

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



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EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

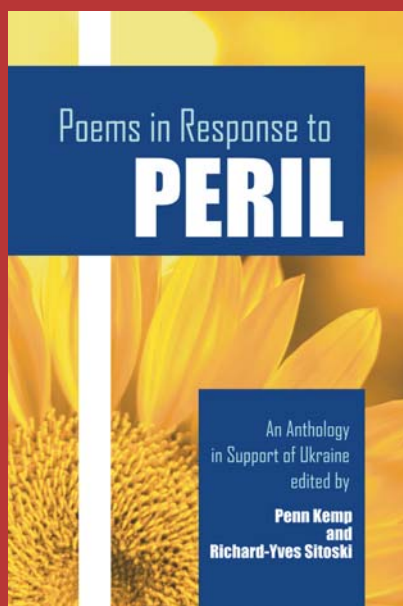
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Canadian poets Penn Kemp and Richard-Yves Sitoski have co-edited Poets in Response to Peril, an anthology which brings together 61 poems by 48 of Canada's most prominent poets in response to the current crisis in Ukraine and other perils afflicting our troubled times. Profits from the book will be directed toward PEN Ukraine's efforts to provide the Ukrainian cultural community with evacuation and resettlement help.

For a deeper look at our process, take a look at

- <https://poets.ca/a-gathering-of-poets-in-response-to-peril/>
- <https://www.inanna.ca/2022/04/18/gathering-voices-in-response-to-peril-penn-kemp-and-susan-mccaslin>
- www.pennkemp.wordpress.com

POEMS IN RESPONSE TO PERIL
An Anthology in Support of Ukraine
edited by Penn Kemp and Richard-Yves Sitoski

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SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

FROM THE EDITOR

In submitting articles for this issue, contributors accepted our invitation to describe how they found their own creative medicine during the challenging times of the last two years. Knowing that creativity gathers momentum in community, we are determined in our desire to evolve *The Journal* as a gathering place for individuals coming alive to themselves by *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. When we read the joy of others enlivened by their creative endeavours, it plants hope for our own journeys into creative expression and the riches of building a community of creators. In *SOME KIND OF ... "MAGIC" ... LIVES HERE* Letty McFall profiles 'the magic' of such a community. Feel the words of Betty Dean in *REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVITY*. *"I love the tactile sensation of applying paint; the feeling of textures and flow are sensual and bring me joy. As the composition unfolds I'm excited; there's a puzzle to solve in shapes and lines, colours and textures."* Professional engineer Chris Lihou shares delight in *RETIREMENT - MY CREATIVE, PLAYFUL ENDEAVOUR* where he can *"enjoy the process and follow my playfulness and inner urges rather than meet external expectations."* Contributor Susan McCaslin in *LOVE & POETRY IN TIMES OF WAR* reminds us how *"Poetry, music, and visual art... (are) our connection to the real, the core of presence and higher consciousness."*

In the turbulent social and political times

of post WW2 America, New York artists came together to herald spirit and a belief in the future understanding that the artist's responsibility to society, especially during dark times, is to preserve, nurture, and glorify the human spirit. Despite widespread criticism of their daring, often wild, canvases, the Abstract Expressionists and Action Painters saw art as a way to save civilization, not by producing political art, but by making art that celebrates innovation and the liberation of human actions to find new ways. In *A GOLD HAND AND A SWEET TONGUE*, we read how such determination and harnessing what he understood into new ways of being enabled Iraqi refugee, Najm Al-Tameemi, to create a business and a home for his family.

In 2000, with the release of his book *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential In The Second Half of Life*, Gene D. Cohen, MD, PhD, set a challenge for seniors to embrace creative spirit. Paralleling Cohen's research, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi released *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Revolutionary Approach to Growing Older*. In *EIGHTIES ARE WEIGHTY* Ina Albert pays tribute to her path of 'sage-ing while age-ing' set out by the rabbi.

It was in response to these books, and my own inner questing, that I created *The Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* in 2011. Rabbi Reb Salman suggested that the responsibility of my generation of seniors – a number larger

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than has ever existed – is to mentor younger generations by sharing our personal stories of creative well-being so that we may together create the future we all yearn for, finding strength and possibilities in its co-imagining. Creativity is unique to humans. Evolving its possibilities will strengthen the future.

American poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou urges, “We need to remember that we are created ‘creative’ and can invent new scenarios as frequently as they are needed.” Psychologist Rollo May advises we grow when we find *The Courage to Create*. Possibilities are waiting.

For our September issue we invite our readers to share moments of creative courage and what inspired them to find that spirit. Your story is waiting to be shared. Perhaps you have been impacted by reading and/or contributing to The Journal. Please let us know. Our intention is to collect and include some of your responses to be included in the September issue. Imagine, Dame Judi Dench had the motto ‘Carpe Diem’ tattooed on her wrist for her 81st birthday.

– Karen Close

SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

The theme to consider for our next issue will be in the FROM THE EDITORS in each issue. Your story is to be original, related to creativity in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining self awareness and wisdom, and/or the act of harvesting your life’s wisdom as a legacy for future generations.

Please attach it as a word document (.doc) – not a PDF - to enable editing, using Calibri font, 14 pt, 1.5 spacing. 500 – 1500 word maximum (use word count).

Please attach 3-4 photos, separately, including: Your headshot, 2-3 photos related to your article. All photos should be numbered, given a caption, and attached in high resolution jpg. format. 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 a brief bio note, written in the third person (one or two short paragraphs of up to 200 words). Your bio will be placed at the end of your article and is intended 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. Please include your preferred contact information, including email, website, blog address – whatever you want included in the publication. In your cover email, please share how you found your way to submitting to Sage-ing. Please email your article and photographs to Karen Close at karensageing@gmail.com and Katharine Weinmann at panache@interbaun.com

Quarterly issues of The Journal go online around a solstice or equinox: March, June, September, and December. We need to receive your intention of submitting an article by the first day of the preceding month or earlier. **Your complete submission is required by the first day of the month preceding publication.**

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

A GOLD HAND AND A SWEET TONGUE

Using his creative gifts, an Iraqi refugee makes home for his family

Katharine Weinmann



He shared the story of coming to Canada with his family in 2015, seeking refuge from wars and civil uprisings in Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria.

“War destroyed me three times.”

It’s a couple of days before Ramadan, the annual monthly fast honoured by Muslims around the world. A practice of devotion that focuses one’s attention on matters of the heart, mind, and spirit; on renewing one’s faith; reminding oneself of the gifts of family; of reasserting the strength that comes from community.

I’m sitting in a local Tim Hortons across from Najm Al-Tameemi, who I have invited to interview for this story. I met Najm last year when, as writer for *EdmontonEats* – a local social enterprise supporting newcomer families through the celebration of their food and culture. I needed to update Najm’s bio for *EdmontonEats* website as a supplier of his specialty food products – honey vinegar and papaya pickles – to be included in our cultural Holiday Gift Box, one of our most successful, annual events. It was then, sitting at another Tims, that he shared the story of coming to Canada with his family in 2015, seeking refuge from wars and civil uprisings in Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria. When I first heard it, his story spoke to me of resilience and commitment to trusting in the creative spirit to survive and support his family. Today, its echo with the recent arrival in Edmonton of families from war-torn Ukraine was beyond sobering.

“We came when everything was yellow.”

I think autumn in Alberta is its most glorious season. Often warm in October, the poplars and trembling aspens shimmer golden, willow bushes glow vermilion in our river valley. The mountains are known for larch transforming the grey granite and dark green conifer valleys into blankets of yellow gold. Najm, his wife, Muna, and their seven children came to Edmonton when everything was yellow, holding the tenuous promise of a better, at least safer life. Their two eldest children, Haneen and Abdullah, now in their late twenties, encountered challenges similar to their father. As university students in Syria, studying medicine and engineering in hopes of beginning their professional lives, war tore apart those plans. Despite excelling in their studies, once in Canada their coursework and practicums were, as is the case with many university students and professionals, including their father, unrecognized. Najm’s next two children, Mariam and Ali, now in their



Mentoring Students in the Art of Arabian Calligraphy

**Once safe and settled,
his enterprising spirit
and passion for
creating awakened.**

early twenties, had not yet begun their post-secondary education leading to careers. Still disrupted, they completed high school with a clearer, less obscured vision of what future could be possible, eventually completing business and health degrees. The younger children, teenagers Riayan, Maram and Slam, too, found that part of relocation easier, but still bore inner scars of war and displacement. Maram, their sixth child, was an infant when bombs fell, and sirens screamed in their neighbourhood. That trauma resulted in respiratory and heart challenges, which thankfully have eased considerably since settling in Canada. Najm smiles as he describes their youngest daughter, Slam, as being “the most Canadian,” a daily reminder of their hard but necessary choices.

Najm tells me that in a week’s time he and his wife watched their life – one safe and secure, with a degree of affluence enjoyed by his family, having respect as a successful entrepreneur with a driver, no less! – suddenly shatter. Again, the eerie resonance to what we are witnessing today in Ukraine, watching millions of women, children and elderly have their lives torn apart by Russia’s invasion, flee their homeland, leaving their husbands, fathers, brothers to fight for their country. Within a few short days, Najm went from working with his mind – applying his accounting and engineering skills, his business and people management acumen – to working as a labourer tending livestock and crops, to provide shelter, safety and food for his family. Too, he learned about bee and honey production, pollinating the seed of an idea which would travel with him across the ocean to eventually take hold in his new Canadian homeland.

Fast forward Edmonton 2017. Once safe and settled, his enterprising spirit and passion for creating awakened, Najm began to ask the questions and make the connections to realize his dream of making honey vinegar, a fermented savoury condiment familiar for its unique flavour and health benefits in Middle Eastern cuisine. Scaling from home production to finding commercial kitchen space, learning and complying to Canadian health and safety production requirements, design and marketing all required stamina, adaptation, energy and money. Called *Maram Honey Vinegar*, after the daughter whose health as an infant had been nearly destroyed by war’s trauma, it was the Al-Tameemi family’s way to say “thank you” to Canada, for giving them another chance for life. Unfortunately, product “traction” from farmers’ markets, local grocers and delis, and well-known take and go food shops, came to an eventual halt with Covid. Yet, even during that time, Najm’s ideas continued, and he recently produced a papaya based spicy pickle sauce with a several hundred-year history in Iraq.

