day is an ordeal for a 90-year-old!

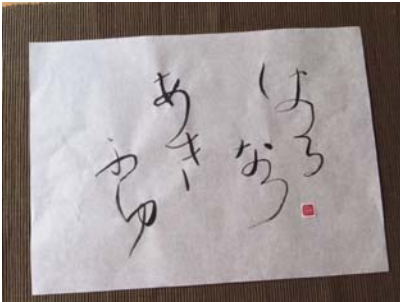
Here I have to stop the story for a short while and tell what happened when I came back home after the second hip operation before the Corona pandemic started. I, to my horror, noticed that I was not able to do anything with my beloved ink and brushes! I did not have the strength to hold the brush in the way it should be held to create the delicate lines needed in Japanese art. I was in dismay! What now? I then remembered the artificial clay that you can fire in your ordinary kitchen oven. I found my clay, which I had used to make some interesting brooches. Not wanting to repeat myself, I experimented with some new ways to work with this material. In no time I was happily rolling black and white little balls with my hands, quickly realizing that they would make beautiful necklaces – I had found my creativity again. And the movement of the hands when doing the work also gradually helped to give my arms and hands the strength back needed to do my calligraphy work!

The lonely time got more lonely when Covid became stronger and stronger; everything closed and people kept themselves sheltered in their own homes. Faces were covered. Vaccines started to be given and everybody got more and more hopeful for normal times.

Then one day, thanks to new inventions, the 'windows opened.' Virtual classes came online. If you happened to have the needed equipment you were lucky, and I did. Soon our calligraphy classes started to be open once a week; everybody in their own homes, work tables organized close to the computer and the teacher ready to help again. We started doing the art the Japanese way: the teacher gives a sample she has drawn on paper, explains the meaning and shows the order and the way the lines are drawn; the students try and follow the instructions as well as they can.

This is an interesting process – which you have to understand and be able to go through before you can start to do it in your own way. Japanese art is not something you can do in a hurry. Making one good piece takes several experiments before you can say that you have a good piece in front of your eyes.

While learning the basic rules for making the class projects, I also continued my own work, which I had started when Covid closed all the doors to higher learning.



Top: *The Darkness*
 Middle: *Winter Spring Summer and Autumn*
 Above: *Bamboo*. Proudly, Raija has these framed on her wall

The pandemic has lifted its head at times now and is giving us hope for better times. I painted my pictures, sometimes depicting hope, sometimes hopelessness. My central idea was the *ensō*—the continuity, the permanence, the inertia. “We will win.” I saw an *ensō* with a fighter in human guise rounding his arms, protecting mankind.

The biggest surprise, when I found the courage to show this work to my teacher, was that she liked it. This one image from my pandemic series is now travelling to Japan to see if it is good enough for an award in a yearly competition my teacher enters us into. Every student who takes part in the Japanese art classes has to enter what is thought to be her/his best piece into this competition, organized by Shodo Canada and the Japanese Cultural Centre in Toronto.

The difficult times of Covid are not over yet, and neither is my way to depict these times. I am now using very dark ink and a very bold brush and strokes to create a painting I call *The Darkness*. I might not be there yet, but I already like the way the big brush strokes work to express my feelings of the difficult time we as people are going through just now.

Today is a miserable afternoon, the world is crying and angry—it is raining and thunder is heard. I take my biggest brush, my darkest ink, white paper, and put all of it in front of me on my table. This is just the day to try to create the picture *Darkness*.

I have done it so many times that I no longer need the sample in front of me—I can create to try and make the painting depict my feelings and understanding of the meaning of this darkness. I will show the misery we as mankind have been going through month after month. The lines will be dark and strong, strong not only because of the unhappiness and anger, but also to show the strength of feeling a win. We will be coming out of the misery, a misery that not only has been bad but has also given new directions. People have learned big things during the pandemic. There have been helping hands for the needy; there have been volunteers doing vaccinations and serving in other positions. We have learned that taking care of others makes a difference.

I change my brush to the thinnest, almost a pen-like one. I want to change my mood. With the lightest of hand movement I shall try to create an image of the seasons—very poetic and light, a very Japanese creation. It will be a nice, optimistic play of lines, black on white.

As I near the end of my story, I realize that writing all this has opened my eyes to look back, mixing all the experiments with the present-day happenings. I have understood that life is just a large *ensō*, going round and repeating itself day after day. A human being either learns from this cycle and is happy with what life has to offer or goes through life with misery as their fellow traveller. There is a Finnish saying, written by one of our most loved poets, Eino Leino: “päivät pistän päällytysten” – “Put the days on top of each other, the better ones on top of the heap!” At 90 I embrace these words.

Related past articles from The Journal:

<http://www.sageing.ca/sageing31.html>,

A FINNISH CANADIAN’S THOUGHTS ON CREATIVITY, p. 55;

<http://www.sageing.ca/sageing17.html>,

WIELDING THE BRUSH AND DRINKING TEA, p. 16

ROSLYN FRANZ

AS MY 10TH DECADE OPENS TO ME

Karen Close

“Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there.”

– Sage advice from Gary Snyder, poet, environmentalist and educator



Music is where my heart is – vocal art expresses the true artist.

Just having turned 90, Roslyn Franz is comfortably settled into her own home in Kelowna, the community she ‘found’ 40 years ago, and still takes responsibility with passion and enthusiasm. “I didn’t choose to retire. Really, retirement chose me when Covid forced me to stop getting out and doing what I love. Music is where my heart is – vocal art expresses the true artist. Whatever form this love takes me into from here, I know music and sharing with others is my life force. I want to mentor others of all ages.” Full of satisfaction Roslyn recalls her life journey with vocal art.

As she speaks her eyes are penetrating and her resilient energy palpable. “I was a performer and a teacher. My focus was music and I didn’t realize that I was inspiring people personally not only in their music, but in their lives – not by my example, but because I had an instinct for seeing their talents and needs. I enjoyed exploring the mystery of each person and building community by reaching out to others and sharing together through creativity – by performing and sharing.”

Today Ros’s living room is her classroom. Although small, it has two pianos, a keyboard and three chairs inviting conversation. “I hope to still contribute by teaching voice and to be involved with musical theatre.” Ros first took piano lessons starting at age five in Portland, Oregon. By age 12 she was soloist with the Portland Junior Symphony. As her career with the symphony continued she was soon named “Woman of Tomorrow” by the Quota Club, a not-for-profit society with members who are dedicated to using their collective skills and talents to enhance the quality of life in their community.

Looking into her dreams, Ros embraced the challenges of her tomorrows and achieved highly acclaimed international experiences and reputation. First, her reputation as an interpreter of German Lieder was affirmed when she was awarded the coveted prize for distinguished achievement as an accompanist by the Franz Schubert Institute in Baden, near Vienna, Austria. That talent continued to flourish, and she added to her accomplishments playing for master classes with Lotte Lehman in Santa Barbara, California, where she received an artist’s certificate for further piano studies with Gyorgy Sandor. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mills College in Oakland, California, life became very busy. She married Gregory Millar, a well-known conductor and operatic tenor whose career kept them on the move. Ros kept pace with her busy husband as well as having four children.

Roslyn Franz in ‘My Place’





Top: Young Ros
Above: Ros more recently

During her husband's two-year stint as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra she was Gregory's pianist and opera assistant.

When their marriage dissolved in 1971, Ros refocused and received a master's degree in Music Performance from the University of Arizona. Soon the San Francisco Opera invited her to join their Merola Program, a coveted young artist program. This was the beginning of developing her love for teaching and coaching young artists, a passion that she continues to cherish today. Ros has a treasure-trove of skills and memories to share.

In 1981, she, her children and second husband, trumpeter with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra Eddie Haug, decided that the place on the planet for them would be Kelowna, British Columbia. The choice was almost inadvertent, as though the community reached out to them. Ros and her family enjoyed hiking together in the Canadian wilderness; while talking with someone at a campsite near Jasper, it was suggested to Ros that she should visit Kelowna in the Okanagan. "Oka-what?" she remembers asking, and yet she was curious, visited, fell in love, and soon Ros dug into life in Kelowna. Sharing her talent and encouraging others was a focus as she settled into this very different community from her days in New York and San Francisco. But, still a "Woman of Tomorrow," she pursued her dreams. In 1991 she was a driving force in bringing opera to Kelowna with the creation of *Viva Musica*. The mandate was generous: to produce high-calibre musical theatre and operatic works accessible to and enjoyed by a wide audience. The group was committed to youth participation by developing technical training programmes for young artists and technicians. In addition, they promoted community involvement from volunteers and local businesses. To live in the hearts of those you have touched is the gift of a life lived generously.

Shelly Vida on the occasion of Ros's 90th birthday noted, "Almost 20 years ago I began working for Viva Musica, the not-for-profit that Neal Facey and Roslyn Franz founded in 1991. It started as an opera company, before they made the switch to musicals in 1999. This dedicated group, staffed by young actors and backed by a throng of volunteers, gave success to large-scale musicals capable of filling a two-week run at the Kelowna Community Theatre. The opportunities provided for students to get hands-on experience in the operations of a large theatre production as well as summer employment in the arts was something exceptional for Kelowna at the time.

