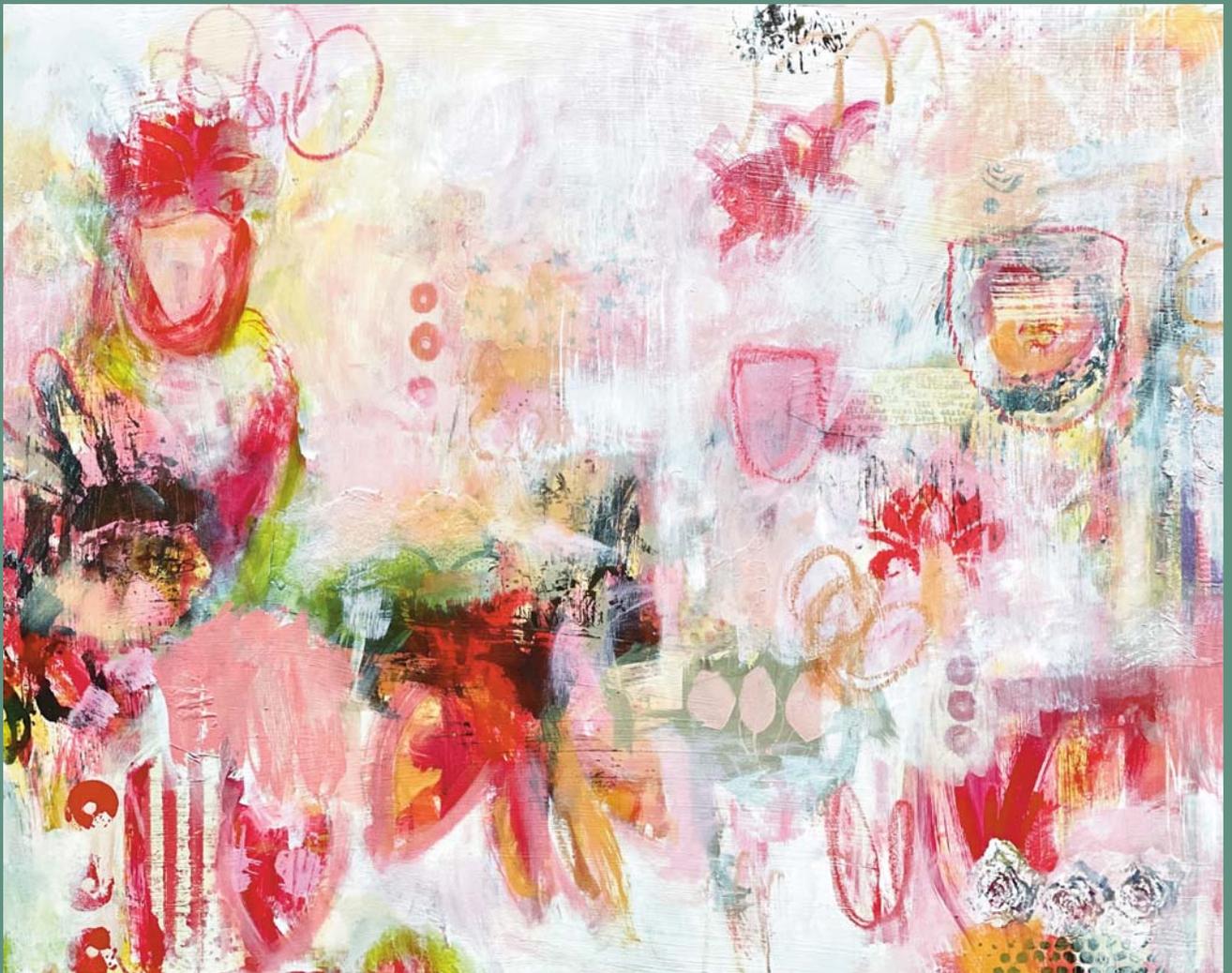


THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE
NUMBER 48, SPRING 2024

KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.
ONLINE AT www.sageing.ca

FROM THE EDITORS

Laura Foster, The Journal's new assistant editor, and I have watched a very heartfelt issue emerge as we've received articles from a 'World Wide Web' of submissions. The theme: "Whoever has eyes, let them feel." has many interpretations and encourages a realization of how creative expression fosters connection and compassion. The dream of the Journal has been to evolve a virtual community sharing and celebrating imagination as each explores creative spirit and how it has manifested for them. In his recently published book *The Compassionate Imagination: How the Arts Are Central to a Functioning Democracy* Canada's Max Wyman, a former president of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, asks what might be possible if we integrate the creative imagination into our responses to the great social challenges we face. Think of Einstein's quote, "Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." In our way The Journal strives to march with Max on this mission. In BUTTERFLY METAPHORS Laura shares growing understanding that "creativity is how we begin to make sense of the world we are born into as infants and can continue to assist understanding throughout our lives." By opening the eyes of our hearts, our creative spirits soar, understanding deepens and we evolve together as compassion grows. IMMORTALITY IN NIGERIA gives expression to Solape Adeyemi's sense of "a narrative intricately woven with threads of tradition and resilience" in her country. In POKEWEED, A JOURNAL OF DISCOVERY, Joanne Grumet explains how through writing poems and songs, evolved from her observations, she has discovered what is real for her and for others as well. As "I paused to watch a horned lizard" Cynthia Bernard pays attention to the insight gained during MY FREQUENT WANDERER AWARD and how by writing poetry she as well has opened to herself and others. Susan Fish's most recent book *Renaissance* was an excellent read and so believable as a 'real life experience'. Yet her article WRITING FICTION IS A KIND OF INNER WORK gives pause to consider her process: "Fiction is not thinly veiled memoir. It's an artistic way of exploring the questions that haunt you." "Every day, photography