“I was born with a gold hand and a sweet tongue.”

So described by his mother, Najm has been long recognized for his skill in Arabic calligraphy. Both an ancient artform and a practical means for communicating, Najm would assist his teachers by preparing their lesson boards, and during wartime he was chosen to write and interpret. Here in Edmonton, a city known for its festivals, Najm began sharing his gift at our



Top: Making Friends and Community Through Calligraphy.JPG
Above: Canadian Citizenship

Writing poetry and contemplative creative non-fiction, and co-editor of our Journal, **Katharine Weinmann**, shares the beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well lived and much loved life in her weekly blog, *A Wabi Sabi Life*, a celebration of life unfolding in all its mess and mystery, grit and grace. awabisabilife.ca

Katharine has been published in the global online Abbey of the Arts blog, The Poets Corner in Maine, USA, and the online Canadian Company of Pilgrims. She is the writer for local social enterprise, EdmontonEats.

With her husband and their beloved Annie dog, Katharine makes her home in Sherwood Park, Alberta, on (Amiskwaciwâskahikan), Treaty 6 territory, sacred ancestral home of the Cree, Dehcho Dene, Metis - Indigenous land that was generously shared with her settler ancestors, a gesture for which she is most grateful and inspired.

annual summer Heritage Days festival. Using brush, pen, ink and paint he would write out the names of visitors to the Iraqi pavilion. Well received, the idea grew and he began teaching at seniors' centres, Arabic schools and mosques, adult continuing education programs and city art programs. Seniors especially have enjoyed calligraphy's quiet, meditative invitation to make something beautiful, while enhancing and growing flexible hand-eye movements. Najm was particular in having me note three more benefits of these calligraphy experiences:

- teaching children and young adults gives them the opportunity, like him, to develop a talent that can earn them income.
- given its quiet way of working, Najm uses the time to congenially share Arabic history, traditions, and stories, creating an opening to shift the more recent and painful narrative of xenophobia directed at Muslims and Middle Eastern refugees.
- friendships and community-making among students of all ages and cultures. This continues to sustain Najm and

his faith in the kindness of people when his other initiatives have not born fruit.

A good hour later, empty coffee cups to the side, as Najm and I began to end our conversation, he disclosed that life here in Canada has not been easy. Yes, they are safe. There is no fear of war, though memories of that time in Iraq and Syria can be easily aroused, especially these days with media coverage of Ukraine. Family pride glows in the photo he scrolls on his phone to show me of the day they became Canadian citizens, when he presented the judge with a gift of his calligraphy. But despite his efforts, he has yet to experience the financial success and security, nor feel the same respect as when they lived in pre-war Iraq. Now in his mid-fifties, he wonders if it would have been different and cautions his children to find a career focus and pursue it. Now he is training as a boilermaker, hoping this might give him the security to purchase their home and finally feel settled.

I'm struck that in story after story, Najm described how the gifts of his gold hand and sweet tongue saw him through remarkably adverse situations and pray, *In sh'allah*, it continues to be so, and more so.

SOME KIND OF ... “MAGIC” ... LIVES HERE



Letty McFall

“The world is full of magical things patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.”

– W.B. Yeats

Six years ago, I settled in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. The decision to move across the country in my early 70s was neither logical nor easy. Like other newcomers, the initial attraction to Lunenburg was its ‘postcard beauty’ and over time, this beauty is transforming into a rich alchemy of history, storytelling, and deep cultural diversity. It’s not just a lovely and historic town: something in the air; something called ‘water light’ by locals, seems to embrace both ageing and creativity...a sort of magic!

How does a small town with fewer than 2000 residents, snuggled in a bay at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, become home to dozens of writers, multiple publishers, three independent bookstores, more than 100 annual concerts, a renowned music performance centre, sailing and language schools, Canada’s most famous ship, award winning restaurants, a handful of festivals, and an abundance of artists and cultural workers? Wanting to know more, I took a ‘mind stroll’ around town to ask a few residents if they were also aware of this other level of *magic*.

My first visit was with Cheryl, a former Colonel in Canada’s Airforce. She arrived in 2010 and saw the town as the perfect place to live out a childhood dream of owning an antique shop. “Instead, circumstances and creative thinking led me to establish a community consignment store... one that gives back hundreds of thousands of dollars to charitable organizations in town. The store operates using an unusual business structure, volunteer staffing and an ever-expanding network of consignors. Looking back, I realize I was not hampered by conventional business practices. I had the confidence and vision to work toward a more creative solution that focuses on benefits to the community.”

My second visit was with Guy and Sharon to talk about their recently opened gallery on the town’s gallery row. “Our gallery provided us with an almost instant connection to the community art and culture scene. We enjoy having a storefront where a variety of people drop in and chat, and it is this relational connection that is special for us.” Guy is part of the annual Folk Art Festival this year with his colourful and personality-laden wire and wood birds. “Having a good part of my life behind me...I have become so much

Our gallery provided us with an almost instant connection to the community art and culture scene. We enjoy having a storefront where a variety of people drop in and chat.



Top: Lunenburg Confined
Above: Hat Junkie

I was intentional about moving here ... the beauty hooked me, and the cultural diversity holds me.

more focussed on my work... Like many aging Lunenburgers, legacy is important to me and age has definitely become a motivating life factor.”

Sharon has just turned 65 and reflects, “My creative energy is not only growing but spreading to all parts of my life... designing, cooking, gardening... I am happy with who I am and my choice of place... My plein air painting group excites me as does my teaching... and my art.” Sharon recently completed a book of insightful illustrations focussed on local people and their work during Covid. She is now completing a project featuring 100 paintings for 100 days. “Both projects grow from and are deeply rooted in this place”.

The next chat was with a bright and intelligent Cambridge graduate who grew up in Lunenburg, left to travel the world for education and career, and retired to her hometown. At 80, she continues to write, having just completed her third novel about the people and places of Lunenburg. Rosalie was a delight to spend time with and was direct and precise in response to my vague questions. On ageing she said, “I seem to work harder but I am not certain I am more creative ... I am told poets do their best work around 40... something about their sex drive ... (laughter) ... I am not certain one’s senses are as acute as one ages, and life generally is not as new as it once was... Wasn’t it Yeats who said *bodily decrepitude is wisdom*? There is lots of ageing in Lunenburg. Perhaps we do get wiser as we age ... perhaps it is this wisdom that pushes our desire for making our mark ... getting things done ... the idea of legacy....”

Elsewhere in Lunenburg I find weavers, knitters, felters, rug hookers, and other fibre artists. Many are dedicated amateurs but among the professional handmakers is a milliner. Anna moved from the USA and settled here with her family. Working from a home studio she creates original hats that sell both here and internationally. “I was intentional about moving here... the beauty hooked me, and the cultural diversity holds me. Creating here is easy because the amazing beauty of the place nurtures me.”

Doug is a well-known ceramic artist now working in a newly renovated studio close to the ocean. The space is bright and open and filled with amazing pots, tiles, and sculptures. He has outfitted his studio furnishings with skateboard wheels for easy movement. “My knees do not work well... by putting wheels on things I can scoot about... my creativity is not limited by my physical limitations or age ... In my younger years I was immersed in the art scene and community initiatives ... Now, while community still interests me, I am becoming more focussed. I am so much more satisfied with the simple act of creating. My creative energy is central to everything I do. I spend lots of time in my studio. Exhibiting and promoting my work is less exciting than it once was ... no indication that my creativity is diminishing. I am excited to create for myself and selectively for others. With a new studio and home space, getting things done is my reward ... that’s enough!”

Lunenburg also has numerous architects and designers, some of whom are internationally applauded for their contributions. Their work celebrates



Lunenburg Bump House

and enhances the cultural magic of this place. Jerry says, “retirement is a luxury... a door to walk through and become different on the other side.” At 84 he involves himself in architectural projects as diverse as lighthouse preservation and in-fill housing. “This town has a profound sense of community... probably more than most places. It is also a safe community for artists and creative thinkers. The connection between its cultural richness, the numbers of retirees, and the availability of creative energy is palpable.”

Tom just completed the revival of an 1885 Lunenburg *bump house*; he is involved in a newly formed *Cultural Collective*; and leads the restoration of the landmark *Lunenburg Opera House*. “My experience

as a designer, historian and arts manager seems to be converging here.” About ageing he says, “I appreciate the challenges and excitement of being involved with community projects like these at this stage of my life. And while there are days when my brilliance seems a bit tarnished and my physical stamina is waning, my sense of creativity is nurtured here by the blend of cultural connections and opportunities. Add to that the beauty and Oh this place....!!

My final visit was to The Lunenburg School of the Arts, the brainchild of a long-time resident, lawyer, and retired senator, the Honourable Wilfred Moore. The school offers day and week-long courses in various art forms, organizes an artist-in-residence program, and presents architectural lectures, exhibitions, and public events. Last summer the school invited Todd Labrador to build a Mi’kmaq birch bark canoe. This attracted an audience of more than 1000 residents and visitors. School founder Wilfred says: “I am a connector...connecting people and resources to the community. I am always building relationships and am eager to foster creative activities that can make our town better. It is my personal belief that giving back to our community is what we are meant to do.”

Wow, my ‘mind stroll’ has sparked new thoughts about the magic of this place and the interrelationships of community, aging, and creativity. To this mix, my interviews have added ideas about risk, rootedness, belonging, beauty, safety, convergence, and contribution. Perhaps the magic is the interaction of all of these.

I see now how this place is working its magic on me by providing a safe harbour to accept the gift of aging as I continue to explore my creativity. The influence of this place makes me shiver with excitement. Look around your community... is there a creative alchemy? Is creativity supported? Do you feel safe to create? How do you connect place, community, aging and your

creativity?