"I was most impressed with the magnitude of these musical productions, and often chronicled the making of one of the larger ones through following progress in the costume departments, stage building, prop making and, of course, the most important aspects of the acting and music rehearsals. Working for Viva Musica, I watched the professional actors, hired for main roles, mingling with the young actors and singers, all working tirelessly alongside one another, guided by the masterful musicianship, knowledge and experience of musical director Roslyn Franz. I could see their enthusiasm, excitement and eagerness to learn from these experiences. Many, many of these young artists have gone on to musical theatre and professional



Top: Leonard Bernstein, Roslyn Franz and Gregory Millar in the green room of Carnegie Hall before a rehearsal of the New York Philharmonic
Above: Ros at 90

musical careers, and I still hear them talk of Ros and her wise music and career advice. She expected excellence and held people accountable, but there was always so much respect for her musical training. As I prepared to attend Ros's 90th birthday party, I was struck by all of the social media communications coming from her intergenerational friends all over the country, many of whom I remembered from Viva Musica."

After Viva Musica concluded, there remained an audience for musical theatre. Kelowna Actors Studio invited Ros to join them as a musical director. Ros's passion flourished and her students loved her for her special gift of empathy.

Ros continued to be well loved as a distinguished pianist, vocal coach and music director at the Kelowna Actors Studio, where she continues to connect with even more young performers. She is so much more than a teacher; she has gained much admiration and love from artists with whom she has worked and performed.

Margaret Gobie reflects on her memories of Ros at Kelowna Actors Studio: "Ros changed my beliefs about aging. I come from a typical Canadian family, where people retired in their fifties or sixties to golf, garden and travel. They certainly didn't start opera

companies, become musical directors or host classical music concerts in their homes as Ros did.

Through our mutual work at the Actors Studio in Kelowna we would often chat, and I soon became the person she could approach about concerns or requests she had for everything from pianos to parking spaces. I learned very early on not to coddle her, and to show up on time for cocktails. She was, and is, a force. Ask anyone who has worked with her or been taught by her. She is passionate about music and teaching, and elicits love and respect from her students and colleagues.

As Ros and I became friends, I started to see a different way of getting older. I realized I didn't have to pay attention to the number of years I'd been on the planet to determine what was possible or even acceptable for me. I began to see acres of life opening up before me. Time to enjoy so many projects I had thought I was too old to start. I owe much of that outlook to Ros and will always be grateful for such invaluable wisdom."

AGING WITH GRIT AND GRACE



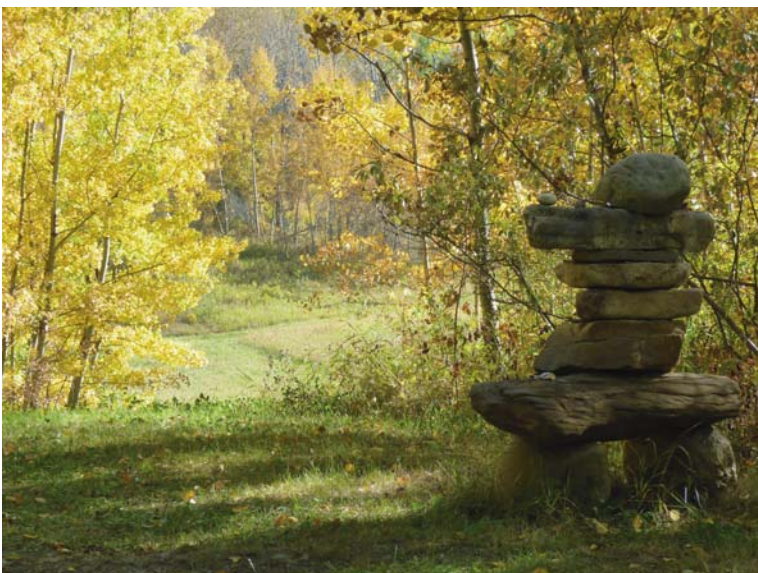
Katharine Weinmann

In the early weeks of the pandemic, I found myself suddenly without work. Though I had left full-time employment nearly a decade earlier, I had immediately jumped into private consulting, working the days, ways and for the pay that suited. Then a year ago, I became “retired” the same month I officially became a senior citizen. Blindsided, for a few months I stumbled around feeling fallow when all around me was bursting with spring and new life. Lost in grief, compounded by the world reeling from its own unravelling, I began to heed lessons learned from creative expression, travel, illness and attending to the inner life. Slowly, I began to feel and find my way home.

Painting from Within: A Genus of Originality

I never considered myself creative. I danced before I walked, pulling myself up by the rails of the wooden playpen to bounce during the Mickey Mouse Club on TV. I played guitar as a kid, sewed many of my own clothes as a teenager, and took up crewel embroidery to keep from drowning in loneliness when, newly married, we relocated three thousand miles from family and friends for my husband’s career. But in my mind, none of this counted as creative. I would never have called myself a dancer, nor musician, let alone an artist. And writer? Despite having had three blogs, the most recent – “A Wabi Sabi Life” – my dedicated platform for contemplative creative non-fiction and poetry, and winning a travel story writing contest, I am only now giving myself permission to call myself “writer.”

Finding My Way Home



I cracked open this myth of what and who is creative when I cracked open

Life, Paint and Passion, a book by intuitive process painter Michele Cassou. Its bold and bright cover illustration and title pulled at something deep inside. Reading, I quickly recognized its simple but powerful truth in describing how to access our deep, often hidden wellsprings of creativity. By the end of that first reading, I’d searched online for classes, and discovered there would be a five-day workshop in the village where my husband and I lived before moving west. A couple of years for stars and schedules to align, and three annual workshops later I had the requisite hours to attend Michele’s ten-day master class in Taos, New Mexico.



“Remember, it’s just a piece of paper.” “You cannot make a mistake.” “If you don’t know how to start, scribble in a corner with your brush and paint.” “Be inconsistent.” “It’s ok to change your mind.” “What would you paint if it didn’t matter?” “What would you paint if it didn’t mean anything?” I had made that trip to dive deeper into the process of intuitive painting, eventually re-discovering that it was never about the painting. It was only ever about the journey I was making into myself. Feeling my edges and sensing my blind spots in the face of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Being confronted with my assumptions, perceptions and rules, each mirrored on the paper. Experiencing my resistance and surrendering to all that is unknown, barely emerging, always evolving – moment by moment – brush stroke by brush stroke. Cultivating

the patience, fortitude, discipline and compassion to show up every day and take my place in front of that paper, ready to face myself, via my painting, in the messy vulnerability of it all.

Today, while excited with the prospects of this new life chapter, like that studio in Taos – its walls covered in white paper, table laden with pots of liquid tempera paint in every imaginable colour, brushes of every shape and size – I’ve felt daunted by its expansiveness, empty of expectation and obligation, yet full of choice and possibility. “Unpacking” that trip taken over a decade ago has helped me navigate this past year’s innumerable moments of uncertainty, unfamiliarity and unknowing. It reminds me to go for the colour that makes my heart sing, and not overthink it. To start small and go simple. To scribble in the corner until I feel comfortable. To break the rules. After all, it’s just a piece of paper where painting outside the lines is the perfect response.



Top: *Capturing a Taos Sky*
Above: *Intuitive Painting*

Travel, a Wise Teacher

I married a fellow who doesn’t share my passion for travel but is happy for me when I set out on my own. He gave me the gift of tending to the home fires when I left for three months, ten years ago, to travel solo to Europe. I learned a bit of Italian, and how to pack lightly for three seasons, honing my system to include the requisite supplies for creative expression. Clothes laid



Top: *Contemplating a Sahara Sunset*
 Above: *Wabi-Sabi Tattoo*

out months before, sorting and switching, a couple of weeks before departure a trial pack. Days before, a case of cold feet and serious thought to cancelling.

As those twelve weeks passed, and with every departure to a new destination since, I realize that I always get cold feet until I literally take the first step into the next adventure. Then comes the exhilaration, confidence and awe with where I am going, what I am seeing, what I am doing – and my unabashed love for the world.

Travelling, especially solo, is a wise teacher, her lessons returning home like the much loved, sought after souvenir or, in some cases, the bag of dirty laundry.

Travelling reminds me to ask for what I need, like when I mustered up the moxie and asked the German TV producer if I might share his table on the very crowded rooftop café in Milan, otherwise I would have to forgo the pleasure of a quintessential Italian *pranzo di primavera*. Repeatedly, she shows me – referring to the wisdom of *Travel*, not the TV producer I dined with – how to appreciate my nature and accommodate to my inclinations. Now indefinitely homebound, travelling's memories are the scaffold for my curiosity, courage and compassion onto which I design this next life chapter, remembering that within every adventure is the boon for the next one.

Illness Broke Me Open

A Sunday in April 2013. Sunny and warm. I feel as if I've been hit by a truck. And my mouth, as if I've just come from the dentist and the freezing's wearing off. By the end of the day, I look as if I've ODD on botox. One half of my face frozen, falling down on my shoulder. The other aged a decade, holding the ravages of stress and fear.

The nurse in the leadership retreat I'd been hosting that weekend, with whom I've been consulting since morning, says now is the time to get to the ER. Eight hours later, a diagnosis of stroke is ruled out, while the diagnosis of Bell's Palsy is given. Cause speculative. Cure unknown. Treatment time, and a prescription for prednisone to reduce the inflammation of the facial nerve, cracked my life open. It took a long time before I could talk about it, let alone chew, smile, sip, blow bubbles, whistle, wink and do all the things, make all the expressions we take for granted with a fully functioning face.

"Wabi-sabi," is how a friend described it. The first I'd heard the phrase and learned its meaning was coined by Leonard Koren, "a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete." Vestiges of that illness will be with me forever, much like the wabi-sabi tattoo I designed and had inked on the inside of my forearm – coincidentally on the anniversary of my solo departure to Europe – reminding me daily to embrace that trip's gifts for my life.



Inner Life Means

Attending to the Inner Life

In his poem “The Way It Is,” William Stafford describes the thread that runs through our lives, guiding us through and to things that change, while remaining, itself, changeless.