offers me new eyes with which to see and a new way to express my love for the world," enthuses Katie Hughbanks in PICTURING A NEW PASSION. She'll make you want to grab your camera too. RUNNING FROM WHAT'S COMFORTABLE is how Jim Demchuk describes the joy he has found in painting – "a mindfulness approach" that expands his vision. As Penn Kemp reflects on her artist father, she describes his similar search as SEARCHING FOR HIS ORIGINAL FACE... There are so many ways of looking with the heart at our relationships, "We find ourselves mirrored and reflected in and by the other, and grow and expand," explains Antoinette Voûte Roeder in THE ART OF RELATIONSHIP. Patti Edmon shares how turning to her art as she struggled with an autoimmune illness leads to BLOSSOMING INTO MEANING, PASSION AND PURPOSE. "Undaunted by the magnitude of the mess", Sharon McMullan-Baron lightheartedly shares her task of SPRING CLEANING IN JANUARY. Opening readers to her Forest Studio in MOMENTS OF DISCOVERY Susan Burnham Neilson invites readers to feel her 'knowing' that by imaginatively celebrating belonging and noticing connections we achieve perception, compassion and hope, "experiences of wonder that bring us all together."

Imaginative celebration of how you connect with compassion to yourself, your environment or each other through creative spirit is our theme for the June issue of The Journal. Let us explore how we'll journey together in joining Max Wyman's call for *The Compassionate Imagination*, to advance us into this millennium.

– Karen Close and Laura Foster

Karen Close invites you to listen to the podcast of her experiences in *The Art of Creative Sage-ing*. Visit ELLIPSES THINKING #34 <https://ellipseshtinking.libsyn.com/>

HOW TO SUBMIT

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

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.**

WHO WE ARE

Karen Close, Editor,

taught English and Visual Arts for 30 years. Retirement in 1995 gave her the opportunity to meet vibrant senior Canadian artists and to hear their stories.



Indigenous cultures teach us, "All Elders have medicine—physical, emotional, musical, story. Let's give our unique medicine to the world." In 2011, believing in the medicine inherent in creative expression, Karen began editing the free online arts and aging journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. She is the author of two books. *Unfinished Women: Seeds From My Friendship With Reva Brooks* and *The Spirit of Kelowna: A Celebration of Art and Community* profiles a community art project in Kelowna, BC. In January, 2015 Woodlake Publishing released *Creative Aging: Stories from the Pages of the Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. Karen is the recipient of the 2016 City of Kelowna Honour In The Arts award.



Johanna Beyers, Copy Editor, is a poet and mixed media artist. She began her career as a marine paleontologist, and holds a PhD in environmental policy

and a Master's of Social Work. She is a certified sandplay therapist. Johanna is the author of *Sandbar Islands* (The Caitlin Press, 1988) and *Wearing my Feathered Hat* (Wind Oak & Dove, 2013). Her work has been published in *The Capilano Review*, *Sage-ing*, *Room of One's Own*, *CV2*, *Waves*, and elsewhere. She has been copy-editor for *Sage-ing* since 2018.

Laura D. Foster, Assistant Editor,

is an artist, registered art therapist and clinical counselor working with clients in her private practice, *Foster Art and Wellness*, newly located in Kelowna, B.C. Laura has always loved to create art. She completed a visual art and design diploma program at Red Deer College, after which she pursued a career in graphic design. She then completed studies at NAIT in Edmonton, and worked in architectural design and drafting. As a young mother, Laura was drawn back to her first love for fine arts and completed certification through the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension Visual Arts program, and began to teach art. Over the years, she developed a passion for the healing power of art, which stemmed from lived experience of her life's journey, expressed through art, and seeing the impact of art on her students.



Robert MacDonald, Designer and Publisher, has lived by his wits, some hard work, and a good lashing of luck. Almost completely

unschooled, he has, over several decades, invented identities as graphic artist, typographer, printer, community activist, publisher, information architect, program director, programmer, and designer. He hasn't finished with inventions. Having spent most of his life thoroughly urbanized (Toronto, New York, San Francisco, Vancouver) he is now nestled into the grasslands and orchards of the Okanagan valley. He finds profound solace in the virgin wilderness upland from his habits. His works have appeared in the journals *Kosmos*, *Image*, *Sage-ing*, and more, and he has chapbooks: *Dead Drop* and *Headwinds*, with more anticipated. He is transcribing several decades of writings from notebook to manuscript, and is otherwise biding his time.