Thank you to the following Lunenburg residents:

Cheryl Lamerson, Entrepreneur,

Community builder

Guy Cranston, Folk Artist

Sharon Cranston, Visual Artist

Rosalie Osmond, Writer

Anna Shoub, Milliner

Jerry, Rolfson, Architect

Tom McFall, Arts Manager, Designer

Doug Bamford, Ceramic Artist

The Honourable Wilfred Moore, Q.C., LL.D.

Letty McFall is a Lunenburg resident who has lived in towns and cities across Canada ... loved them all and has found her forever home in Lunenburg.

REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVITY



Betty Dean

As I sit to write there is war raging in Ukraine; in some places war never ends. We hear news of COVID on the rise again; here, convoys of trucks drive across the country to protest vaccine mandates. Many have no access to vaccines.

Looking out my window this morning, lights are coming on in the houses that surround me. The sun is starting to shine on the park across the street and my world is calm, silent and beautiful. I wonder if creativity is the purview of privilege and wealth.

Creativity needs to be considered within the context of our lives. Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/creativity>) states that “Creativity encompasses the ability to discover new and original ideas, connections, and solutions to problems. It’s a part of our drive as humans—fostering resilience, sparking joy, and providing opportunities for self-actualization.

“An act of creativity can be grand and inspiring, such as crafting a beautiful painting or designing an innovative company. But an idea need not be artistic or world-changing to count as creative. Life requires daily acts of ingenuity and novel workarounds; in this sense, almost everyone possesses some amount of creativity.”

It must take enormous creativity to survive in Ukraine’s current conditions.

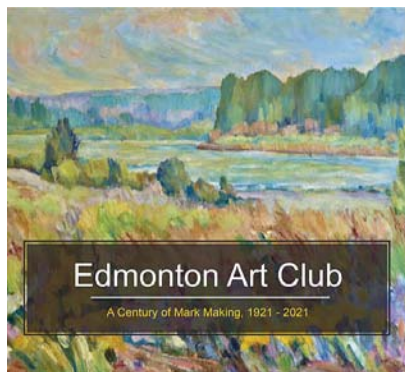
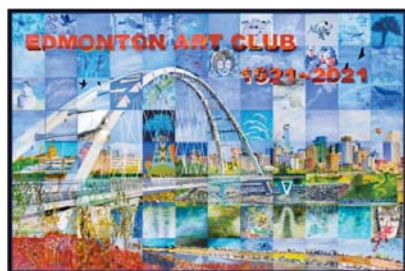
I grew up thinking of creativity in the narrowest of ways. Creativity, I thought, was evidence based, more a product than a process. I applied it mostly to my art. In my working and parenting life there was little time for my love of painting. Rather, creativity showed itself through problem solving and project development, through leadership and organization.

I have come to the realization that creativity is a loaded word. If I believe I’m creative and don’t produce something others define as creative does that make me less? Are these the expectations of others or my own construct? How I define creativity is part of how I define myself. At times, it shows in my use of space, both physically and mentally. The way I organize my studio, my books, my closet and my head all reflect who I am.

I always knew that when I retired I would return to my brushes and paint. Art had been my favourite school subject and although I did well enough I was never confident in it - certainly not enough to take it in high school. In fact, in grade 7 when I won a contest for art lessons at the Edmonton Art Gallery (precursor to the Art Gallery of Alberta), I thought I had cheated because I used a reference photo.

Not being ‘good enough’ still haunts me. The beauty of retirement is that

Life requires daily acts of ingenuity and novel workarounds; in this sense, almost everyone possesses some amount of creativity.



Top: Edmonton Art Club 100 Year Anniversary mural

Above: Edmonton Art Club 100 Year Anniversary commemorative book

I remember wandering through shopping centres where the Edmonton Art Club was holding shows, and dreaming of 'some day' being able to join. Would I ever be good enough?

I don't mind as much what others think. Returning to my art has been a gift and, I know, the result of the privilege of my life. I love the tactile sensation of applying paint; the feeling of textures and flow are sensual and bring me joy. As the composition unfolds I'm excited; there's a puzzle to solve in shapes and lines, colours and textures. At some point in the work I'm usually disappointed; I might need to put it away for a while, to take a fresh look at it after some time has passed. Or maybe I'll just keep going. A sense of mystery and magic surround the work, and sometimes when I finish I stand back and think "How did I do that?"

Art has given me a whole new group of friends. Sometimes we get together to paint and sometimes just to visit. I'm part of the Edmonton Art Club (EAC), now into its second century, and feel honoured to be part of it. To celebrate the club's 100 Year milestone members came together to complete three projects: create a mural of the Edmonton skyline with the new Walterdale Bridge, publish a commemorative book *Edmonton Art Club A History of Mark Making 1921-2021*, and hold a show in the *Art Gallery of Alberta*.

My creative juices flowed as I composed sections of the book and painted both tiles for the mural and "Peace of Mind", a piece for the show.

"Peace of Mind" gave me an opportunity to both confirm techniques I favoured and challenge myself in new areas. Part of honouring my past was in my selection of the substrate to use – a print I had made in a University print-making course. By using that, I could connect my current self to my past. I decided on a tall solitary spruce tree, reflecting my love of trees and the solitary nature of growth sometimes seen. I love painting spruce trees, and connect with a quote from Robert Genn: (<https://painterskeys.com/trees-2/>)

"More than anything trees are metaphors. Firmly rooted, genuinely patient and content, willing to undergo insult and humiliation, they also open themselves to all manner of creatures and make a home for many. These oldest of living beings have nobility in every leaf. They bring warmth to the northern cabin, and shade to the southern traveler. Daily, they do the breathing for our increasingly fragile planet. If they were to disappear, we would soon be dead. To honour trees is to grasp life."

I remember wandering through shopping centres where the *Edmonton Art Club* was holding shows, and dreaming of 'some day' being able to join. Would I ever be good enough? Because I loved working on "Peace of Mind" I felt that I had satisfied some of those questions: the work demonstrated a variety of techniques, connected me to my past. It held some mystery, and, to me, communicated my feelings and beliefs.

I have to work at reminding myself that I am good enough and that only I can determine whether or not my art expresses my intent, whether it has reached its mark, and conveys what I wanted it to be when I started.

My question of 'good enough' has been answered, in part, by my successful career, my academic achievements, by having writing published,



Peace of Mind, Mixed media 18 x 26"

and art sold. Yet even now, through all the decades of my life, the question still haunts me. I know it is part of my internal questioning, and has nothing to do with the perception of others. It keeps me striving to learn, to be better. It is the question that reinforces my belief that creativity is a journey and not a destination.

As I paint, I reflect on the luxury I have to create. I wonder about artists in Ukraine and in other war torn countries, and count my blessings.

Betty Dean, B.Ed. M.Ed., has been painting almost full time since retiring from a career with Edmonton Public Schools. She is a member of the Edmonton Art Club as well as numerous other art organizations, and hosts several art groups and classes. Betty has had a number of articles published in educational journals and magazines.

bettydean@telus.net, www.art-by-betty.com

SEEKING BEAUTY

IN THE SPLENDOUR OF TRUTH

Azkaa Rahman



My journey into ikebana began with my seeking of truth. Ikebana is a centuries old Japanese practice of flower arranging. I am a student of this practice, a curious novice.

Komoda and Pointner (1980) wrote, “...*the real experience of ikebana cannot be experienced through words... If art is supposed to lead to truth, then it is not to be perceived with the intellect alone, but with the feelings as well. Artist and observer are challenged as whole persons. Only the whole person can experience truth...*”

In the Muslim tradition there is a teaching, “God is Beautiful and He Loves Beauty,” which has been a guiding post for my life. Whenever I’ve travelled across continents, where Islam has been practiced for generations, I’ve experienced remnants of traditional societies adorned with immaculate beauty from the micro to the macro, from the hidden to the overt. Beauty is a necessary existence - perhaps what I have come to recognize, as the splendour of truth. I have found it in pottery, architecture, gardens, textiles and so much more.

These intellectual or spiritual recognitions about beauty haven’t quite been sufficient for me in my seeking of truth; I’ve aspired to learn how I might bring a practice of excellence and beauty into my everyday life, and realized that the key missing piece has been a practice of refining my eye for detail.

Years ago, I came across *Ikebana* through my travels to Japan. It served as an opening into my spiritual practice of beauty. It has made me more attuned to the significance of liminal spaces and how the slightest—most minute—repositioning can be a transformative experience. This has been critical for me, as I believe what we intake through the opening vessels of our bodies impacts the entirety of our condition; what we see and perceive impacts our hearts and how we show up in the world. There is a grandeur in subtlety.

The exploration of subtlety has demanded a strong rigour of humility. Every willow branch requests a different treatment than that of a delicate blade of grass, just as all human beings have their unique characters and needs. Ikebana invites a discipline of presence, a necessary element in the journey of cultivating relationships. It requires building trust with whatever natural material one is engaging with and a deep sensitivity that can invite the personality of each flower to blossom.

Ikebana is an art form that, in my perspective, brings together many opposites. Through simple and complicated arrangements, this practice has taught me that tension is necessary for harmony and the importance of honouring the masculine and feminine, the tall and the short, the wide and

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Top left: Freestyle
 Top middle: Ikebana
 Top right: Ikebana 2
 Above: Shoka

the narrow. In older forms of Ikebana, such as “Tatehana,” I learn that while flowers are grounded in the earth their fragrances rises to the heavens, how high or where to, remains unknown, but there lies a deep resonance of hope in each flower that gazes up at the sun, or delightfully receives rain from above.

Over the years, I no longer perceive the River Valley the same way I did before I began this journey. I no longer experience space the same, nor the human beings around me in the same way as I once may have. Today I am enamoured in wonderment, at the branches, leaves and twigs – the positions they take, the way they grow, bend and connect, how they draw light, how they sleep, how they exude resilience and how they are beautiful. I now see nature and all of life as a miraculous arrangement.