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn’t change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see. While you hold it you can’t get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding. You don’t ever let go of the thread.

As I reflect over my life, and during this unprecedented global upheaval, I see how predominant is the thread of attention I give to my inner life. Throughout this story, I see how attention has guided me to read the books, take the trips, engage the experiences and find the gold in the dross of everyday life.

Subtle and nuanced in my day and night dreams, curiosities, synchronicities, musings and hunches, I rise early to sit in the new day’s stillness, to listen for its whisperings. Meditation and prayer, yoga and walking with our Annie dog, making poetry and

cooking meals, contemplative photography and journaling are practices I use to create space for the revelation of its wisdom.

Countless times I mindlessly and arrogantly override and overrule perceptiveness of my inner guidance. Admittedly, countless times I mindlessly and arrogantly override and overrule the perceptiveness of my inner guidance. Trusting in an inner wisdom to guide me home.

Katharine Weinmann, MSW, is a former therapist and retired leadership coach, who is now a writer of contemplative, creative non-fiction and poetry. In her blog and podcast, “A Wabi Sabi Life,” Katharine shares the beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and loved life, reminding herself and inviting others to appreciate and allow life to unfold in all its mess and mystery, with all its grit and glory.

panache@interbaun.co | <https://awabisabilife.ca>

MYTHO-POETIC KINSHIP



Johanna Beyers, PhD

When Covid restrictions in B.C. were partially lifted in late May, I made good on a long-planned trip to the Shuswap and Okanagan regions of the province. Driving south through the Cariboo, watching the sky almost as much as the road, the words “rain waiting” kept presenting themselves, and so it was that “Cariboo Waiting” began to write itself to the rhythm of wheels and the changing sky.

This poem and the sketch, *Bark Nude – Cottonwood #1*, belong to the continuum of my engagement with the mytho-poetic domain of kinship with nature, psyche and spirit. Its natural expression is the image. This theme has been a saving leitmotif for me since early childhood. The book *Wearing My Feathered Hat* grew from the knowing I gained while dwelling in a state of deep kinship with this territory. Writing it helped me knit together the scattered elements of my experience into the language of a consciously undertaken, evolving journey.

The following excerpts were culled from my book’s opening chapters. In these first examples, my focus is on the role of nature in the development of my personal and professional identities, as well as the subtle interactions between our inner and outer dimensions.

“Nature has lent high notes and bass tones to my entire life. From childhood, I was on the side of nature. Unlike the human community, it was steadfast, I never had cause to doubt it. It sheltered me psychologically and showed me its sophisticated ways in which strength and beauty could coexist, and variability in unity, simple with not-simple. Its incorruptible, original veracity called up in me a longing for my own authenticity.

“In nature I heard a voice I felt to be true and reliable; in its presence I could trust that one day I would discern that necessary direction for my life that the Greeks sometimes called fate and sometimes daimon. ... Innerly, what’s beneath the surface is the domain of image and myth; outerly, myth manifests creatively in the shape we let the unseen world assume, through the story of our interaction with it. ... Inner to outer is the mystery of spiritual transformation. If the natural tendency of my life were to be compared to a compass, its needle at true North would hover about my desire for spiritual engagement. By this I mean largely a quest to discover what life uniquely wants from us and how to answer.

“My quest did not take me on a straight path. Professionally (outer life), I started in the earth sciences. Moved by a dream (inner life), I left geology for

Nature has lent high notes and bass tones to my entire life ... Its incorruptible, original veracity called up in me a longing for my own authenticity.



Bark Nude – Cottonwood # 1. Mixed media on paper (pastel, watercolour pencil, ink)

Cariboo Waiting

Rain waiting –
Cariboo clouds
like lenses gather
in the blue distance

Holding out, teasing,
drifting high above the road
and the blue sky beyond
emptying somewhere
Cache Creek maybe,
Savona, like gold.

Rain waiting.
Sky lake ferries cloud cargo
across light-bruised water meadows
dragging broken constellations
tucked inside
this ephemeral bowl.

Zeppelin clouds
patched with tones of grey
and the wild blue beyond
sailing with the currents.
Flocks, countries
form & disappear.

environmental policy. As it turned out, my research subject was a study of forest management. Among other things, natural resources policy is a repository of our attitudes to nature. ... Again and again I realized how much the interior world of images mattered to me, but I knew it didn't fit well with mainstream views in academe and society at large. ... I wanted to feel intellectually, emotionally and spiritually at home in everything I did. It seemed it was the only way I could live with myself.

"I thought it was here, at the intersection between the contours and sensibilities of inner nature and their expression in the world outside, between imagination and its realization, that I could fulfil my unstated goals and make a difference too."

Bark Nude and "Cariboo Waiting" are two instances of how the communication between inner and outer happens for me. They illustrate a way of being with nature through listening and attuning. Familiar to me all my life, it's a form of knowing similar to what we experience in dreams. The materials we use in creative work – pen, paper, paint, ink, camera – are part of the outer world too, and they have their own say in how a piece is executed.

"The core of *Wearing My Feathered Hat* is a story about dreams and becoming. ... [Dreams] are the root system of any inner-outer dialogue."

In the work of becoming, "We grow away from a somewhat narrow self-picture into one of greater maturity, infused with a sense of direction and of belonging more fully to life. Life then is less about what one is as defined by roles or values than about drawing one's being from a paradoxical source, where being and becoming, form and formlessness, origin and completion, separation and unity occur together – a dance in time and timeless, a play of is and is not.

"We may know chaos, but there is also a steady centre. Call it the Jungian Self, it is a nucleus around which we circle like charged particles. The Self-system is an image of encompassing wholeness. When we feel radiantly whole as if anointed by grace, when we view twenty-thousand-year-old paintings and feel a frisson in the nerves, when we enjoy kinship in the presence of wild nature, we experience the Self and the mystery behind it. It is a love connection – Eros speaking – ... [felt] in the arts and in moments of intimacy ... and in our own dreams."

"We are born whole, but it is a promise only; we are, but need to become. ... I mean a state of being, ... a dance with Self.

"The point of journeying is not actually to cover distance. It is the joyous entry into a deeply intimate relationship with the mystery of existence.

"Dreams give the impression of actively evoking our participation and engaging our will to shape and maintain life.

"The meaning here appears to be that dreaming is the rootstock of imagination. There is something so vital, so fundamental to the power of imagination that nature itself invented it. Dreaming is an adaptive modality

geared to survival. When we are learning something new, dreams help us put it all together. ... [T]hey are evidence of an unforced imagination that comes from within, from the unconscious, unknown psyche. ... Their role is to instigate change, and even to upset and shock in order to orientate us to a new attitude that serves life better.”

Becoming is a journey that has traditionally been understood in terms of the symbolism of death and rebirth, experience rendered through the ages by means of ritual and art.

Dreaming is an adaptive modality geared to survival. When we are learning something new, dreams help us put it all together.

Contact with the psycho-spiritual dimension – art, dream, ritual – gives depth to the body, as if dark chambers were being unearthed.

“All painting is cave painting; painting on the low dark walls of you and me ...’ Winterson, a British writer, is referring to the fact that the oldest extant paintings have been found in caves. Caves are special places, easily identifiable with the womb, and their exploration is attended by danger similar to the hazards of birth. Wombs, like graves, are centres of metamorphosis.”

“Insofar as ‘art, all art’ rests on such contact, it wells up from the same source as the journey. In fact, it has been argued, art that ‘lacks encounter’ is ‘escapist creativity.’ ... Art and the journey are psycho-spiritual processes. I find an understanding near to my own experience in the Australian indigenous idea that art is ‘a means of access to the Dreaming, a way of making contact with this spiritual dimension, and yet in turn it is the product of the Dreaming.’ My journey is made possible through contact with psyche and in turn my encounters provide the material and direction for my work. ... [M]y dreams instilled in me a sense that I was visited by what certain myths have portrayed, that in being enacted in me, they endured in the present moment and I, participating in them, was made real in their image. I call this mythological living.”

“Contact with the psycho-spiritual dimension – art, dream, ritual – gives depth to the body, as if dark chambers were being unearthed.

“In the language of the journey, to become acquainted with psyche is to answer a call.

“[R]itual identity ... breathes and resonates and is open to Isness. Ritual identity’s most compelling quality seems to me the idea of meaningful participation in the dance of being. To dance the dance of being, to have mythological resonance, is to participate in God’s ongoing incarnation. Only a human can give form to psyche; only a human can stand in the middle space; only a human can tell the story of creation. When I struggle to make the gods conscious and release them into life – when I exercise my human nature – I find that *I* am alive.”

“The brushstrokes and lines of our cave art tell the story of our growing relation to Isness, the creation myth of our own becoming. ... Performing our art, what we learn situates us within the round of cosmic being and metamorphosis and meets us in the personal necessity of it, providing direction, substance and meaning. The middle space is the *right* place, and to inhabit it is to be exquisitely at home. It is the place of belonging.

Retelling the events of my soul's journey reminds me of what I am, affirming and reweaving the tissue of my belonging. The telling is the being.

“Lineage is like ritual identity in that retelling the events of my soul’s journey reminds me of what I am, affirming and reweaving the tissue of my belonging. The telling is the being. A psycho-spiritual lineage is a natural history of the soul.”

Johanna Beyers reflects:

“As an adult, journeying at the intersections of inner and outer reality in a quest for mytho-poetic relatedness induced me first to study paleontology, then forest policy and resource management. The paths that joined in this way somehow took me into the field of psychotherapy, where I specialize in sandplay. Later, I returned to university in order to consolidate my practice further with a Master of Social Work degree. Against expectation, I find that social work allows me to offer an approach that can integrate psyche, nature and spirit. My creative work has been woven in and out of this background. Currently, I am focused on the Bark Portraits series and a new volume of poetry, in addition to writing further on sandplay.”