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Cover image: detail from *Sweet but a Little Salty* by Patti Edmon

Please note: not all browsers can use the hyperlinks on our PDF pages. If you encounter that issue, we suggest you copy the web and email links, and paste them into your applications.

BUTTERFLY METAPHORS

An Integrated Art Therapy Theory

Laura Foster



Butterfly on a flower

On a beautiful fall day in the art studio of a mutual artist friend, I had the pleasure of being introduced to Karen Close, editor of *Sage-ing*, and then to this Quarterly itself. I am an artist, art teacher and art therapist, so I was delighted to read the mission statement and realize I had found kindred souls, those who have the same passion for the arts. When Karen invited me to consider assisting her I was excited and honoured to participate in the co-creating of *Sage-ing*.

As I begin this new journey with *The Journal*, I want to share my story, particularly my experiences and studies in expressive arts therapy, and some of my related art.

Studying at St. Stephen's College at the University of Alberta as a mature student was a great opportunity to engage with the expressive art therapy process in depth. Upon admission to the program, I was excited by the possibilities that might emerge. I was eager to deepen my understanding of art therapy and cultivate my artistic sensibilities as an art therapist. However, I did not anticipate what a challenging and meaningful process this would be for me. There were times in which I was anxiously questioning myself, my authenticity and my identity. Who am I really? What is my artistic identity? Do I have what it takes to be an art therapist? Is this really what I want to do? Why? My anxiety increased as the beginning of my art therapy interim approached. It felt as if I was facing an enormous responsibility: was I ready? Experiencing moments of loss and grief, I am grateful that my studies coincided with this time of anxiety and grief, as the art studio became my refuge. The studio provided a time and place to make art and work through fear and sadness; it put the practice of art therapy to the test for me. I discovered how forms of art such as mandalas could be meditative and mindful practices for becoming grounded and centred, and finding wholeness. I found ways to cultivate my new artistic identity as an art therapist. I grew in confidence. I was encouraged by sharing with a group of like-minded artists in a nurturing environment. As a result, I experienced growth both personally and professionally, and my understanding of the effectiveness of art therapy was affirmed through my lived experiences with healing art processes.

Perhaps most significantly, through my own process I discovered how the meanings of personal imagery emerge and how metaphors deepen and develop over time. I learned how to reframe my thinking, overcome self-doubt and become empowered with confidence. My personal approach as an

Perhaps most significantly, through my own process I discovered how the meanings of personal imagery emerge and how metaphors deepen and develop over time.



Above left: *Butterfly, Psyche, Soul, dancing.*
Mixed media

Above right: Performance piece of
butterfly, soul, dancing



art therapist began to develop through reflection on a personal process that integrated the central metaphor of a butterfly with its expression in art. For me, the significance of metaphor in the creative process unfolded and actualized as the metamorphosis of the butterfly, a conventional metaphor symbolizing transformation.

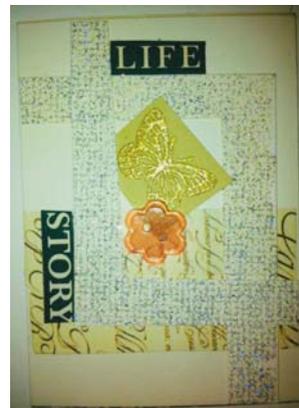
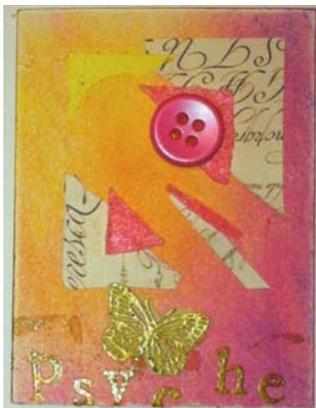
I learned from Monica Carpendale, author of *Essence and Praxis In the Art Studio*, that many layers of meaning can emerge in the creation of a piece of art when conventional symbols and metaphors are perceived through

the context of lived experience. While working with the butterfly metaphor I was enthralled to discover that the Greek word for butterfly is psyche, which also means soul. Many cultures and religions embrace the butterfly's metamorphosis as symbolism for life after death.

The metaphor of a butterfly already had much meaning in the story of my life because my mother had shared with me its spiritual meaning in our faith. The meaning deepened and comforted me as I later grieved her untimely passing. My personal meaning of the butterfly metaphor was further deepened in my experiences of divorce and letting go and finding a new identity, and then again when experiencing the grief of losing other loved ones. The butterfly image continued surfacing in my art. Throughout my art therapy training, as I experimented with the inter-modalities of all the expressive arts – from painting to sculpture, poetry, dance and journalizing – its meaning deepened more. By staying with the art-based process and the metaphor, I gained a further understanding of how metaphor works as an agent in healing and in the percolating of creativity between modalities.