Azkaa Rahman is madly curious about how hospitality, story and heartwork can cultivate a greater sense of connection and whole wellness for individuals and communities. She’s passionate about creating spaces of unreserved welcome and immaculate beauty. Azkaa serves as an independent host facilitator and community grower, building bridges and weaving relationships across systems, disciplines, cultures and traditions. She is often found navigating pathways through the messy ‘groan zones’ within complex systems.

In addition to *Ikebana*, her projects also include needle-felting, studying fragrance, examining fungi, and travelling the world for exotic honey.

RETIREMENT

MY CREATIVE, PLAYFUL ENDEAVOUR

Chris Lihou



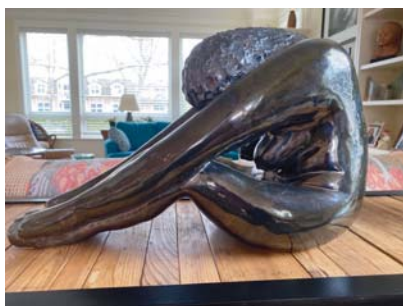
After a working life in a technical environment, accompanied by frequent moves, retirement presented an opportunity for many changes. One of the bigger challenges at the end of an expatriate working life (and incidentally, the acquisition of three passports) is the decision of where to retire. Where does one fit in, after such a varied life? Who do I consider to be my ‘tribe’?

My wife, Anne, and I chose Salt Spring Island, B.C. This was a very good choice for the first seven years. Anne joined a painter’s group and I pondered what artistic endeavour I’d try. Any choice I’d make would be an entirely new experience. I chose clay; ceramics and sculpture, alongside woodwork, which I’d done on and off since I was a small boy. What a delight playing with clay turned out to be! For the first time I learned that in the creative realm of artists failure was OK, even encouraged as part of the process. That was entirely novel to me and not something that as an engineer I was expected to do in my professional life. I was so accustomed to focusing on the “correct” end result that I’d never given thought to process over product. Both my pottery and sculpture mentors encouraged me to enjoy the process and follow my playfulness and inner urges rather than meet external expectations for the result.

After seven years, Anne and I looked for a home on a flatter plot of land and as a consequence we moved to Qualicum Beach. It was here that I dabbled in writing, especially poetry. I found free verse poetry to offer a joyful, playful medium for the expression and release of my emotions and humour as I experienced the oftentimes unsettling realities of aging. Writing poetry helps me to come to terms with these realities.

I ramped up my woodwork and played less with clay. I often found that I wrote about my feelings and emotions as I observed my own aging process.

My discovery of aging via my creative spirit turned out to be very therapeutic when my personal health was challenged with a diagnosis of advanced prostate cancer. I had found my own medicine for the release of my emotions. Many of my poems have recorded the frustration and impact that such a diagnosis and the subsequent treatment imposed.



Top: Lucy – our beautiful, redheaded granddaughter

Above left: Reaching Forward

Above right: Lucy’s Horse (constructed from Western Australian hardwood)

On Being Seventy

Really!
 What's there to celebrate!
 seven decades
 twenty-five thousand days
 I can't comprehend
 I've been here this long

Like a Dali watch
 this age feels, well
 flexible
 perhaps only noon
 in the worst case

After all
 it does not seem so long ago
 when the age I am now
 when seen back then
 would appear
 so bloody old!

It's true that
 like Cohen
 there are now aches in places I used to play
 complaints frequently arise to my brain
 from these places
 to a brain that refuses
 to acknowledge
 the decades of its occupancy

But entropy always happens
 it's had
 Six hundred thousand hours
 to make apparent those disorders
 at the joints
 and who knows what else
 or where internally

Steed

Long ago he sat
 astride his steed
 a shiny, black,
 hot blooded, Arabian

The only mane
 one can see now
 is his pony tail
 as if to recall
 past hippie days
 and some semblance of
 retained virility

Later on
 his charger was
 a red rag-top
 an equine-badged
 chick magnet
 302 cubic inches of
 pulsating
 testosterone

Now, in life's final insult
 to all his masculinity,
 he rides a puny,
 three-wheeled scooter

A Death Without Dying

He stood uneasy
 a shadow of his former self
 not that there was any less to his bulk
 indeed, there was more of him than
 before
 (an unpleasant side effect of the meds)

He was ghostly and pale,
 with sweat beaded on his brow
 (another of those unpleasantries)
 watching intently
 as parts of him
 were lowered into the freshly-dug hole

First in went his Self,
 the Self as he knew it
 the Self he'd constructed
 over seven decades

His wife, meanwhile,
 respectfully dressed in black,
 wailed, grieving
 in uncontrollable sadness
 as Who he was,
 Who they were
 Who they had been
 was lowered into history

His Libido followed his Self
 lowered beyond reach
 with it went all his dreams
 of flesh upon flesh

As tears flowed
 on those ghostly cheeks
 an even greater wail
 escaped his lips

His Control
 despite its vocal resistance
 was corralled
 then lowered
 and covered with soil

All he was
 was now gone
 all he knew of himself
 was now history

All he now presented
 was a body
 an assemblage of organs
 one of which
 was soon to be shot

by a technician
with a beam of radiation
tumour's capital punishment
for a life of
reckless growth
He was effectively dead
but not dead

Alive
but not alive

Man
but not man

Existing now
as merely a target
for a medical sharp shooter

Diagnosis

the poet hears
looks to write something
of nature's circle of life

the engineer hears
calculates
what are the odds?
what is the likelihood?
of false negatives
of false positives

a lover hears
weeps and wails
knowing, sensing
what will be lost

a scientist hears
and is assured
that all is well
confirming the cellular decent into chaos
via the second law of thermodynamics

for everyone
poet, engineer
lover, scientist
there is a life
forever altered

EIGHTIES ARE WEIGHTY



Ina Albert

On July 3, 2014, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, author of *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, passed away. I continue to feel his presence in my life.

The eighties decade is a weighty experience. At 87 I find that memories nicely tucked away in my 'Past Events' file are re-emerging with an exclamation point. Perhaps I didn't allow myself to fully experience the impact they should have triggered at the time, or maybe the situations were so emotion packed that I was unable to fully experience them. However, recently, one memory of deep loss peeks its head up frequently asking to be explored further before it is filed away permanently. My hope is that sharing it with you will allow the tears to disappear and put my emotions to rest.

It was eight years ago when my car phone rang on the drive home from shopping on a sunny July 3rd afternoon. It was my husband, Allen. His usually thunderous radio voice whispered the news. "I guess you've heard by now. Reb Zalman passed away this morning."

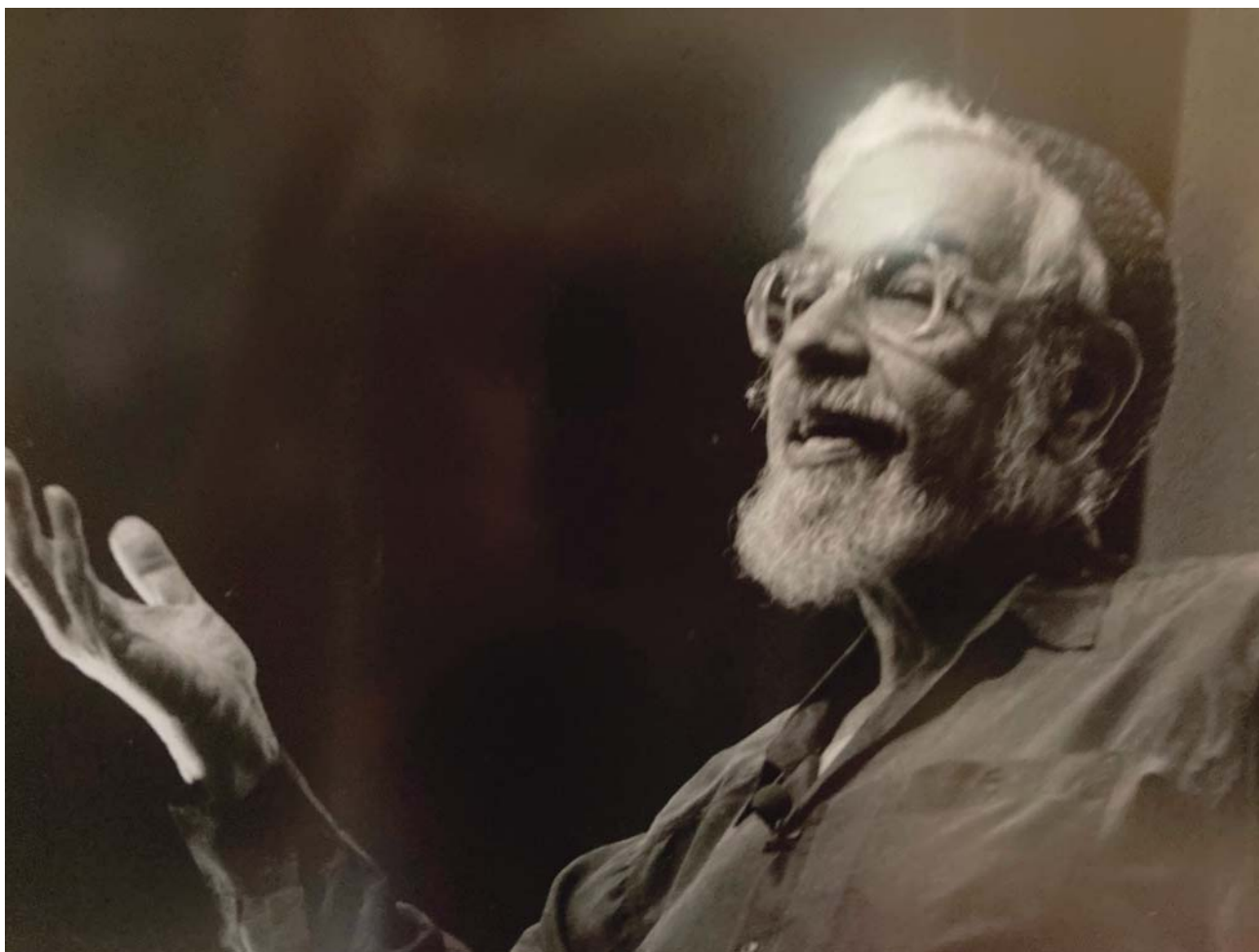
"No. I hadn't heard," I whispered. My teacher, my mentor, my spiritual hero – gone. "I can't talk now. I have no words."