An e-version or print copy of *Wearing My Feathered Hat* (2013, Wind Oak & Dove Press) can be obtained from my website www.wearingmyfeatheredhat.ca

CLIMBING THE RAIN: AN EXCERPT



Marvyne Jenoff

Poetry for me consists of music and implication. With this mind-set and a phrase or notion I begin to write. I enjoy making something out of nothing, a poem often starting in the minutiae of daily life. One word or idea leads, leaps to another, and my pleasure in the tenuous connections keeps me writing. The process alternates between organizing what I've already written down and incorporating new ideas as they come. After several drafts, or sometimes many, my patient work is rewarded. A poem gels, and I know with a rush of satisfaction that it is complete.

My collages are made of elements cut or torn from my own work – photographs and repurposed watermedia paintings. I often determine what a piece suggests and start from there, choosing and shaping more pieces and arranging them until I am satisfied that the work is finished. I am drawn to collage because of its duality: there is content in both the individual elements and in the work as a whole.



Ghost Flowers, Glass. Collage

A is for

A is for what ails us
and for aimlessness,
the twins of aging.

Ailments assail us;
aimlessness can be achieved.

A is for anxiety when you're a child,
then it becomes angst,
now it's anxiety again.

Therefore aspire to aimlessness.
Encourage it on weekends,
free from medical appointments.

Imagine being airborne as long as you wish
alone in a silent, spacious airplane
without the airplane:
you've achieved aimlessness.

Make aimlessness the stronger twin.
From it arises articulateness,
amiability,
affection,
and
and

A is for *and*—
better than *end*.



Blue Town. Collage

Sky Blue Umbrellas

Late summer day, my subway train
speeds toward our timeless afternoon.

We greet and, cane assisted, make our way;
You have new dangle earrings.

Delicate wrist watches we wear, and scarves,
I in a flowered one to foil the season's turning,
you, the scholar, in a print that might be
ancient symbols.

Here we are lunching on the fenced back patio.
Flowers and trees protect us from the city,
not-so-ancient city noisily borne ahead
by the news of the world.

Out here where no TV insists upon the present
we analyze Victoria, Guinevere, Cleopatra,
the coloured gossip-filled balloons rising past
sky blue umbrellas with their flimsy shade
and dissipating up to where we, in another time
may meet them.

Meanwhile we, the source, the ballast, pay our bills,
rise carefully from the table.
Scarves flamboyant in the breeze lead us elsewhere
for still more tea,
perhaps dessert.

Walk to the Park, October, 2020

Down the windy street a flimsy mask flew,
brushed past mine.
Is that a kiss these days?

Must be from those dear nonchalants ahead,
thin-legged, racing against each other.
I am cane-paced, slow but steady.

It blew right past me, meant to keep going.
I wouldn't want anyone else's mask.
I wouldn't want anyone else's legs.

Even anyone's who'd bound up the subway steps
two at a time, I've even seen three,
back when the subway sped us on.

It's not a race, though all of us are in it.
There they are already in the park, sparring, dancing;
now I do that with words.

What they're doing would free any mask.
With all those legs, let them be horses and escape
the mask-denier's end.

My own legs slow, my breath too, I could stop awhile
and listen past the next street's traffic
to the hush of wind-blown leaves.

No race, but there's a finish. Mine could be
this triumph: stand tall and still and let the leaves
fete me with their colours, passing kisses,

spin a cape of scintillation round me
till their murmur lessened.
Then the silent mask of snow.

Song without Nouns

Just when we comfortably know it all
nouns leave us.

It would be nice to keep a few –
forest, bird –
but no, whenever they please, nouns flee us,

leaving the *the's* bereft and stuttering,
preceded by *for's*, *with's* and *to's*
but going nowhere,
one-upping the *a's* and *an's*
now mootly

Some nouns circle back unbidden,
say, the Abyss,
or worse, Eternity—
not even a *the* or we can cling to it,

we who once asked
where all the flowers had gone.

Risen

Laboriously risen from the sea,
opposable-thumbed,
we've come to this:
devices strewn on the bed

My new bed with its own remote:
thumb-clicks slowly raise the top or bottom
suggesting whims of comfort to the aged
perhaps new bamboo sheets?

A remote for the TV:
one click and the world invades the bedroom
one more click to the parts I like
gardens, giraffes

And the wireless phone
how is that possible:
so mobile, friendly?

You ring from the downstairs lobby.
There you are, caught on the TV screen
jacket already opened.
I buzz you in and banish the devices.

For us the bed is set at flat.
Naked as our forebears, faded,
in a slow tumble,
breath, hair, saltiness of sweat

we re-enact begetting,

lie back in the after-warmth and rest
and talk. Remembering the remotes I offer
sitting up, watching TV:
some comedy, some crime?

A larger choice awaits us.
We lie silent,
lest we quarrel,
clinging to indecision,
for there is no answer:

Succumb to our devices,
how they shape us,
or once again embrace,

Which is the talisman
against the long fall back?

Born in Winnipeg, Marvyne Jenoff began publishing poetry in literary journals in the 1960s as a student at the University of Manitoba. She is the author of four books (poetry, experimental fiction) brought out by Canadian literary presses. The poems published here, infused with the awareness of ageing, are from *Climbing the Rain*, the book manuscript she is currently working on. Marvyne is also a collage artist. Her most recent solo show, *Moon, Paper, Scissors*, was held at The Arts & Letters Club of Toronto in 2019. She has exhibited her work in various venues in Toronto, where she now lives. An interview and reading of her poetry, recorded in July 2021, is available on the Mensa Canada YouTube Channel. See the link on her website, www.marvynejenoff.org.

BECOMING AN ARTIST



Silmara Emde

I believe we are all in this life to express our unique soul-tone. Life itself is the ultimate creative act. I'm learning how to be a channel where life works through me, manifesting, expressing, materializing as I become the true me, an artist. Growing up, I had felt that no one in my family had any artistic skills. Despite my early interest in crafts, paper and colours, my parents didn't provide me with much opportunity for developing my creative side. Even so, I remember finding ways to create and make stuff, as children naturally do. I loved art class at school and collected packaging and all sorts of paper just because I loved the texture or the design; I created elaborate journals and was always happy to spend quiet hours in my room, drawing away in them.

At the age of 17, I was getting ready for college. I had to choose a subject to major in, but had no clue of what I wanted to do. I was really lost. My universe seemed small; I didn't have much access to research tools such as the Internet, and all I knew came from friends and high school classmates. I decided to go for business, mostly because it seemed to offer the greatest chance of post-college 'success.' Although I had some interest in marketing and communications, it was still a decision made somewhat grudgingly. It was just a couple of weeks before the college application deadline when I had an encounter that changed the route my life would take.

One day I overheard a girl enthusiastically talking to a friend about the classes she had taken. She described a carpentry workshop, nude model, a paint studio...! I felt an electric charge zip through my spine. Without really knowing what I was doing, I approached her and said, "...please tell me more – what is that?" It turned out the enthusiastic art student was a young woman named Rebecca who was talking about a program called Industrial Design that had started with one year of Applied Arts. She would then go through Graphic Design, Visual Communication and Product Design. I didn't even know that such a course of study existed. The more she told me, the more I knew that was it. I felt that certainty in my gut; an inexplicable joy – it was the loudest and clearest soul-call I had ever recognized to that point in life.

College was a constant unfolding of incredible experiences – a big, bold and completely new universe. There was colour, fun, hard work – joyful encounters. I produced terrible artwork and some good stuff, too. Often I felt unprepared and deeply out of depth amongst those artists-to-be. At the same time, I had no doubt that I was on the right path – a path of creativity, beauty, visual harmony, innovation, imagination.

I graduated and became a graphic designer and worked in the fast-paced advertising agency world for a few years before running my own design

I'm learning how to be a channel where life works through me, manifesting, expressing, materializing as I become the true me, an artist.



Top: *Dad and Son*
 Middle: *Dad and Girls*
 Above: *Shelby*

studio. The workload was creative and intense. Fifteen years after that encounter with Rebecca, I started to realize that maybe/perhaps there was indeed a small chance that I was a capital-A Artist. Sure, I considered myself a creative person, but, in my understanding, creativity was something that I could apply to my graphic design work, and that was about it.

Life stepped in and photography caught my interest. I did my first photo-project at my grandparents' home. The project was a spontaneous and intensely personal series of photos about the memories generated from my childhood to adult years at their house. My grandfather and grandmother were declining rapidly, and I felt the call to document their home and belongings. I named the photo series *The House of Memories*. For me, it was a meaningful project, but I didn't know if it was any good.

While developing the *House of Memories* project, I was thrilled to discover how creative my grandparents actually were. Besides being a baker and professional dressmaker, my grandma took part in the local theatre and hosted a cooking show on the radio. She also appeared in a Hollywood film shot in my hometown. My grandpa had been a photographer, an amateur actor and wrote a half-dozen unpublished books.

I then started questioning my ideas of what creativity was. The revelation of that period of my life was that art and creativity aren't restricted to the applied arts. Rather, they are elements of something much broader, a force that permeates all aspects of life. I had spent so much time directing my creativity to graphic design projects that were done on demand for clients who were not always open to creative concepts that it took me some time to be able to create images that were totally free of external expectation. For that to happen I had to disconnect crea-

tivity from the idea of work. Creativity, for me, had been too long ingrained with the idea of business.