In one art therapy skills course, I was introduced to the creation of artist trading cards. I enjoyed seeing author Cathy Hyland Moon's approach and examples in her text *Materials and Media In Art Therapy*. It was intriguing to make art on such a small scale. Card-making allowed for the production of lots of art and the quick development of ideas. As I was creating these art

Art cards 1, 2, and 3



cards, a number of themes emerged that seemed to spill over from other art I had recently created and from the theory I was studying. Together they energized my exploration of metaphor and narrative in the healing process.

Reading *Poesis*, I was deeply inspired by Stephen



In My Chrysalis. Poem and Art about liminal space

Creative vitality can be viewed as a condition in which all of our resources are simultaneously engaged.

Levine, who speaks of “becoming a healing artist, capable of placing artistic media in the service of the soul.” Yet I at times shuddered to think of the responsibility inherent in this. As I developed my personal experience of art therapy and then articulated my understanding of the theoretical leanings that spoke to me, I evolved them into my own understanding. I titled my theoretical approach, “Butterfly Metaphors: An Integrated Art Therapy Theory,” which summarizes my work with metaphor in art, poetry, journaling and dance. While staying with the metaphor in my continuing art process, I began to focus on the butterfly’s chrysalis as an ideal metaphor for transitional space. This is what Ellen Levine, in *Tending The Fire*, refers to as

the space where “creativity resides and creative activities find their home.” In my studies I have observed that the containment of this transitional space is a common underlying theme. Psychoanalytic therapy maintains that creating this transitional space is critical for the therapeutic process. Shaun McNiff refers to this same belief in *Art Heals, How Creativity Cures The Soul*, as “*Temenos*, a sacred place that acts as a vessel of transformation.” According to McNiff, creative vitality can be viewed as a condition in which all of our resources are simultaneously engaged. He writes, “The expressive arts’ approach to art therapy, then, relies on the making of a space where these creative powers can be activated, and where we in turn can be healed by them.” This resonates with me as the essence of what is crucial to the therapeutic art process to provide a nurturing environment so that creativity freely occurs. In a safe environment, “*temenos*” is a “circular” relationship between the therapist, the client, the studio space, the art materials and the images. Most important is paying attention to these relationships and containing this transformational space. The art therapist facilitates the art-making process by helping people to connect therapeutically to their own creativity and imagery. Stephen Levine writes, “Without the container, the psyche cannot ‘hold’ its suffering; the intensity is too much to bear. Art creates the form in which intensity of feeling can be contained.” Stephen Levine refers to transitional space as liminality, a term he notes was originally coined by anthropologist Victor Turner. As an art therapist, keeping art and creativity central is key in my theory and practice. As psychodynamic theory states, creativity is how we begin to make sense of the world we are born into as infants; it can continue to assist understanding throughout our lives.

For as long as I remember I have enjoyed the creative process as a means of self-expression. The idea that creativity is essential and inherent to our existence and wellness deeply resonates with my artistic sensibility in my approach as a healing artist. I look forward to sharing further with you as we explore how creative spirit brings wellness for ourselves and our communities.

IMMORTALITY IN NIGERIA



Solape Adeyemi

Immortality

The urge to last forever
 The need to be immortal
 The words to last for generations
 Drawing creations yet unborn
 Those messages, those epistles
 That ring in people's consciousness
 That defy time and space
 That define the essence of immortality
 That compel me through those outpourings
 To be immortal.

In the heart of Nigeria, where the sun's warmth wraps around the pulsating rhythm of life, a captivating tale unfolds, revealing a narrative intricately woven with threads of tradition and resilience. The pursuit of immortality isn't a distant, elusive dream but a gentle whisper carried on the winds that sweep across the expansive savannah.

Venturing into Lagos' lively markets, where a vibrant kaleidoscope of colours mirrors the diversity of its people, the essence of immortality takes root in the tales shared by elders beneath the comforting shade of ancient baobab trees. These stories, alive with the comforting cadence of oral tradition, create a vivid canvas where spirits linger, and the seamless blend of past and present mirrors the intricate patterns adorning cherished traditional garments.

In the midst of rhythmic drumbeats and the graceful movements of dancers, the spirit of immortality finds its eloquent expression in echoes that traverse time. Nigeria stands as a testament to the belief that ancestors' spirits are not confined to the pages of history books; instead, they resonate in the beats of the talking drum, a timeless language that transcends generations.

From the labyrinthine waterways of the Niger Delta to the ancient city of Kano, the sprawling landscapes bear witness to the passage of time. Yet, immortality is etched into the very geology of the land, whispered by the gentle rustling leaves of palm trees and reflected in the resilience of communities that have weathered the storms of colonialism and strife.

As the sun gracefully sets over the mystical Ogbunike Caves, where history and myth intertwine like vines, the concept of immortality takes on a tangible form. These caves, serving as a portal to another realm, evoke a sense of timelessness where the spirits of ancestors and the living coexist in a mesmerizing dance of shadows and light. Here, immortality ceases to be an

These stories, alive with the comforting cadence of oral tradition, create a vivid canvas where spirits linger.

Immortality





Lagos City (population 226.2 million)

Navigating Nigeria's socio-political landscape, where the echoes of corruption and the struggle for justice resound, immortality transforms into a beacon of hope.

abstract concept, becoming a palpable presence that lingers in the cool, damp air.