Gone. Reb Zalman, a force of nature no longer with us. No more would he greet me with 'Inalleh' each time we met. No more warm hugs. No more guest appearances at our synagogue in Chicago. Yet he was and will be with us always. Reb Zalman infected all of us.

'Reb' is a term of endearment and respect. He would have celebrated his 90th birthday in August, 2014. The huge gathering planned in Boulder, Colorado, would become a memorial service. I had met him in Florida at the first *Age-ing to Sage-ing*® seminar presentation. His book had just come on the market. Most of us were residents of Orlando and knew one another, but we represented a mixture of religious and social backgrounds. Reb Zalman created an easy atmosphere that encouraged participation and group safety. It was Friday afternoon when the seminar opened...the eve of Shabbat. He began the evening service by asking us to drape a prayer shawl over our heads to create our own private sanctuary...our personal sacred space. Then he began to chant in that rich melodic voice. His energy infused the sacred music of the ceremony and, for the first time in my life, I knew that Spirit was present. Tears filled my eyes, and I smiled wanting to laugh out loud with the joy of it. Reb Zalman won my heart, but he also introduced me to my deeper self.

His book put me on solid ground. It escorted me down the path of examining my life, put me in touch with my deeper questions about aging, and offered a road that would lead to understanding my personal relationship

At 87 I find that memories nicely tucked away in my 'Past Events' file are re-emerging with an exclamation point.



Reb Zalman

**His book, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing ... A
Profound New Vision
for Growing Older.***

to the aging process and a desire to share my discoveries with others. So, I trained to be a seminar leader and have been involved in this work since 1999. I used the name of his book, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing,®... A Profound New Vision for Growing Older*, as the title for nine years of monthly essays that I wrote for Montana Woman Magazine. His vision inspired me and influenced more and more of us who will live far into our 80s and 90s. The Reb stood proud as he explained that living thirty years longer places us at the frontier of human development. He challenged us to become elders in a world sorely lacking in wisdom and restraint.

Reb Zalman created an age map to guide us into our elder years consciously, with purpose and spirit. He trained hundreds of us to carry that message to an aging population expanding at lightning speed. His voice, his smile, his laugh, his wisdom and creativity, his commitment to our planet, and his acceptance of all faith expressions infected us.

Born in 1924 in Poland, he and his family escaped the Holocaust and made their way to safety in America. In his last years, he held the World Wisdom Chair at Naropa University, authored countless books, articles, and Internet programs. He chaired hundreds of workshops and training sessions, championed environmental causes, and created a legacy that is still being completed. Reb Zalman's journey through time, space and thought is most

If not for Reb Zalman, I would not be teaching his work and writing stories about aging. Nor would I have laid to rest the pack of troubles that I carried with me for years. I certainly would not have learned to stand in my own power.

remarkable. On a personal level, if not for Reb Zalman, I would not be teaching his work and writing stories about aging. Nor would I have laid to rest the pack of troubles that I carried with me for years. I certainly would not have learned to stand in my own power.

More importantly, were it not for Reb Zalman, my husband would not have returned to the rabbinate after years of being rejected for his creative interpretations of standard prayer services. If not for the Reb, neither of us would have ‘found’ spirituality again. Hundreds of *Sage-ing*® leaders like myself would not be teaching elders to live creatively and encouraging them to build communities of wisdom and peace. The late Dr. Bob Achtley, Past Chairman of the Graduate Department of Gerontology at Naropa, said it best in his article, “Infected by Reb Zalman” – *Yes!* “It is a blessed infection. In the quiet of my office, I hear his voice singing the music that touched my heart. I see his twinkling eyes and feel his presence. I’m bathed in that wonderful smile and generous spirit of his blessed memory.” Me too.

Several months after Reb Zalman passed, we made a trip to Boulder to visit his grave. On a cemetery hilltop sat a huge black marble slab roughly chiselled on three sides. The fourth side is highly polished. Hebrew letters trace his family heritage followed by one sentence in English. “*He loved them to God.*”

The visit did not stop the tears or put a period to my mourning. Now, as the distance of time grows wide, my visions can be transformed into smiles of gratitude and feelings of joy at being privileged to have him in my life. I’ll remove the weight of my loss and replace it with gratitude and precious memories.

Ina Albert, CSL, and member of *Sage-ing*® *International*, is an author and Life Transitions Coach, who has developed and presented *Age-ing to Sage-ing*® seminars since 1999. She co-authored *Write Your Self Well...Journal Your Self to Health*, a journal demonstrating the power of expressive writing. In ‘Granny Greeny Says...Listen Louder’, Ina tells a story about the power of listening louder to young people and elders. During her 35-year career in healthcare communications, she published articles in national healthcare publications. For nine years, she wrote a monthly column about aging for *Montana Woman Magazine*. She contributed a chapter in *The Art of Grief*, and has written numerous articles for internet publications. Ina’s stories appeared in *Hudson Valley Magazine* and *Chicago Parent Magazine*. She also contributed a chapter in *Disquiet Time*, by Cathleen Falsani, and published *The Facts of Life*, a short story, which appeared in *Whitefish Literary Review*. Ina is a founder of *Alpine Theatre Project*, the only Equity theater in northwest Montana, and of *Love Lives Here*, a community organization dedicated to human rights. Ina lives in Whitefish, Montana, with her husband, Rabbi Allen Secher, and their dog, Kugel.

Sage-ing International

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MAKE IT HAPPEN

Kathy Monroe



The origin of the project Makers Studio & Art Market <https://windsormakersstudio.com> came from my strong belief that, with all the benefits our society has realized from technology, they have come at the expense of corresponding costs. As a society we became more mobile. Families no longer remained in one community and skills stopped being passed down through generations. While technology literally connects points around the world, we have become more disconnected socially. At the turn of the twentieth century, we lived in fixed communities. Families remained intact. Members within their communities knew who to approach for their needs. Goods were created locally, not brought to communities via cargo ships. Much like many things from this era, high quality goods were replaced with mass-produced wares that were intended to be easier to acquire and were more disposable by their nature. As technology drove the creation of these goods, the corresponding ability to recreate these items became more distant. A major casualty of this transition to high-speed automation was that individual skill-sets and the pride that comes from creating goods for society and from extending one's knowledge to others within the community was lost. I hold the belief that failing to preserve these individual talents only serves to weaken our society.

My career was spent using my expertise in the financial sector, in factory automation, in identifying "need" niches, and in using my technological expertise to develop products that would create fiscal benefit for the businesses I ran. My responsibility was to the bottom line, rather than to the effects that these products would have on our society. I filled needs with unique products that would generate positive revenue with little concern for the social reaction to these items. My retirement years have been spent shifting the paradigm from generating profitability for my companies to

using my talents to focus on projects that provide societal benefits. Redemption comes in many forms.

Being a lover and supporter of the arts, one of my initial projects was to produce outdoor art fairs to enrich artists while creating opportunities for the public to realize pleasure from having an enjoyable day bereft of technology and filled with social interaction. I managed a score of festivals in my first decade in Nova Scotia and was fortunate to have met thousands of Maritime artists. This engagement led me to consider an even more directed concept project that would create a significant positive impact upon our local community. The result of this project is Makers Studio & Art Market (*Makers*).

Wood workers





Top: weavers
Middle: our birhouses
Above: ceramics

Makers is a constantly evolving community of talented artists and individuals (students) who strive to achieve proficiency in some artistic area. We presently market the goods of over 150 artists in the retail section of our site. The remainder of our footprint is used for individual artist studios and space for instruction. We are situated in a prime retail location in a small community in central Nova Scotia. Our site has seven discrete sections that provide for multiple concurrent activities. We have a large retail section and departments that focus on fabric, fibre, glass, metal, pottery, painting, and woodworking. In its most simplistic form, the facility and much of the equipment and materials necessary for artistic creation is provided.

This has allowed the greater community to form a subculture of makers who regularly meet to share their talents, use this site as their professional studio for the creation of commercial goods, and/or to use as a venue to offer classes. The latter two uses provide our makers with income streams without their need to cover our overhead. Our consignment rate is the lowest in the industry (20%), again with the purpose of creating the greatest possible revenue for those artists who choose to use our site for production, sales of goods, and instruction in their respective areas of expertise.

Makers has delivered many remarkable results:

- The spreading of our core values. Those who participate at *Makers* soon recognize that we believe in skills sharing and trust that the rising tide floats all boats. There has been an unselfish attitude fostered among our makers where negative competitiveness among artists of a common genre does not exist. Instead, there is a cooperative process that aids growth through positive interactions. Collaboration is encouraged as we endeavour to deliver unique offerings to both the market and to our students.

- The mental health results of this project. Our retail site is fully operated by volunteers. We actively seek the skills of artists and community members to keep our offerings fresh. We are a mix of casual artists, recent graduates, seasoned artists, and retirees. The group that has typically been overlooked in the arts community has been its retired members. Seniors at *Makers* soon realize that their expertise and their engagement is highly valued. It has been incredibly rewarding to witness the emergence of our seniors, in particular, as they realize how needed, respected, and honoured they are by our community. We realize a tremendous benefit by having them share their wealth of knowledge and expertise, as it has been earned over time and is sought by so many. The benefits they impart to others is returned to them in multiples. Their involvement with *Makers* provides them with an additional income stream from the sale of their goods and/or from their instruction.