In 2011 I went to photography school and became a photographer. More than that, I became an artist. Better yet, I recognized the artist that I'd always been. I had skills, I'd learned loads of techniques, I knew how to make beautiful images but what I really wanted to do was to express myself. I wanted to take part in the world with my unique way of seeing life. I wanted to work only with people and places that I was genuinely interested in. I wanted to develop an original style; to create soulful images, meaningful work full of beauty and harmony.

To me, the process of becoming an artist was strongly connected with

The exercise of accessing my heart space showed me that creativity was a life-force that permeates all our thoughts and actions.

Therapeutic photographic process where the intention is for you to allow yourself to be seen.

the work of self-knowledge and spiritual experiences. The exercise of accessing my heart space showed me that creativity was a life-force that permeates all our thoughts and actions. Creativity is in everyone all the time and inspiration comes when we allow our hearts to take charge. The creative force of the universe wants to express itself through us, and that can take many forms – a beautiful painting, a fascinating conversation, a meal made with love, a song we make up during our commute; a city construction project or your daughter’s most recent Lego tower, built and disassembled in a single afternoon.

I don’t need to be an artist, but I am if I want to be. And so I am. I don’t need to do things perfectly. I allow myself time to paint, sew, draw, dance, cook – time to explore different media with no expectations, but simply for the joy of creating. Creation pours through me and all I have to do is to allow it. So I do.

Recently I have begun to explore *Soul Search Photography*, which aims to promote self-knowledge through photography. There is a healing quality to the photographic process, and the more I experience being the subject (photographed either by other photographers or by taking self-portraits), the more I get in touch with the parts of me that are normally inaccessible on the other side of the mirror. I’ve come to several important realizations. For starters, I’d spent a long time resisting the acceptance of parts of me that were simply not the way I wish they were. I realized I was being too hard on myself – that I was referencing beauty standards that were not even mine. I’d been in denial of the aging process and was hiding myself for fear of judgment. Most importantly, after approaching the images with an open heart, I also realized how beautiful I am – just as I am, with all my glorious imperfections, at this very moment of my life. The old negative self-talk has been turning into self-compassion that transcends the way I look. It has been deeply therapeutic, and I thought I could share my gifts with other women.

With this intention, I have decided to offer others a sort of therapeutic photographic process where the intention is for you to allow yourself to be seen, to be looked at and to be mindfully vulnerable in the presence of the camera.

Giving ourselves the opportunity to really look at who we are from the inside and the outside is the key to becoming who we are supposed to be – our unique selves.

www.SilmaraEmde.com | www.TheOrangeLamphouseStudio.com
www.instagram.com/silmaraemde | silmaraemde@gmail.com

THE ART OF LIFE

Erika Lambert



A smile rested on my face as I easily moved about my daily activities in my new home surrounded by smooth white walls, like big blank canvases. All of my art had been squeezed into storage. This was a new chapter for me. Things were looking up.

One day in early spring a bright red-breasted robin caught my attention as it flew from one budded tree to the next and settled on my window ledge with fixated eyes, observing me. This startling behaviour caught my attention. The robin's presence reminded me of a small oil painting I had previously painted, *The Spring Robin*. I found it, pulled it out of my packed storage and felt the urge to place it on my fireplace mantle. The empty wall space no longer was empty. The painting reminded me that a new hope and fresh start are what spring brings forth. After all, it was a new year and I had moved into a new space; it was time to be regenerated.

For a while the painting sat idle as I contemplated it. Spring turned into early summer; aroused by the changing season, I considered a change of scenery above the mantle. Just as quickly as that occurred to me I scrambled and scrounged through my collection of paintings and felt the inkling to replace my *Robin* with my diptych, *Entangled Dance of Life*. Had the diptych's energy field called me from the depth of its unseen darkness? In reflection, I think impulses like this can be inspired by one's art spirit. Had my diptych been sitting there as I contemplated its artistic perspective? In his book *The Art Spirit*, written in 1921 but still popular, Robert Henri said, "...an artist says, 'How did I do it?' ... The artist's work is a surprise to himself."

My work had been tucked away for quite some time. Some artists suggest it's best to put a painting away for a while before a decision is made

Diptych, *Dance of Life*



for its completion. I considered some revision, but scrapped that idea and stopped studying this painting, although I had wondered why it hadn't sold. This kind of question is what happens to some artists when their paintings don't sell as well as others'. I had felt a deflation of self-confidence. We artists tend to feel vulnerable about our art at the best of times. Yet, as I look at it, this diptych emanates electromagnetic energy. Robert Henri suggested the artist's en-



Love Birds

I had gathered some of my remaining courage and ventured forth into art and created whatever came up for me.

ergy, at the time of painting, is painted right into the artwork.

Hanging in its new location over my mantle, an artist friend visited and admired the diptych and curiously asked, “What are the names of those unusual colours?” That stumped me because I did not care about colour names, rather I was interested in the feelings colours had on me. I replied, “I’m curious, myself, what inspired me to do this kind of painting style.”

My friend reminded me about M.C. Escher’s art, which this diptych suggested to her. Our free-flow conversation triggered memories of the past when I’d painted this work. It was part of a series I had made during a time when my life had taken a serious downfall. Self-confidence had gradually slipped away as I danced with life and let fear take the lead. My “but what ifs” staggered my movements. To stand up for myself had had repercussions which had disappointed me.

I had been interested in M.C. Escher’s geometric art and had integrated it into my

math lessons with my students. They were awestruck and eagerly experimented with his illusionary art. During that time I had, also, been inspired by Daphne Odjig’s Picasso-ish paintings and the strong colours she had used. I had also been much interested in quantum physics and researched how energy operates within humans. Are humans in a number of dimensions? How entangled had our energies become with the energy fields of others?

At that time much of my confidence seemed to evaporate into thin air, and my art spirit seemed far away. Yet now as I look at these works I see them differently. I recognize that I had silently been prompted just to be myself and express myself. I had gathered some of my remaining courage and ventured forth into art and created whatever came up for me. Maybe that’s how one’s creativity happens. In that moment of painting, my muse spirit grabbed my mind and my hands and directed them towards materials and shapes needed to make my personal art piece, even though I thought I had held a partially planned intention.

I completed a few paintings in this more individualistic method and received interest, but with very few sales. Henri suggested that when artists think of being impoverished and devalue themselves, that can be felt by viewers and influence the value of the art piece. I had questioned my work and wondered if it was worth my time and money to pursue art.

Fortunately, I attempted to crawl out of the despondent hole I’d fallen



Man in Bubbles

I continued to use my art as a source for well-being.

into and to revive my weakened self-esteem, and used my art as a way to refresh myself. Support and respect from a few artists gradually accumulated. Some of my writings and art pieces seemed to express this cycle. In hindsight, these challenges may have underlined my need to accept and love myself and to love my divine energy, which could strengthen my immune system and my intuition.

With encouragement, I moved into Spontaneous Process Painting. My art veered into another more abstract direction. Previously, I had lacked the courage to venture into the untamed world of abstract art, although I had read Rudolf Steiner's ideas, the man who had inspired Wassily Kandinsky, the "father" of abstract art. With Spontaneous Painting I was encouraged just simply to let go and allow my internal art spirit to choose the colours and do the painting. I just needed to hold the brush and let it be moved. After painting a piece for a short time, I could sense when enough strokes were on the canvas and stop. Later, I could turn the canvas around in all four directions and see evidence of shapes and concepts.

Certain directions had more composition and felt more perceptively balanced, possibly due to intervention from my art spirit who had a more superior vision of my painting. Sometimes abstract art confuses the viewer until the painting is given a bit of time to impress itself upon and "speak" to the viewer.

I continued to use my art as a source for well-being. I contemplated how life seemed to be circular. Just when the circle seemed to end on a darkest spot a light had switched on and things improved, for a while, and appeared with new aspects in my art. A slight shift in time and space, and another circle spiralled upwards (and downwards) from the previous one. I was somewhat connected to my past and living my future in the present moment, as I breathed, blinked and shifted in time and space.

In retrospect, I noticed many of my spontaneous process paintings had integrated circular motions and shapes. Is it possible my internal art spirit had reflected my thoughts about circular life or was it the other way around? Had my muse inspired me to think of life's spirals to assure me that my doom-and-gloom days eventually do pass. "This too shall pass" is an old adage that reflects the temporary nature of the human condition.

As an overview of the processes of my art activities, I am able to perceive much of my art has been inspired by my internal Art Spirit. It not only inspired me to use certain artistic tools and methods, but also to connect with the



What Goes Round, Comes Round

electromagnetic energies of certain people and places. H.D. Thoreau suggested that when I hold on to what I believe, my spirit is free and I can be happy with my creative endeavours. Someone once asked me, “What tempted you to create such a variety of art pieces?” I exclaimed, “It appears my internal Art Spirit likes variety, as it appears I do too! Or is it the other way around?” Isn’t the art of life fascinating?

As Erika Lambert contemplates, she shares:

“I think I inherited the pursuit of all things art from my ancestors. Creative people show up on many of my family tree’s branches. To follow my passion may be stimulated by my genetic makeup. I guess when I stumble and wonder what that is all about I can simply say, “It’s in my genes. Haha.”

I started out as a very poor immigrant and made my toys from the Sears catalogue and scraps of paper. Cans and boxes were great materials for a fertile imagination. I could make anything “pretty” with things I found around me. In my teaching years, I enjoyed the art portion of the curriculum. I enjoyed mucking around with the students with the art materials from our well-stocked supply room. Later, when my financial

situation took a nosedive, I thought I’d pursue art on a full-time basis. After all, who questions a “starving artist” because it’s sort of expected? I tried to apply my art in a more entrepreneurial way with little success. I did sell some pieces that now hang in various places, even across the ocean. Yet, I continued to do art in a variety of ways, which seemed to feed my spirit and many times uplifted me out of some state of sadness. Eventually, I was asked to organize a program for the Art Centre that would rely on volunteerism galore. The people who came to these gatherings were many times those who had been spurned in their previous art endeavours. Here was a safe place just to let go and experiment how art felt. Many responded that they had felt stress release during those times.