Yet, amidst this rich cultural tapestry, the echoes of modernity and the challenges of a third-world reality resonate. Immortality transforms into a metaphor for the resilience of a people facing the complexities of progress and development. The struggle for a better future, the fight against inequality and the quest for education emerge as threads intricately woven into the ongoing narrative of immortality in contemporary Nigeria.

In the bustling cities, where the stark dichotomy of wealth and poverty is evident, the pursuit of immortality takes on new dimensions. It manifests in the dreams of a young girl in a rural village, yearning for education to shatter the chains of generational limitations. It is witnessed in the sweat and toil of a market vendor, striving for a better life for her children against formidable odds.

Navigating Nigeria's socio-political landscape, where the echoes of corruption and the struggle for justice resound, immortality transforms into a beacon of hope. It is found in the voices of activists challenging the status quo, in the pens of writers crafting narratives of change and in the hearts of those who steadfastly refuse to succumb to the shadows cast by the challenges of the present.

And so, in the timeless dance of tradition and modernity, amid the vibrant hues of Nigeria's diverse cultures, the concept of immortality unfolds. It is not merely an abstract yearning for eternal life but a dynamic force – an ever-evolving narrative written by the collective consciousness of a nation. Immortality in Nigeria is a story being told, a dance being danced and a dream being dreamed under the boundless African sky.

Shoe Shiner

And he was born into abject poverty
Lack and deep want pervaded his family's existence
From childhood,
He had been taught, he was born to be a shoe shiner
He could never be anything else
His father, grandfather and the ancestors before him had all been shoe shiners
The possibility of being anything else was zero
As they had been born into a life of deep servitude...which they had embraced, as their lot
And so, whenever he saw someone, anyone
The only thought that came to his mind was...the shoes and how to shine them
He never thought of possibilities, he never dreamed of getting out of the rut
He never thought a customer could be his life line out of the life chosen for him
His only thought
Was how to shine the shoes of others
Shoe shiner

Lagosian

You can only call yourself a Lagosian if the following distinguishes you:

You are always in a hurry. It doesn't matter that you've left house early

Things are happening and tempers are short. Inflation is on the rise and kidnapping too. You mustn't trust 'nobarry,' as people selling out other people is commonplace.

enough to beat the never-ending traffic. You hurry to the bus stop and hurry back home. Hurry on the pedestrian bridge, hurry to cross the expressway, hurry everywhere! Almost as if the hordes of hell forbid a leisurely movement!

You must always run after public transport. Whether it be car or bus, you must run after it as if your life depends on it, as it does because only people with the fastest legs and the greater ability to push and shove will enter into the promised land of public transportation.

You must complain about the government. Yes, you must be a complainer. Complain about government neglect at the presidency and state levels. Complain about the hot weather and complain about the rains when they come in an avalanche. You must be a good complainer.

You must ever be on edge and be very suspicious. Things are happening and tempers are short. Inflation is on the rise and kidnapping too. You mustn't trust 'nobarry,' as people selling out other people is commonplace.

You must be a good 'curser' and 'swearer'. Especially in traffic whilst navigating the madness of Lagos roads where many drivers have never visited driving schools. You must never be out-sworn. You must curse the next driver (plus his mother, dead or alive) who attempted to bump into you or swerve without caution. You must always, always make sure you have the last word and the last curse!

For the ladies, you must flaunt what your mama gave you. Wear clothing that leaves absolutely nothing to the imagination and some. And if you were perchance not given anything, Balogun market for instance is flooded with brassieres that can make a flat chest full and bosomy; same goes with the butt. You must shamelessly flaunt your body or appropriately "adjusted" one!

Your car must be dented in parts. A testament to the crazy driving that characterizes the great city.

You must learn to accept appropriate apology from danfo drivers. The danfo, a little yellow commuter bus, is a common sight in the city. Yes, this is a fundamental skill. You must accept their full prostration on the road, shirt plus pant removal to tender their unreserved apology when they hit or scratch your car. As a 'my car' owner, you will stew a little and, as a good Lagosian, broodingly for maximum effect, accept his apology with some graciousness and long suffering. After all, you're supposed to be way superior to him

You must learn to swim and wade through water. Beeni. It's essential, else how will you negotiate the flooded roads on the island and mainland, occasioned by flooded and blocked drains? Your swimming skills will come in handy when the waters have come to rest along your chest region!

Another is, you must learn to lie with the greatest ease and confidence, especially phone lies. Your bus has just left the bus stop at the mainland to Lekki and yet you lie to the client patiently waiting for you that you're already at Lekki toll gate!



Expansive Table

You must learn to wake up at any time in the middle of the night to cook and iron as electricity supply in your area might only be supplied at that time. Another is you are an early riser. Four a.m. on the dot sees you arising, agitatedly, from your slumber. Five a.m. sees you already out and approaching your bus stop.