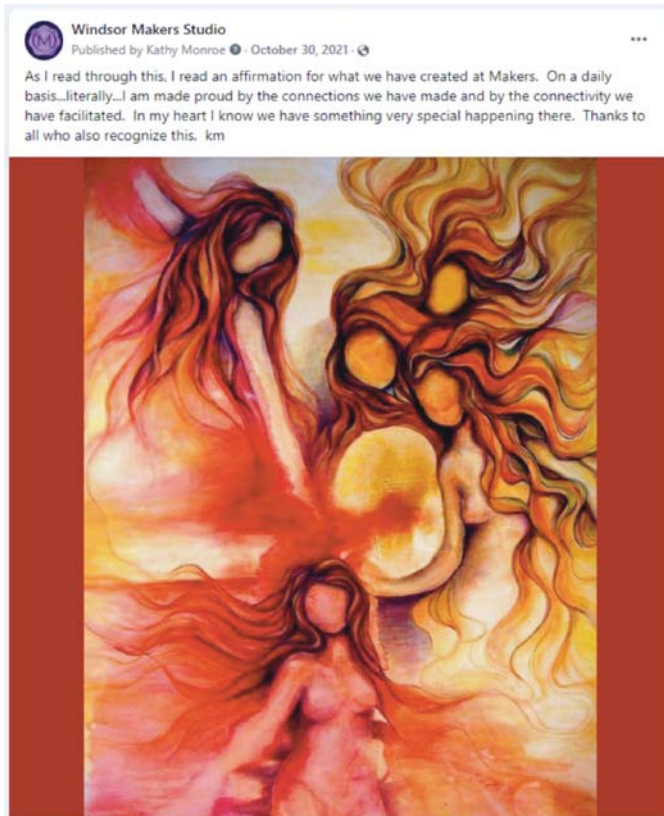
Top: accessorize
Above: drawing

We receive raw materials, we create products while educating students, and we return finished goods back to our community.

This happens while they are in front of (or beside) others who possess common interests. The sharing goes far beyond the steps to create their respective art, for it develops relationships that have been lost to time, lost to technology, and most recently, lost to a pandemic. To say that *Makers* was lifesaving for many during these last years would be an understatement. It is a comment that has been heard with great regularity and is, perhaps, the source of my greatest pride for I know too well the sincerity in the words of those who have delivered these comments.

- The closing of the giving circle. By this, I refer to the reality that most of our materials and much of our equipment has been received as donations. We use these donations to advance the skills of our members. The goods that are created are then returned to the community where they hold value. One example of this closing of the circle is in our fabric department. We take in donations, often from families who have lost an elder. These goods are prepared (washed, ironed, folded, sorted, and prepped for projects) and then used as teaching materials for those wishing to improve their sewing skills. Their finished products then go into boxes of goods to be delivered to local institutions, be they walker caddies that go out to nursing homes or chemo caps that go to oncology departments. It is truly a win-win-win situation that puts everything to use and prevents volumes of materials from going into the waste-stream. We receive raw materials, we create products while educating students, and we return finished goods back to our community.

- Observations on how the success of this location has had a positive effect upon the greater business community. Our artists reach out to our local businesses to work collaboratively to create greater awareness of our community and its rich offerings. Success is infectious and there is definitely a resurgence of positive activity within this community today...activity that did not exist when we initiated this concept project. We have been approached by many visitors from other areas who express their desire that this project be replicated in their home community. I can think of no better way to energize a community than to repeat this development in every region. It has created a sense of local pride. It has provided to those with specific talents a method of generating additional income. It has caused (encouraged, forced) people to meet their neighbours...literally. It has created a more self-sufficient and sustainable community in that there is now a recognition of those within our community who can be approached for assistance.



One of my original goals in starting *Makers* was to provide transformational energy to a community that had gone stale, for lack of a better expression. I have long felt that many societal problems can be reversed once that *golden thread* is identified and pulled to release existing community tension. While I had no interest in opening a business in my retirement years, I did see the potential for using *Makers* as a vehicle to (re)grow this community. I run *Makers* as a business, but it operates far more like a cooperative. I use my business acumen to inform artists of basic business decisions that will allow them to realize greater profitability. From my perspective, *Makers* has been that golden thread that has brought cooperation, willingness, curiosity, positivity, confidence, creativity, satisfaction, connection, vision, optimism, altruism, collaboration, and kindness back to this community. And it will not end here. The evolution will continue until the many additional aspects of this transformation are given their time to develop. Stay tuned!

Kathy Monroe retired to Nova Scotia in 2008, after a successful run as a corporate CEO at Wisconsin-based companies that provided electronic transactional services to U.S. businesses. This position came after a stint of factory floor automation services that was preceded by a long career at a significant financial institution where she used her expertise to drive the massive projects during the era of consolidation in the banking industry. Once in N.S., Kathy became a leading breeder of a rare equine, the Norwegian Fjord, and created a vineyard to participate in Nova Scotia's burgeoning wine industry. She was instrumental in the consolidation of local municipalities and devoted a term as a municipal councillor. Her to-do list is still long.
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LOVE AND POETRY

IN TIMES OF WAR

Susan McCaslin



Poetry, music, and visual art are essential in times of war, as they present through imagery, musicality, storytelling, and craft, a sense of how we are more than self-centred egos on a war plain.

How can one act from a state of love in a time of war? Throughout history there have been continuous conflicts among humans – wars between individuals, tribes, city states, and nations. Much of human art depicts these battlefields arising from brutal clashes of self-interest – from the *Bhagavad Gita* to Homer’s *Iliad*, to Shakespeare’s history plays, to name only a few. Such works of art and poetry explore how decency and right actions can endure in perilous times. Homer’s epic is not a glorification of war but a story of how war creates tragic losses on both sides. Great art emphasizes our interdependence with our fellow humans, with the non-human creatures and life forms – indeed our oneness with Gaia, planet earth as well as the vast star fields.

Poetry, music, and visual art are essential in times of war, as they present through imagery, musicality, storytelling, and craft, a sense of how we are more than self-centred egos on a war plain, hating and othering others, descending into monstrous modes of being, eradicating our connection to the real, the core of presence and higher consciousness. Even in times of warfare humans can sow seeds of loving acts that will become mother trees, sheltering and nurturing what novelist and poet Joy Kogawa has called “the arc of goodness.”

At the end of *The Iliad*, the Greek hero Achilles is lost in a rage because the Trojan hero Hector killed Achilles’ beloved companion Patroclus in battle. In revenge, Achilles desecrates Hector’s body by tying it to the back of his chariot and dragging it three times around the walls of Troy. Yet when Achilles awakens from his fit, he steals secretly by night to the tent of the Trojan King Priam and returns Hector’s body to the grieving father for a proper burial. It is clear in the context that Achilles loses his true self in his rage but regains it to some extent through his gesture. Here two leaders, one young, one old, acknowledge each other’s humanity on common ground, even if only for a few brief moments.

Poets like Homer, William Blake, and W.B. Yeats are poet-prophets who spoke truth to power and called out injustice. So are Ukrainian poets Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) and proto-feminist Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913). In the words of Stéphane Mallarmé echoed by T.S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets*, poets have the ability to “purify the language of the tribe” which the politics of power constantly debases. Poetry reveals through the mythopoetic imagination that people carry deep within themselves a hidden capacity to probe



Left: Taras Shevchenko, Ukrainian Poet (1814-1861)

Right: Lesya Ukrainka, Ukrainian Poet (1871-1913)

35.



the darkness, transform darkness into light, and to enter the mysteries of both planet Earth and of the cosmos.

Poets in times of war are often tricksters living in liminal or borderline places and states of being. Every culture has its trickster figures – Hermes, Raven, or the Ukrainian goddess Mara, associated with the death and rebirth of nature as well as the transformative magic of dreams. The trickster gods and goddesses are smarter and more versatile than the autocratic gods or the thugs of history because they transcend the constricted narratives of those who seek absolute control. The world's war-broken statues,

sculptures, and monuments bespeak human destructiveness; yet out of the ruins new voices arise. The shape-changing potential of art is part of its enduring beauty.

We cannot control the greed and self-centredness of the autocrats and dictators. Yet mass killers and war criminals eventually burn out, destroying their own souls. In Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the wind from the fallen angel Satan's wings are experienced in the upper regions of hell as punishing fire. Yet in the deepest abyss Satan himself is locked up to his chest in ice, a slobbering, mindless, sub-human entity isolated from the life-giving whole through his own self-will. The killers and dictators of the world are not punished by an omnipotent deity but enter the state of narrow, isolated consciousness they have chosen. Yet why they are able to create so much havoc and cause so much suffering is a conundrum we may not be able to answer this side of time. Like Job on the dung hill, we may question and even experience the wonders and mysteries of what extends beyond our current knowing. Yet theological answers wrapped in a tidy box are clearly insufficient.

Like the greening power of spring that the twelfth century German mystic Hildegard of Bingen called *viriditas*, love, beauty, goodness, justice and hope burst forth again and again. Love has a longer, deeper, wider, infinite trajectory, and we are part of this timeless flow if we open ourselves to it. The smallest acts of kindness have impacts we cannot imagine. The divine spirit deep within each of us has the capacity to lead us to new openings where we may drink from fountains of healing and renewal and turn to the service of the greater whole.

I'd like to close with a poem I wrote in response to the current war in Ukraine which is part of a series in progress titled *Kyivan Chants*:

**Love has a longer,
deeper, wider, infinite
trajectory, and we are
part of this timeless
flow if we open
ourselves to it.**



Top: Gustave Doré's, illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, "Lucifer, King of Hell"
 Above: William Blake's Satan from his illustrations to Dante's *Inferno*, Circle 9, Canto 34

Oligarchs

Dictators lost in ego and lust for power
 exclude themselves from community

exile themselves from the arc of song,
 beauty spiraling in plants, seashells, neurons, galaxies,

isolate themselves so completely
 they can extinguish their souls.

For eons the few have risen to power
 herding and manipulating the many.

Why are those who have grown monstrous
 able to wreak such pain on the innocent?

Yet in places of unknowing, poets spring to action
 to help friends and strangers fallen on the road.

"Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets,"
 sang William Blake, who spoke his truth to power.

Susan McCaslin is a B.C. poet residing outside Fort Langley, B.C., who has published sixteen volumes of poetry, including her most recent, *Heart Work* (Ekstasis Editions, 2020). A chapbook, *Cosmic Egg*, came out through the Alfred Gustav Press in 2021. When not writing, reading, and being with family, Susan can be found practising yoga or walking with her dog Rosie along the Fraser River, better known to the Kwantlen First Nations as the Stó:lô. Susan initiated the Han Shan Poetry Project in 2012, which used poetry to help save an endangered forest in Glen Valley near her home. Currently she has been involved in helping to organize an online poetry reading for Ukraine that took place on April 2, 2022 called "Poets in Response to Peril," which has been followed up by the anthology *Poems in Response to Peril* (editors, Penn Kemp & Richard Sitoski).