I guess in a way I was instrumental, for some folks, in the understanding and the appreciation that art can be used for well-being. Many found they liked certain art methods and pursued more art through art lessons.

Today, the various ways to apply art are still part of my life. At present, the art of writing seems of interest to me. Who knows, I may write something that can render money, eventually. One is always young enough to venture into something that can surprise oneself. I give thanks for my free spirit and the energy to continue to do art.

START OVER

PLAYING BACH IN THE ALZHEIMER'S WARD



Jannie Edwards

When the steel doors click shut, you turn. You're here because your friend asked you to come after she had moved her mother and her piano to the Alzheimer's ward. Music, she said, is one of the few things that connect the patients to the life they've forgotten.

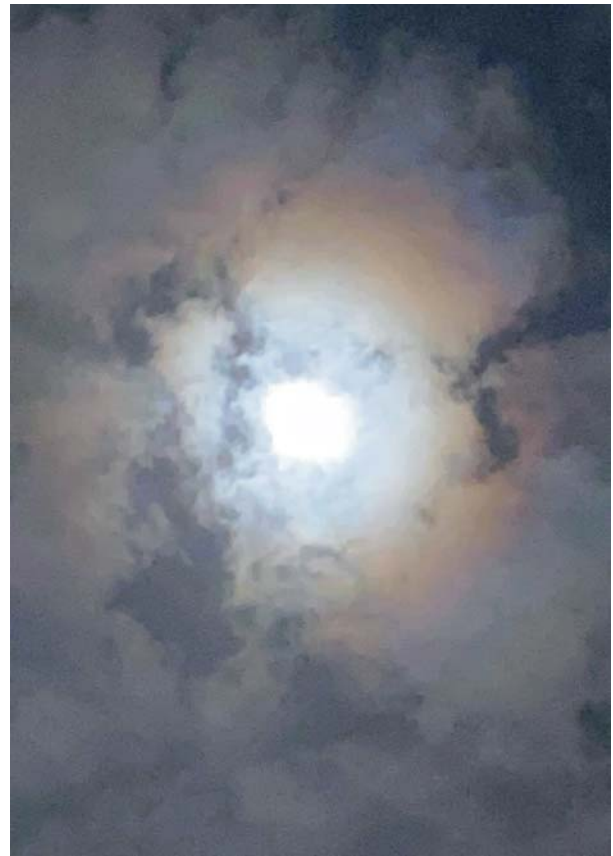
Folded over herself in a chair, your friend's mother is like a toy that's been washed so many times the stuffing has shrunk. You greet her, but she doesn't look up. Her hair is a dandelion puff. She cradles an infant doll, the kind with eyes that open and close when you tip it, and a mouth shaped to take a bottle. She strokes the doll obsessively, listlessly. *Absent-minded*, you think, as in absent *from* mind. If *mind* is what we mean when we say *person*. If *person* is what we mean when we say "has a name"; when we say "has a story."

You've decided to play the first variation, the foundation of all thirty of the *Goldberg Variations*. You were first drawn to this music by their origin story: The insomniac count, Johan Gottlieb Goldberg, who commissioned Bach in 1741 to write music to ease him through the vault of his sleepless nights. The composition is a kind of anthem to forgetfulness. You've listened to Glenn Gould's famous recordings of all thirty variations – the first when he was only twenty-two; the last a week before he died of a stroke at fifty. There's something stubborn in you, some variation of Bach's and Gould's ambition, this urge that drives you to grow this music into your own aging hands until it lives in them so deeply, you could play without thinking. Each time you open the score, you see my dedication: *For Mark, Husband, with love. Christmas 1983*. You're back to playing the piano after your spinal surgery six years ago. Losing the flute, your main instrument for over forty years, has been a deep grief. When you try to play the flute now, your right arm tremors wildly, making it impossible. Start over.

Bach's music has such a huge spiritual reach, a scope that is grounded in the precision of complex musical theory. Listening closely moves one to the boundaries of being human, to the ephemeral, the sky, mystery – however one understands what we sometimes call transcendence, divinity, the sacred. Playing the *Goldberg Variations* in an Alzheimer's ward? This project has its own reach – the desire to connect through this music with people whose memories spin inside mystery – albeit a very different kind of mystery in that the causes of this disease are still largely unknown. Humans know so much, and yet we cannot fix all that plagues us. The image below of branches reaching to the sky suggests the complex nature of the human brain, both in its capacity for creation, and also in its fragile mortality.

You see how the staff operates with the professional patience necessary to sustain their work – kindly, detached. An old man pacing circles is stuck on

Listening closely moves one to the boundaries of being human, to the ephemeral, the sky, mystery.



Left: *Branches Reaching to the Sky.*

Photo by Valary Howard

Right: *Sun Obscured by Clouds.*

Photo by Valary Howard

the punchline of one joke – repeat, repeat, repeat – *There’s more horses’ arses than there are horses*, his mind revolving deeper into its rut. Memory spins inside mystery.

The sun still glows at the centre of this image, which suggests the welcome but unpredictable moments of lucidity in people with Alzheimer’s. An old woman strapped in a wheelchair wails for home, each cry unleashing fresh heartbreak, fraying nerves. You’re reminded of the news story of ducks on the US-Canada border in winter, poisoned by lead shot, powerless to lift their wings, trapped in a circle that grows smaller, smaller as ice closes in.

You embark on the first variation, the aria that tethers the keyboard to a baroque cathedral of sound. I’ve seen how you’re determined to learn all thirty variations, knowing it would take what’s left of your life to do so. In this locked room your fingers and hands layer over each other, building crystal ladders, note by note, that cross and re-cross a meadow jewelled by countless butterflies. It’s easy, you’ve told me, to be so dazzled by the music’s superstructure you can miss its delicate melodic choreography. The music’s mind and body demand your laser focus to render, to honour each note and bar, fingers working independently in harmony with the whole. If you lose concentration, you know, for even a fraction of a second, your hands would collide, the whole glittering structure would shudder and fall, and you’d be old again, swearing, profane as mud. You’ve done this many times. Jarred by each mistake – a phone summons, the dog’s predictable howls after the first notes.



Ice Forming on the River.
Photo by Valary Howard

Then an old guy yells, *Know any Johnny Cash? Ring of Fire?* and you break focus, and the only sound is a woman wailing for home and that man with the punchline he's wearing through the floor. The crystal notes fall away from each other; the sun goes out; a hole opens beneath you. Start over, you tell yourself. But when you look back, the old guy is shouting *Johnny Cash, C'mon!*

So you give them the Man in Black: *I ... fell... in..to a burning ring of fire. I went down ... down.... down and the flames went higher... and it's burn ... burn ... burn, the ring of fire ... the ring of fire...*

When you look round again, the old guy is beaming, clapping wildly. The joker has stopped hunting for a laugh. The woman in the wheelchair has stopped keening for home. And your friend's mother. Her eyes are open. They shine, and the baby doll in her hands is dancing.

Jannie Edwards has published three books of poetry: *The Possibilities of Thirst*; *Blood Opera: The Raven Tango Poems* (designed and illustrated by Paul Saturley) and *Falling Blues*, a finalist for a Writers Guild of Alberta poetry prize. Her collaborations include the videopoem *Engrams: Reach and Seize Memory*, with Edwards' English poetry translated into American Sign Language and

performed by deaf translator and actor Linda Cundy. With visual artist Agnieszka Matejko she co-curated community arts projects that feature short poems sandblasted into Edmonton sidewalks and on the High Level Bridge. Edwards is an Emerita of MacEwan University where she taught creative writing and literature for over 25 years. She continues to be active in the Edmonton arts community.

For 13 years Valary Howard lived on a hillside where she was compelled to watch the sky in all weather, all times of year, all light, including middle of the night. "I became known for my sky pictures. Now I take pictures of many other things, often plants, and sometimes people. It's a great way to pay attention to what is around me, to see what I can see."



STIMULATING CREATIVITY

WITH SEVEN PREDICTABLE PATTERNS

Eleanor Deckert



"If he [the teacher] is indeed wise
he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom,
but rather
leads you
to the threshold of your own mind."
– Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*

I love to teach.

So: I teach.

Do I have training? No.

Do I get paid? No.

And yet, I find people and places and time and topics to teach.

My earliest genuine memory (by that I mean neither stimulated by a photograph nor an often re-told family story) is of me teaching my younger twin brothers. We lived in Pennsylvania. We stood on the sofa, our backs to the Christmas tree, our tummies pressed against the cushions, looking at the copper Nativity figurines displayed on the wide windowsill.

"This is Mary. Here is Jesus. Joseph is standing guard." I told them about the manger, the star. I pointed to the camel, the sheep. I thought teaching meant "I know something you don't know." I was just past three years old and they were almost two.

Again, I remember, in Colorado, setting firewood stumps upright for my siblings to sit on. I thought teaching meant "I'm the boss." Be still. Face me. I flattened a big cardboard box to use as a chalkboard. I wrote letters with a red crayon. In first grade, I knew the sounds of the letters. I could read. C-A-T. M-A-T. S-A-T. F-A-T. Now they could read, too.

I always watched as my teachers taught. Mrs. Warner drew the shape of each letter into a picture so we could remember the sound: T Table. M Mittens. S Snake. Mrs. VanKirk, no matter what class was interrupted, made popcorn on the first day it started to snow during the school day. Every year, Mrs. Thompson read aloud "Little House in the Big Woods," the first in the series of pioneer memoirs written by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I could see that teachers convey significance and build community through traditions.