You must be adept at instant transformation from a well-heeled absolute gentleman in a three-piece tailored suit to an instant *agbero* (a tout, or thuggish hustler) when a conductor refuses to give

you your change. You must know how to do *weyrey* (exhibit madness) for the conductor. Learning how to remove your jacket, glasses and shoes in a jiffy to tackle the conductor at your bus stop is a most invaluable skill!

From the foregoing, do you qualify to be called a ... Lagosian?

Expansive Table

The table is almost tottering with the weight of the many goodies on it

Built for millions, it 'houses' only a few people

So many different dishes, pastries and fruits adorn this very overladen table

Only the best of the best is allowed on this very expansive table

The few people who are at the table are obese, constantly munching away, greedily, their beady eyes ogling, their stomachs straining under their shirts

A free buffet, they serve themselves mountains of different dishes, dishes they take a taste of and abandon, reaching for the many other dishes

Wicked revelry, debauchery and avarice characterise this table and those at the table

Just underneath this expansive table are the minions, the kwashiorkor-ridden lot. So many of them, they are in the millions, whilst those above are in their tens. Lean, scrawny, severely malnourished, their hands raised for the droppings from the table above them and beyond them in all ways.

Once some food drops, these minions scramble, fighting over themselves for these crumbs, many times hurting and even murdering each other, seeing themselves as the enemy, the barrier to them getting the droppings from the table

These minions are content waiting for these droppings, tiredness and apathy characterise them, as they live for these occasional droppings.

Just underneath this expansive table are the minions, the kwashiorkor-ridden lot. So many of them, they are in the millions.

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi is a dedicated professional with a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology and a Master's in Environmental Management. She is a passionate environmental sustainability enthusiast and a talented creative writer, with her works published in esteemed journals and magazines, including: *Writenow Literary Journal*, *TV Metro*, *Poetry Marathon Anthology*, and *The Guardian* newspaper, among others.

With over a decade of experience, Solape has excelled in various roles within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry. Her commitment to environmental causes aligns with her belief that everyone can contribute to saving our planet. Beyond her professional life, Solape enjoys watching action movies and immersing herself in whale documentaries. Her diverse interests reflect her curiosity about the world and her commitment to learning. Currently, Solape serves as Secretary of the Association of Nigerian Authors in Lagos, Nigeria, where she continues to contribute to the literary and cultural landscape of her community. Her dedication to both her professional career and her advocacy for environmental sustainability demonstrate her multifaceted talents and unwavering commitment to making a positive impact in the world.

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POKEWEED

A JOURNAL OF DISCOVERY

Joanne Grumet

The following poem from my chapbook *The Garden of Eve*, published by *Finishing Line Press* in 2020, is an extended metaphor for my personal journey of sage-ing.

Pokeweed

On a long stem
of small blooms
I grew, in Momma's
fragrant arms
Hard green berry,
I lived the summer
through, indifferent to
her sweet florets as
they fell. In autumn,
songbirds came
for my deep ripe fruit
and I learned to sing
the love she lavished
on me that summer through

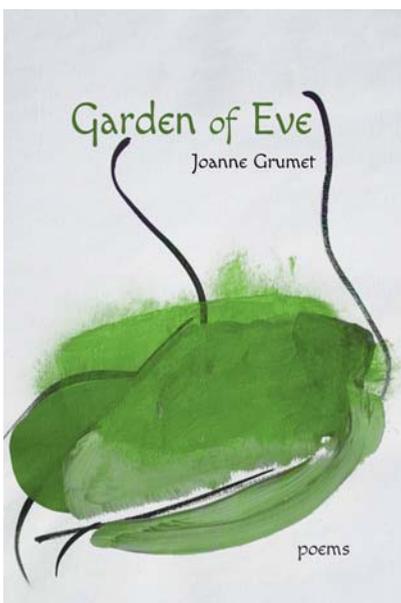
Of course, it all starts with my parents, especially my mother, who was a writer and a poet and a loving, if not always available parent, and my father, who was a sweet man.

Perhaps I should start with memories of childhood after moving to New York from Ohio to explain my sage-ing. The threat of communism was very palpable in the culture during the Army McCarthy Hearings and the House of Un-American Activities back then. When I babysat for a nearby family, the father had a back room that he told me not to go into. So, of course, I imagined he was a Communist and was hiding God-knows-what.

By the time I got to high school, I met children of liberal families who explained the goals of pure communism and socialism and what was not to like about those lofty ideas? I could not, however, imagine myself subscribing to any program in fear that my future life of a marriage and



Below left: Cover for *The Garden of Eve*
Below right: Pokeweed



I realized that I had studied language, loved language, taught language, written about language but had not really used language to express myself.

career would be in danger. So I decided that after I had fulfilled my family's wishes for me, which were my wishes, too, of marrying a nice Jewish boy, having children and establishing a career for myself, I would risk radical ideas, even if it meant I should be 60 or so. This was very near to what happened in my life.