THROUGH THE DOOR

Sheila Drummond



Spanish Door



Years ago, in a coffee shop in Medicine Hat, I came across a handmade card featuring a quote attributed to Flannery O'Connor: "I write to know what I think." "Yes," I thought. "That is exactly right." I bought the card and put it in a special place that I can no longer find.

As a young person, up until my university years, I kept a journal, going so far as to imitate Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* by having different journals to explore the different areas of my life. When university ended, I let it all go. For years after that – decades even – I wrote personal letters, reports for work, and emails. That was all. My sister-in-law once remarked upon the number of books about writing I had on my bookshelf: books by Anne Lamott, Natalie Goldberg, Stephen King. Truly, I read much more about writing than I ever wrote during those later years. Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* especially called to me, with her insistence that anyone – everyone – can write. Get yourself a notebook, said Natalie, a writing instrument that feels good in your hand, and something to act as a timer. I loved the final words of her preface: "Now, please, go. Write your asses off." But still I felt unable, not up to the task, afraid.

Fast forward to 2020. Shortly before I retired, I bought a small painting of a door (*Spanish Door* by Frances Pelletier). The door was closed but seemed redolent of possibilities, symbolizing all the things I might do in my retirement. It spoke of challenges and the unknown.

A few months into COVID and my retirement, the opportunity to take an online writing class presented itself. The teacher appeared to have been schooled in the ways of Natalie Goldberg. I took the class and then three more, interspersed by weekly writing hours with the other students. After decades of not knowing how (despite lots of advice from that part of my bookshelf), it was as though someone (Susan Walsh) reached out her hand and said, "Here. We can do this together. I'll show you how. It'll be okay." And it was.

Susan's class was that rich, red door. The classes gave birth to a community of writers like me. Some were there for part of the journey; others, for the whole ride. Each person was creative and supportive of all the others. With that support, I wrote the creative nonfiction piece that follows. During those writing sessions with others, and on my own, I had largely avoided writing about incidents or memories that were painful, simply opting not to go there. One day, I followed a suggestion by Natalie Goldberg to write about something that I had avoided writing about, taking the time necessary – days, weeks or even months – to get it all down. I decided to write about the last

We brought an old photograph album from her room and I was amazed to discover what she remembered.

Agnes at 20



time I saw my 92-year-old mother, sensing on that visit that I would not see her again. The memory was painful, but also bittersweet, infused as it was with love. I was surprised to discover how much I looked forward to getting back to that writing day after day, allowing my memory to roam through visits during those final years and then all the way back to the recollections and impressions of my youth. How well does a person know even someone she knows well? The answer is surely ‘partially.’ My earliest memories of my mother were of a woman in her 40s. For me, her life before then was the stuff of story and photographs. I am now the age she was when I kept my university-aged journals, and I’m appreciating for the first time how much this person who was known to me was unknown by me. In choosing to write about my mother as I knew and didn’t know her, I had opened a door and walked through it.

Agnes, as I Knew Her

she was the reader
 the cryptic crossword puzzle doer
 the Blue Jays fan
 the watcher of Masterpiece Theatre on PBS and
 of Another World on weekdays at 3
 she was the auditor of university courses like
 Russian Literature doing
 all of the readings and none of the assignments
 “I’m lazy,” she said on more than one occasion

The shock we felt, one day, when Mom mentioned on a phone call that Dad had gone out for a walk. Silence, then – carefully, gently – “Mom, Dad died last month.” A brief silence on her end and then, in a quiet voice, “I know.” We learned to change the subject or somehow distract her when she spoke as though he were still alive.

Her final home was a long-term care residence in Kingsville, the southernmost town in all of Canada. When I visited during Ontario’s long, warm months, we sat outside under hazy skies, the air so saturated you could see it. On rainy days, we parked ourselves by a fish tank in the atrium, taking in the smooth movements of the fish and the sound of the tank bubbling and dripping. On one such day we brought an old photograph album from her room and I was amazed to discover what she remembered. “Who was this, Mom?” “He was my boyfriend,” or “That was our neighbour on Mulcaster Street,” and then “I loved that dress. It was blue.” And I believed her about all of this.

Art and Agnes



she was the bridge player
 the needle pointer
 the slow eater
 the coffee drinker
 the enjoyer of her Sunday Manhattan

We visited our mother during what was to be her last January. She didn't speak a lot but seemed relaxed, content. Was she able to keep us straight, know who was who? It didn't matter; we were her daughters, she was our mother.

Young Agnes



and speaking of Sunday
she was the Mass-goer
the one who knelt by her side of the bed before getting in
the one with a rosary under her pillow to make good use of bouts of insomnia

We visited our mother during what was to be her last January. She didn't speak a lot but seemed relaxed, content. Was she able to keep us straight, know who was who? It didn't matter; we were her daughters, she was our mother. That was enough.

I dreaded that last morning when we would have to leave, each of us saying goodbye in her room at the last possible moment. "I love you, Mom," and whatever else we could think to say. After our final words and embraces, we left the building and looked for the window of her room. There, we waved as cheerfully as we could, and she waved back, each consoling the other. We turned and walked unseeing to the car. She died one month later.

but here's what I don't know -
did she ever have doubts during those long years of faith?
regrets?
what were her feelings about her step-mother and the
father who cried at her wedding because she was marrying a Protestant?

don't know
will never know

Sheila Drummond reads and writes in St. Albert, Alberta. Following a rewarding career in academic and public libraries, she's pursuing a life-long interest in writing inspired, in part, by the work of Natalie Goldberg. When not writing, Sheila might be gardening, quilting, doing genealogical research, volunteering, spending time with family, and enjoying the many gifts of retirement. She can be reached at sheila.drummond85@gmail.com.

EMBRACING 85

AGE-ING ... SAGE-ING AND ... ENGAGE-ING



Gloria Wallace

Age-ing

A deep nudge for inner peace visited me right in the middle of our endless pandemic. Deeply aware, I realized I existed in a life stage totally different from anything I had ever encountered. At 85, I am tired of the current confusion, extremism, hate, rigid patterns and cemented thoughts about humanity, political issues, and our democracy.

The life I lived and navigated for years, step by step, was and is disappearing. I have been disconnected from friends, previous connections, commitments, yet deep down I still know how to move forward: I know people like to meet, share their lives, and pursue new ways of living and being. The internet offers us this open forum for sharing and age-ing.

Fortunately, amid my frustrations, my deeper intuitive self showed up...perhaps my soul is kicking in, informing me of new alternatives. How do I reframe myself and recruit ideas that will resurrect energy to move forward? In those quiet moments, when my inner advisor stepped in, I recognized it was time to take a deep dive into making peaceful coherence within me. I could shed old thoughts about mistakes, say goodbye to embedded distressing internal saboteurs that continued to annoy me. This would be a chance to review my life with its surprises, hidden desires, accomplishments, and an opportunity to regroup my contentment, gratitude, and joy.

As elders, we acknowledge we have learned a lot and are quite willing to share our wisdom with the upcoming generations. Astute in many ways, we recognize and like to share our growth among the ongoing needs of others.

Sage-ing

This unexpected jump into my inner journey involved a readiness to revisit, wrestle, and own all of me...the strengths and the weaknesses in how I've lived my life...such honesty would be a challenge. I plunged into my life review, revisiting patterns, acknowledging the mountain tops, dipping into the valleys, the challenges. I became willing to face corrections of past incidents. I found I personally ignored things where I wish I had paid attention, celebrated where I wish I had stayed quiet, stepped in when I could have stepped back.

It's hard to accept and share one's mistakes but monitoring my nature and character has moved me to a higher bar that has bought important wisdom. I recognize how important achievement and success has been to me as I have succeeded in obtaining advanced degrees, licensures and credentials as a psychologist, therapist, group facilitator, and leadership coach. I was learning to adapt and stand up for who I am. I recognize I unknowingly

This unexpected jump into my inner journey involved a readiness to revisit, wrestle, and own all of me.

navigated my life path with creativity, resilience, insight, remaining organized and forward looking,

I have been strong and adaptive, married 64 years to one man. I was a good enough competent mother who raised four sons, sadly losing one at age 21 to a seizure while 3 have grown into successful adult lives. I matured as a trailing spouse who moved often and learned how to reinvent myself many times. I was engaged as our family gained confidence when we arrived and grew in new communities, where we found amazing new friends and emergent focuses. Attachment to Human Development has been my life pursuit, seeking deep learning about personality, relationships and family health as well as learning a lot about myself.

My personal tendency has possessed the drive of “hurry up”. That may have been a plus many years ago when I was in the thick of working, raising sons, staying on top of our home, and was married to a man who was a worldwide traveller with his work. Hurry Up is certainly not a bar I want to embrace at this stage of my life. In my middle years between 30 and 70, I was always curious as well as interested in life itself. Too often, I accepted and took on more responsibility where I should have just said no... primarily to myself.

Our household... “Five guys and me” ...we all loved to camp...that is tent camp. Often, we drove long distances to national and state parks in our overloaded station wagon (6 of us) jammed with enough food and supplies to get us through a weekend or a week. Life with all these males was not a life in which I had grown up...I had one sister six years younger than I and loads of aunts and girl cousins in our family gatherings when we lived in a Chicago area suburb. People have always interested me, so it has always been easy for me to connect, and I’ve had the privilege of having lots of friends in my life. I realize in my early life I was rather bossy and directive at times. I don’t like thinking about that much except... I learned to lead and direct early on. My overbearing style never worked out too well especially if I tried to lie or “cover something up” ...I am happy I learned to drop that early in my life.