Mr. Menendez, my Grade 6 teacher in Florida, had one very memorable tradition. He had a list of famous people and events for every day of every month. Each student was assigned a date to write and deliver an oral report. Each person also drew a picture to be posted on a huge calendar on the back wall of the

**I could see that
teachers convey
significance and build
community through
traditions.**

I was free to explore, discover, expand, observe, spend my creativity, my own uniqueness, my life and its happenings as I saw fit.

Here is what I discovered: Heart. Spirit. Mind. Body. These are what we are. Each part is hungry, curious and desires to grow.

classroom. Scientists, artists, battles, poets, explorers, musicians – all kinds of facts, historical events, significant biographies, origins of folk songs, inventions and many other fascinating tid-bits became part of our education as researchers, writers, presenters and listeners.

When we moved to Ontario, I was a teenager. I became more aware of the fact that my father was a university professor, while my mother became a kindergarten teacher. This fascinated me. One taught at the beginning of the educational curve and the other at the climax. Who was working harder? Who was getting paid more? Who had a bigger impact? Which might I become? There are seven generations of ink in my family: clergy, teachers, professors, specialists, proofreaders, translators... Love of words surrounded me at all times: stories, research, theatre, lyrics, famous literature, spur-of-the-moment puns. Books were the best gift to receive. All the while I tried to consider, “How will I find my role?”

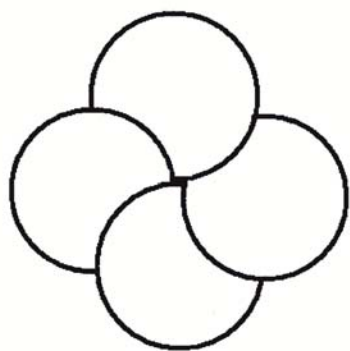
By age 20, I came to this conclusion: I am already a teacher. I am a big sister: I teach. I am a babysitter: I teach. I volunteer in the elementary school: I teach. I volunteer in Sunday School: I teach. So: Why do I need to go to university? It takes such a long time. I want to start now!

I took an unlikely path: marriage, a trip across Canada to find the mountains of British Columbia. We built a tiny log cabin. That first winter the isolation was crushing. Later, as I got to know the people in the nearby tiny town, I made my career choice: volunteering. It was not important that I get paid. My husband had reliable employment on the railway. I was free to explore, discover, expand, observe, spend my creativity, my own uniqueness, my life and its happenings as I saw fit.

Our own children arrived. The school closed. We homeschooled. At first there were correspondence lessons through the B.C. government. I found them somewhat cumbersome and restrictive. Then (here comes the good part) the regulations shifted, and parents could design their own methods and curriculum. “Now! Now I can begin. My own creativity can emerge.”

I spent the summer mulling over my options. “What if I tossed out a prepared curriculum? What if we follow the children’s interests? What if I have a list of expected outcomes for each grade and subject? Does it matter exactly how the content is presented?” When our children attended public school, I had tagged along to volunteer in their classrooms. Soon the teachers asked me, “How did you *do* that? What is your training?” I began to wonder: Could I possibly teach adults my method? To clarify my own thinking, I literally ‘followed myself around with a clipboard,’ observing myself while I was teaching. I asked myself these questions: “What is underneath? What is the foundation? What is actually happening? What if I trim away the bells and whistles and wait for the gleam in the child’s eyes when they understand. What do I provide so that moment will happen? How can I stimulate the students’ curiosity so that I barely have to guide them as they eagerly search for more?”

Here is what I discovered: Heart. Spirit. Mind. Body. These are what we are. Each part is hungry, curious and desires to grow. How can teaching/learning



I identified seven patterns, found recurring in nature, that would illustrate what I was thinking.

Eleanor Deckert is currently working on books 6, 7 and 8 (in one volume) of her series of *10 Days...* memoirs. As she writes, she asks herself these questions: "What were the inborn talents and curious interests in my early childhood? How did they develop into volunteer and later paid work? How do these authentic whisperings of my Self continue to find voice and expression as I age, even during the cancellations in the months of Covid-19 when we all experienced disappointment, isolation and restrictions of so many kinds? What is the Life Force of Creativity within me that refuses to be silenced?" While working on her memoirs she is exploring her own authentic voice and questioning, "Is it okay to trust your Self?" The wisdom she has discovered was always there.

provide better and encourage a sense of satisfaction? I began to discern an approach so that I could enable each part of a student to be nourished, given meaningful tasks, be cleansed and rested.

Mind: give each student facts, new vocabulary, numbers, charts, maps.

Heart: give each student colours, music, traditions, opportunities for artistic expression.

Body: demonstrate how each student can practise skills using large movements with the whole body, tiny movements with the hands.

Spirit: create a safe space to explore invisible, significant things such as purpose, reverence, gratitude, kindness, honesty, trust. Provide concrete or visible symbols that hold meaning.

Over time, I realized that I could see the underlying foundation of my approach. I identified seven patterns, found recurring in nature, that would illustrate what I was thinking while preparing and delivering a lesson.

Timidly, I invited five educators to listen while I tried to explain. I sent out 150 letters inviting subscribers to buy my seven-part newsletter. I started to travel and deliver seminars. I named this method of teaching *Seven Predictable Patterns* and paid for the registered trademark.

After attending a *Seven Predictable Patterns* presentation in Calgary, one participant told me, "I didn't learn anything new, but everything I already know makes more sense." Somehow, by holding the patterns found in nature in one's mind while weighing alternatives to try to solve complex or creative problems, an "A-Ha!" moment is practically guaranteed.

What are these patterns? We all know them. We see and make use of them every day. Here are five:

- Opposites. In and Out. Wet and Dry. Hot and Cold. Light and Dark. Both opposites are necessary. How does this apply to my creative project?
- Cycles. Day. Seasons. Life cycle. How is my creativity part of a Cycle?
- How small things become bigger and stronger. Tending a fire. How does my small effort grow stronger?
- Making a new decision and taking action, then noticing the results in a feedback loop. When I did this: what were the results?
- The three dimensions. Up and Down. Side-to-side. Back to Front. As we see ourselves oriented in space and time, we can see our own decisions and creativity more clearly.

Perhaps now is the time. Perhaps this Sage-ing journal together with on-line learning will make possible a way for me to deliver the *Seven Predictable Patterns* to more people who will comprehend, make use of and pass along the *Seven Predictable Patterns*, each in their own way. We can make our own creativity blossom, our inner journey more meaningful and, perhaps best of all, convey the simple *Seven Predictable Patterns* to influence [or affect or have an impact] and nourish the younger generation.

Please look to hear more about the seven patterns in the next issue of *The Journal*.

WALKING OUT

Jacques G. LeBlanc



Either I needed to become a different person or remain the same at the cost of my life and health...I was determined to make this transition from being a pediatric cardiac surgeon to a retired one with grace and dignity.

If you wait for inspiration, you may wait all your life, because it does not come as an order. Inspiration must come through the capacity of creating, of imagining, a capacity we all have within us, at different levels. During my 40-year career, my inspiration was influenced by my work, my search for better care for my infant and child patients, but only later did I understand the full meaning of inspiration, its relation to creativity, to re-imagining myself and being true to who I am.

Over the many years that I worked as a surgeon, I came to realize that one of my deepest beliefs about medicine, and about being a doctor, no longer matched my core personality. I was paralyzed by uncertainty. Did I want more work and more responsibility, on which I had thrived and from which I drew my identity, and more medication to keep me alive, or did I want to make a drastic change and jump into the unknown where I had built little identity at all? It was a question I had never had to face before, but I chose to face it, and I was scared. Changing the direction of my life was a difficult decision. Either I needed to become a different person or remain the same at the cost of my life and health. I was at an impasse, nervous and frustrated.

Choosing retirement was my answer, but what a frightening choice it was! When I walked out of the hospital for the last time on December 1, 2009, I was feeling everything at once – fatigue, eagerness, freedom and distress, but fortunately excited about the prospect of driving down to my new home in Palm Springs, where I would trade my suit, white shirt and tie for a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. I had spent three decades working in Vancouver’s Children’s Hospital. I was trying to hold myself together, while feeling out of control. I was determined to make this transition from being a pediatric cardiac surgeon to a retired one with grace and dignity. Working over 60 hours a week takes its toll, especially when you add the daily stress of being a surgeon and the toll of sleep deprivation from too many nights on call. The time had come to make a major shift in my life.

I now have time to reflect on what this whole adventure meant. I had been so set in the routine of my life and profession. It was comfortable, and it was all I knew. I had this drive to learn, to stretch myself mentally and physically with daily exercise and the occasional marathon. I loved to experiment and think outside the box. These characteristics were present in my father and I was grateful to have inherited them.

For about a year and a half, it seemed I had found the freedom to explore a sense of myself beyond being “Dr. Jacques LeBlanc, Pediatric Cardiac Surgeon.” After coming out of the initial euphoria of beach lifestyle and sunny skies, I realized I had been quick to dismiss and marginalize my contribution to the lives of many patients, friends, family and colleagues

whom I had cared for and with whom I worked. I was falling into a rut. I have 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. 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. That tentative start began a two-year-long professional relationship with Rory, and led me to analyze my career, my personality, my desires and the very few plans I had for the future. This analysis was a great awakening that helped me to understand how I could be a doctor again, just a different one – the one I had been searching for and now looked forward to growing into, and to reinventing myself. And I did.