As a young child in Cincinnati, I loved to dance in the woods. My mother sent me for dancing lessons. I will be a dancer, I thought. When I was around twelve, living in New York by then, a dentist I went to asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. A dancer, I said. That is not a good idea, he said. Hmmmm... I said to myself; perhaps I should think of something else. My mother had instilled in me a love of poetry, recounting to me my first poem composed at the age of three or so: "Butterfly/ Come and drink the nectar/ out of me." My father loved to sing opera along with the radio and used to make up funny, silly names with me: "Mr. London, Mr. France, Mr. Pants."

Throughout high school my favourite book to read was the dictionary. I studied French, German and Latin in high school, and when I got to college I decided to study language and majored in Linguistics. Following my gameplan, I got a PhD in Linguistics, married a loving (Jewish) man and gave birth to three wonderful children. I became a lexicographer and worked on several dictionaries before becoming a professor and teaching Linguistics and Writing to non-native English speakers. So far, so good. Until.

Until I had the first trauma in my life at about the age of 60... which was not receiving tenure at the college I was teaching in. All of a sudden, I needed to deal with rejection and to think about what I wanted to do with my life. I realized that I had studied language, loved language, taught language, written about language but had not really used language to express myself. So at the age of 64 I began to write poems and songs. Finally, I realized, I had fulfilled my game plan from decades before, but instead of becoming a social activist, I became a poet like my mother, and a songwriter, influenced by my father's love of music.

Writing songs allowed me to transcend earthly realities and join the music of the spheres. The few times I sang my songs in public I was high for weeks afterwards.

My book, *Garden of Eve*, is a tribute to my mother, whose name was Eve, and to all women. Implicit in the poem "Pokeweed," offered above, is the idea that I had reasons to be upset with my mother. In a more recent poem, I was able to articulate the problem that plagued my childhood. At left is "Momma, I Feel Your Pain":

I learned from writing poems that I can share my feelings... what is real for me and for others as well.

Writing poems and songs has allowed me to process my dreams. One such dream was the basis of a poem and later a song. The poem is titled "Journal of Discovery," and "Ohio" is a song. Here are the lyrics to that song, which you can listen to at www.ReverbNation.com/summerwind.

Momma, I Feel Your Pain

I feel your pain,
Momma.
Why can't you be well?

You do not say what really hurts,
so you let head, legs, stomach,
whatever, be the cause

What about this little girl?
How much of your suffering
can I bear? Momma

Ohio

(words and music by Joanne Grumet)

I dreamed last night
I was going back
On an old train track
To my childhood in Ohio, Ohio

I got on board
And we headed for
Pennsylvania
West Virginia
And Ohio, Ohio
Looking for what I left
Looking for what I lost
In Ohio, Ohio

We chugged along
Up and down the hills
And I heard the songs
From the mines and mills
Near Ohio, Ohio

We stopped at last
At a sunny spot
Where we all got down
And I walked around
In Ohio, Ohio
Looking for what I left
Looking for what I lost
In Ohio, Ohio

And there it was
What I was searching for
I found it there
What I had missed before
It was my innocence
Waiting patiently
It was my innocence
Waiting there for me

And now I know
I can always go
To my childhood
In Ohio, Ohio,
Looking for what I left
Looking for what I lost
In Ohio, Ohio

Dreams give us insights. Using them in creative processes magnifies their power to heal. I am very happy to be experiencing this richness at this point in my life.

“ In autumn ... I learned to sing/ the love she lavished/ on me that summer through.”

Joanne Grumet has always been in love with language. Her chapbook *Garden of Eve* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2020. Her poems have appeared in print in *The Poetry Quarterly* and *The Same*, as well as online at *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *NYCBigCityLit.com*, *The Vital Sparks*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *One Art*, *The Wisconsin Review* and in *The Bangalore Review*. In addition, her poetry can be found in the archives of the Brooklyn Museum. Joanne's songs and poetry have been featured on the cable TV show "The Song," out of South Deerfield, Massachusetts. You can hear all her songs at www.ReverbNation.com/summerwind.

MY FREQUENT WANDERER AWARD

AGING WITH POETRY

Cynthia Bernard



A few years ago, in my mid-sixties and newly in love with the man who is now my husband, I surprised myself by beginning to write poetry again for the first time since my college years. I've enjoyed a long career as a classroom teacher, grades 6 through 12 math and science, including more than a dozen years teaching incarcerated juveniles and adults. I raised three children, mostly as a single parent, and I approached my own personal development and evolution through both psychology and spirituality. Now, having just entered my seventies, I teach part-time online, one student at a time, and I have the luxury of plenty of time for creative expression.

I find that reading and writing poetry and short fiction open me very deeply to myself and others, to life in all its richness and its mysteries, in ways that feel both important and truthful. Writing feels like further growth and unfolding, going beyond where psychology and spirituality could take me, to a deeper and even fuller awakening.

Cynthia Bernard is a woman in her early seventies who is finding her voice as a poet after many years of silence. A long-time classroom teacher and a spiritual mentor, she lives and writes on a hill overlooking the ocean, about 25 miles south of San Francisco. In January, 2023, Cynthia began her studies in the MFA program at Lindenwood University, with a concentration in poetry. Her work has appeared in *Multiplicity Magazine*, *Heimat Review*, *The Beatnik Cowboy*, *The Journal of Radical Wonder*, *Poetry Breakfast*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Passager*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Verse-Virtual*, and elsewhere.