I didn’t miss much in my involved personal and family life, but I did miss times of savouring certain stages...time with family, hanging out more with each of my sons, our friends...times that can never be re-created or retrieved...sweet times filled with heart and creativity that could have been much stronger. My first paid work started in parent education when I was in my 30s. I learned so much and wished I had received more education as a parent before I jumped into parenting. At mid-life, I learned more about life, aging, pregnancy, birthing, welcoming a sacred child, and family development. Information like that wasn’t offered in the 1960s. I continue to wrestle with stages of ignorance and how important information, therapy, coaching, support, direction, and friendships are as we move through many stages of life.

My mother used to say, “Gloria, will you please slow down?” I didn’t always pay attention to her directions, but I wish I had paid more attention

Hurry Up is certainly not a bar I want to embrace at this stage of my life.

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Times that can never be re-created or retrieved ... sweet times filled with heart and creativity that could have been much stronger.

Part of our collective job is to keep people involved, starting with ourselves and then with each other.

I see this Journal as a place for me to write with others, tell my story, deepen my courage to speak, and encourage others to trust themselves.

to my pace, my seduction to parts of life I could have skipped or deleted. I certainly was efficient at creating new realities, sustaining an interesting life as well as letting go of realities that no longer served me.

As you can imagine, I was long overdue in securing reflective time that inspired me to look at smarter ways I could have handled certain episodes in very different ways. Taking time for myself is a gift where I continue to find contentment recognizing the strength in introspection. Without doubt, I have gained wisdom living a long life that fills me with gratitude. I also learned to take advantage of isolated silent time to empower and reinforce who I am.

Engage-ing

Looking to the future, my tendency is to look to light, kindness, character, enlightenment, new beginnings. Softening my heart means staying connected with humanity, the world, our communities, our climate, our planet. We all need to be prepared to face and deal with emotions, distortions, transformations, thoughts, history, polarities, life itself.

As I talk to myself and share my inner diary, I want us to stay alert, conscious and forward looking. We all need ways to see and navigate life as it is, then assess what we as individuals, groups, or a community can contribute. We look at sustaining internal balance, setting boundaries, owning personal responsibility, monitoring health, energy, and discerning what pace of life works best.

Part of our collective job is to keep people involved, starting with ourselves and then with each other. Joining or gathering people together to talk about their ideas, wants and needs is key. Where do I go for recovery? What did I do with myself at this age? Who is the real me? Can I find my lost parts and put them together again? Can I still transform myself? How do I find a way to deal with different views?

I see this Journal as a place for me to write with others, tell my story, deepen my courage to speak, and encourage others to trust themselves. I invite you to join me. We can...we will... create and speak up for a world as we share our hearts and the wisdom we have gained.

“Toto – I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore”

Dorothy, in *The Wizard of Oz*

Gloria Wallace is a *Psychologist Emeritus, Minneapolis, Minnesota,*
“It is an honor to be one of your messengers today.” <77wallacemn@gmail.com>

FOUR WAYS TO CREATE

IN TURBULENT TIMES

Bonnie Hutchinson



World news is mostly not filled with joy. That's not news! And of course, we've all been through two-plus years of pandemic and it's not really over yet. That's not news either.

All those external stressors are on top of whatever challenges might be going on in your personal life.

This is not a trivial thing. In challenging times, it's not just the energy it takes to cope with external challenges. It's also that the need to keep slogging can simply wear us out and grind us down.

Here are four ideas you might find helpful to replenish your energy, uplift your mood and tap into your inner wellspring of resilience and – dare I say it? – joyful creativity.

ADD A TOUCH OF BEAUTY

“A few years ago, pre-pandemic, six friends gathered for dinner and conversation. Our hostess had Stargazer lilies. What a treat!”

Lilies – especially Stargazer lilies – are among my favourite flowers. To see them was pure delight. The lilies lit up the room. Their scent permeated. They definitely enhanced the pleasure of our dinner and conversation. As we left, our hostess gave each of us a lily flower that had not yet opened. “Put it in a glass of water beside your bed,” she said. “When you wake up it will be open and you'll have that wonderful smell.” So I did.

The first morning the lily had opened just slightly but I could smell that lovely scent. I smiled and carried on with the activities of the day. On the second morning the lily had opened. It was glorious. The scent was stronger. I carried it into the kitchen; smiled at it over breakfast; took it with me as I moved to my office. Later that day I hosted an online webinar. Front and centre in my line of vision, the lily was smiling back at me as I spoke. I carried the lily from room to room so I could see it while I moved from one activity to another. Every time I flicked my eyes in the direction of the lily, I smiled. The lily lifted my heart and spirit and increased my optimism. Such a gift!

WITH MACRO INTENT

A few days before that dinner with friends, I'd been reading a book called *In Times of Terror, Wage Beauty* by Mark Gonzales. I'd been thinking about the state of the world, and how our thoughts and emotions are impacted by unsettling and traumatic world events, even when we're not directly affected by the events. I'd been thinking about how to stay sane and healthy even

Replenish your energy, uplift your mood and tap into your inner wellspring of resilience and – dare I say it? – joyful creativity.

when some things in the world seem insane. Perhaps like you, sometimes I feel powerless and discouraged in the face of events that seem appalling to me, but over which I have no influence whatsoever.

In his book, *In Times of Terror, Wage Beauty*, Mark Gonzales talks about how we might feel that we cannot do much, but we have more power than we know. This quote stopped me cold, and reverberated for days:

“...even if your contribution to a better world seems like a small step, never doubt the power of a micro-strategy done with macro-intent.”

Macro-intent? What a concept! We can do macro-intent. However tiny our direct impact may seem, we are absolutely capable of having a macro-intent, as in “be a positive presence in the world” or “contribute to highest good” – even when we don’t know what the highest good is.

When I remember that one tiny lily, I also remember all the ways it enhanced my week. Our hostess’s “macro-intent” was to bring some pleasure to her friends. The lily did so much more than that. I also remember the African saying: “If you think you’re too small to make a difference, spend a night with a mosquito.”

PLAY THREE TO ONE ODDS

You’ve probably noticed, as I have, that lots of mass media coverage is a tad dismal. The state of the world, the state of the economy, the state of the environment, the state of governments – and for the past few years, the state of the pandemic – none of it feels like good news. Fear is in the air. Anger and bitterness are often loud.

Yet really – even now, with turbulent events in the world – even the poorest among us are living better lives than most humans did for millennia. We are safer, with more advantages and conveniences, fewer hardships and injustices than most of our ancestors. How come it doesn’t feel that way? There might be a clue in something I read.

Caroline Adams Miller, author of *Creating Your Best Life*, wrote, “In order to flourish, whether in a marriage, at work or in any other type of environment, you need three positive comments or interactions for every one negative. If you listen to the news, we’re so far below three-to-one it’s staggering.” Three positives for every negative? Three to one odds?

When I first read that, it was daunting. But then I thought, we could use that information in a practical way. For example, we could pay attention to when we’re thinking dark thoughts or saying dark things. As soon as we notice we’re in “bitter” or “depressed” or “anxious” or “grumpy” territory, we could choose to say or think three positive things. If nothing else, stopping to think of three positive things breaks the negativity trance. That in itself is a benefit.

INVOKE THE SPIRIT OF CREATIVITY

Recently I noticed I was feeling resentful about a minor incident. I’d felt patronized and brushed off when a much younger person said, “There you

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And when you tap into your own strength, resilience and creative SAGEING spirit, THAT changes everything. In times of terror, wage joyful creativity!

go, Dear,” and turned away. I knew the other person didn’t intend to be condescending but I couldn’t stop thinking about the incident.

My mature rational mind understood that the intensity of my resentment was way out of scope for the tiny incident. I was also thinking about the SAGE-ING journal and its focus on creativity. I sat with my journal and wrote:

“Dear Creativity, how can I stop resenting when someone calls me ‘Dear’ in a way that feels patronizing?”

The answer came in a flash.

“Pretend the person meant it. You ARE dear. Fill yourself with how dear you are. Yes, you really ARE dear.”

And here is what I experienced next.

When you are filled with your DEARness, there is no room for resentment.

Thank you, Dear Creativity!

AND THE POINT IS...

None of these “creative joy-maker” ideas will change the external stressors in your life or in the world. What they may do is raise your energy, tap into your inner resilience and lift your spirit.

And when you tap into your own strength, resilience and creative SAGE-ING spirit, THAT changes everything.

In times of terror, wage joyful creativity!

After careers as a graphic artist, teacher, community developer and consultant to non-profit organizations, **Bonnie Hutchinson** now helps people in their 50s, 60s and 70s to tap into their deepest inner wisdom and make this the most fulfilling phase of their lives. As a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, she is keen on helping to raise humanity’s vibration for future generations.

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PROSED TO ARTFUL EXPRESSION



Tenneson Woolf

It continues to amaze me how even the most mundane of descriptions, when prosed, can create artful expression and more animated encounter. The way that words can pop to nuanced meaning. The way that line breaks can create line breaths. The way that phrases can come alive, with slightest of spotlight.

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It continues to amaze me how even the most simple of photos, when prompted, can animate life and wonder. The way that paths and crevices can illuminate journey. The way that color can blend the near and the far. The way that vistas can stretch imagination.

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Near Lumsden, Saskatchewan by Tenneson Woolf

The way
that vistas can stretch
imagination.

Tenneson Woolf, for all his life, has been a person with as much interest in the unseen as the seen, leading him to a professional life of facilitating groups, leading workshops, teaching, and more recently, writing. All of which invite relationships with wisdom and soulfulness, to create deeper connection and insightful learning. His first published poetry collection, *A Cadence of Despair: Poems and Reflections on Heartbreak, Loss and Renewal* (CentreSpoke, 2020), has now been followed by *Most Mornings* (Centrespoke, 2022). Originally from Edmonton, Alberta, Tenneson now lives in a small town where urban meets rural in Lindon, Utah, in a valley at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains. He can be reached at www.tennesonwoolf.com.

Creativity lives within us. And I believe, wants to grow, sometimes through simple 'prosing'. Creativity lives within us. And I believe, heralds healing. Creativity lives within us. And I believe, calls us to love, hearts aged, yet awakened, once again.

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SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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

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

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