I considered life in retirement as a new period for reflection and exploration into my newfound creativity. Transition is a passage to something new. I was at the start of a new beginning, on the threshold of reinventing myself, of finding a new way to come into life. I began a process of steps taken one at a time on this new path. After multiple discussions with my friend psychologist, Rory, I found myself deciding to write a book, and to put into words my feelings, emotions and memories. A year into it, I realized that it was not such an easy process. I had reflected on my relationship with my father, before his death in 1980 and after his death, but I began to realize there might be more. Reflecting on the many children I had treated helped me to explore the concept of spiritual life, my relationship with death and my own soul, through considering their souls. I had a hard time expressing my emotions and feelings into words. The book started as a collection of many stories, and I could not see it through; I could not connect with the new me I was trying to develop. Then one day, after discussion with a friend who is a poet, it hit me, I would write the book as a conversation. The revelations seemed easier as I worked with my friend the poet and a surgical colleague, both asking multitudes of questions, challenging me to my core. Ultimately, *Path of a Healer: A Time to Reflect* was born.

Through my conversations with Phil, my dear colleague and friend, I explored the power of the soul, including my own, my relationship with death and the feelings I had kept buried for so many years. Phil, my trusted colleague before and after his death, with his inquisitive mind and his capability to challenge my ideas and explore emotions, helped me transfer this bounty of experience into words, pushing the boundaries of my creativity as never before. Phil, as a result of his own professional life, and his many years working with me helping children, was able to understand my sense of humanity and empathy in the practice of medicine.

I believe that each person's expression of his/her soul is unique. Our soul is our inner self that we lock away in order to engage in the material world. Being able to recognize objectively and to accept that you are a unique person, a unique expression of your soul, is life affirming. However, tapping into soul is abstract, ambiguous and mostly unconscious. This is the work of

I considered life in retirement as a new period for reflection and exploration into my newfound creativity. Transition is a passage to something new. I was at the start of a new beginning, on the threshold of reinventing myself.

While my retirement from surgical practice has challenged my sense of identity, it has also increased my awareness to question my priorities. I have opened or liberated my creative spirit, and with that I have reviewed and renewed myself.

creativity, the energy that guides my fingers repairing the baby's heart, and the patient's heart repairing itself after my stitches. My participation in these two acts, both practical and spiritual, is my own uniqueness. The survival of a baby in surgery, for example, is beyond my control, and I have many stories of love and loss. I cannot control the intricacy of heart function or the complexity of interactions. I can, however, control my repair and my stitching, and I concentrate on that. I rely on my capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses, facing death without trying to cure it. Still, stress does creep in, especially through the suppression of feelings, which tend to reenter my life in a flash in unexpected ways, and that stress has certainly taken its toll. The pressures are ongoing, and crises are unpredictable; real resilience is being prepared to be unprepared, a hard concept to explain in words.

Through this reflective process of finding myself, exploring my soulful nature, studying my relationship with death, I arrived at a new project. I decided to write my autobiography in French, my native language. With the help of an amazing writer/editor and friend, a new book called *A Coeur Ouvert: un recueil de pensées* came to fruition. My journey in finding myself, and in reinventing myself is not over. I know a lot more about myself, my feelings and my emotions. I am not a new person, but I hope I am becoming a more evolved person. This process, having started with the first book and moving even further in the depth of my personal understanding with the second book, has allowed me another way of knowing my uniqueness within the layer of collective humanity.

While my retirement from surgical practice has challenged my sense of identity, it has also increased my awareness to question my priorities. I have opened or liberated my creative spirit, and with that I have reviewed and renewed myself. In practical ways this newfound life since my retirement has allowed me to discover writing as a creative outlet and welcome the expansion of exploring myself. Perhaps what is emerging in society and in each of us is an awareness that there are many ways of knowing, of self-discovering and of self-growth.

ARRIVING AT YOUR OWN DOOR



"In moments of authentic creation you greet yourself arriving at your own door and seeing with a new sense of rootedness." – Karen Close

Penn Kamp, Suzanne Chavarie

Massif Penn Kemp

In Emily Carr's one self-portrait, broad brush strokes obliterate boundary to fling her bosom across the canvas like horizontal wheat sheaves. Caring no fig for convention, flesh streaks off edge outside all frame.

Wild woman of the woods, in a village of cat's eyes. She nags snarling weather into domestic peace, pets the wind, sweeps cloud down streaming cedar trunk.

In the paintings around her, implacable mountains rise and sit arms folded, waiting their turn. Firm hands on knees, another hill down the hall squares off discourse.

The mountain inside recognizes the other out there.

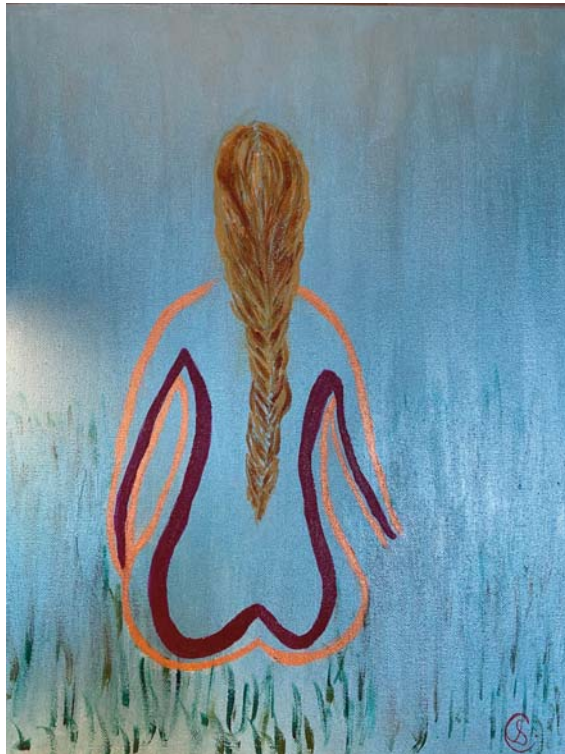
The mountain inside recognizes the other out there.

The mountain inside recognizes the other out there.

Canvassing Landscape Penn Kemp

Taut skin stretched across cheeks, O'Keefe's old bones talk louder than living animals, she remarks. She collects

hollows from the hills of oceanic desert to enter endless cerulean sky through the certain two dimensions of paint.



In the Moment, by Suzanne Chavarie for exhibition *Undressed* at the Kelowna Art Gallery

"Your need for acceptance can make you invisible in this world. Risk being seen in all your glory." – Jim Carrey

THE LAST ARTIST



Robert MacDonald

1. *She left notes, provided by executors,
that she was of right mind when insisting
that her remaining works be burned.*

The paint brush hurt her crippled hands
when she touched it, the palette hole
caused her thumb to bleed. She tired of it –
beyond making art, of life itself.

Painting a task that betrays being old,
lame, clumsy, the bones grown
brittle, vastly unlike the easy grace of flirtation,
agile, intense, alive, persuasive.

Paint, oil, and inspiration seep into
the blood, groin, eyes, pancreas,
and shout at the heart to give it all up, but
creative urges are powerful.

2. *She made bright, weird objects
that she gave to strangers in the street,
pretending they had no value.*

Persistence is the only solace
forged from grit, colour to force
one more bitter stroke of yellow onto indigo,
bristle with failing strength.

Her life force flowing onto a last few
desperate canvas as proof of grace,
gift, wisdom, generations of inspiration
soaking canvas with ecstasy.

Stains on the bedsheets, tears of sorrow and
redemption in the distant shelter
where there is no storm too difficult to say
she has beauty to confess.

3. *She was born to a family of
magicians, who practiced the dark
arts, where light killed nonsense.*

She did not remember whether
she had more to celebrate, instead
her children hid her frightened canvases,
painting the eyes shut.

The colours made a perfect canvas
lit the room with awkward brilliance,
while she made the world light and alight
and stormed against the dark.

The circles of people who surrounded and
surrendered the joy of her brilliance
proved shallow and paled by comparison.
Is there still art left?

Robert MacDonald was gifted with a keen curiosity and an attraction to working with his hands. Over several decades, he became a graphic artist, then a typographer, then a printer, then a community activist, then a publisher, then an information architect, then a program director, then a programmer, then a designer. He hasn't completely finished with being and doing any of those. Having spent most of his life in big cities (Toronto, New York, San Francisco, Vancouver) he is now nestled into the grasslands and orchards that overlook the lakes in the outrageously beautiful and strange Okanagan valley. He finds peace and profound solace in the virgin wilderness upland from his home. He is transcribing several decades of poems from notebook to computer, and otherwise productively biding his time. He recently published a chapbook of poems, which is available online at www.oyonder.com

SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

The Journal of Creative Aging

Edited by Karen Close

NUMBER 38, FALL 2021

ISSN 1920-5848

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

5. **TURNING 90 DURING COVID**
Raija Lavanti Gaskell
8. **AS 90 OPENS TO ME: Roslyn Franz**
Karen Close
11. **AGING WITH GRIT AND GRACE**
Katharine Weinmann
15. **MYTHO-POETIC KINSHIP**
Johanna Beyers
19. **FROM CLIMBING THE RAIN**
Marvyne Jenoff
22. **BECOMING AN ARTIST**
Silmara Emde
25. **ART IN MY LIFE**
Erika Lambert
29. **START OVER: Playing Bach in the Alzheimer's Ward**
Jannie Edwards
32. **STIMULATING CREATIVITY WITH SEVEN PREDICTABLE PATTERNS**
Eleanor Deckert
35. **WHEN I WALKED OUT**
Jacques G. LeBlanc
38. **ARRIVING AT YOUR OWN DOOR**
Penn Kemp, Suzanne Chavarie
39. **THE LAST ARTIST**
Robert MacDonald

A PUBLICATION OF THE
OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT
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.