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Mojave Desert

Wandering the Mojave

Along with the silvering of my hair
the years have gifted me
with a Frequent Wanderer Award
granting open access
to the Mojave of Middle-Night,
where there are many
interesting places to meander
but there does not seem to be
a trailhead that leads back to sleep –
and though I could remedy the one
with gloves, a bottle of dye,
and the laundry room sink,
there seems to be no compass
to help me navigate the other.

For a long time I grumbled about this
and stumbled through too-much-coffee tired
days,
but then, during one weary too-early,
I paused to watch a horned lizard
swishing tail, flicking tongue
near the base of a Joshua tree
and noticed the almost silent whisper
of a gestating poem,
stopped to play with her for a while,
and soon I was surrounded
by her many siblings, cousins, and rivals –
quite a lively little nursery
with a hungry baby sonnet I'd almost forgotten,
two toddling villanelles fighting over a yucca
flower,
and a pantoum with sand in her eyes crying in
the corner.

Middle-Nights now, when the Mojave calls,
I am ready, having indulged in another
gift of the years, the afternoon nap.
I brew up a pot of cactus flower tea,
toss my tinselled hair over my shoulder,
grab my favorite pen,
and set out happily a'wandering.

Approaching the Sevens

My face is older than my me
especially in the too early
when I've forgotten how to sleep
and my mouth does not yet remember
how to smile.

My arms are older than themselves
when I bend forward to brush my hair,
pitted, drooping as if asleep,
then replumping when I'm upright again –
a preview of old-lady-arms to come.

My hands are blazing this trail for me,
such a thin veneer of skin, part leopard now,
branches of the Nile threaded in between,
fingers a little gnarly, sometimes stiff,

complaining like the crows
who left their footprints above.

My legs are younger than the rest,
still strong and shapely;
please view them
with naked presbyopia-eyes,
blind to any pink varicose flowers.

I've got pill bottles in a row on the counter,
more on a shelf in the fridge,
silvering hair, warm socks in bed,
prunes for stewing,
a recliner for napping,
reading glasses in every room.

Meanwhile, the compassion lines on my face
are also embroidered on my heart –
my heart, younger than my old,
older than my young.

The blue heron stands on one leg, completely still,
waiting for the moment just before it's time to fly.
I wait with him, chocolate ice cream melting in my
mouth.
My heart is every age, and none.

A'sailin'

'T'would seem quite true I never was
the captain of this ship,
though in my youth I did believe
in charting my own trip.

But Master Time has made it clear
how lowly is my rank.
I've silver locks and aching limbs
and soon I'll walk the plank.

One thing I've learned as days go by
a'sailin' life's rough seas:
It doesn't work to push against
what comes upon the breeze.

For when I tried to turn the tide,
instead the tide turned me;
the Sea of Life dictates for us
in ways we can't foresee.

'T'is true that we are powerless
to stop waves high and low,
but we can choose to welcome both
the pleasure and the woe.

And so this ship does carry me
through seas both sweet and tart.
When I embrace my life, I live
with full, contented heart.

Living with the Elephant

I guess the fog has little cat feet
sometimes, but around here
it dances with the wind,
wild and fierce,
especially at dawn.
Howling across the ocean, up the hill,
gusting my robe against me,
sloshing coffee into my face as I try for a sip.

I guess aging is gradual
sometimes, but around here
it's a tempest, arising suddenly,
wild and fierce
and relentless.
Wrenching my days apart
into a before that can never be found
again – and a very different now.

I guess one could fight it
sometimes, hair color, face cream,
supplements and potions,
exercises, affirmations,
denial.

I guess one could simply accept it
sometimes, but around here
arthritis has swept in on elephant feet,
fierce and relentless,
and no pill, no potion,
no affirmation, no meditation,
can sweep it out again.

I guess one could handle things gracefully
and sometimes I do,
but around here there are other times, too,
when everything seems to hurt
and I want to stay under a quilt
for whatever part of forever
I get to see.

And then again, there are
yet other times, sometimes,
the majesty of the ocean at first light,
the sweetness of love found late,
my hand sliding into his.
New buds on the camellia,
rain on the roof, deer in the yard,
granddaughter's smile,
or a nothing-special-time
in the exquisiteness of the now.

And I find that
sometimes, increasingly often,
I welcome it all:
the cat's feet and the elephant,
things wild and fierce,
quiet moments and raging ones,
lines on my softening face,
creaky joints and aching bones,
wind in my hair,
full heart,
fog over the ocean at dawn.

WRITING FICTION

IS A KIND OF INNER WORK

Susan Fish



There's a lot of emotional biography in my books, but even this one that has a lot in common with my own story isn't me. Fiction is not thinly veiled memoir.

Over this past Christmas holiday, we met and hosted my middle son's girlfriend and her dog for two weeks. For her birthday last fall I sent her a copy of my new novel, *Renaissance* which is about a woman who flees to a convent in Italy after a crisis where her family dismissed her as two-dimensional.

One day during our visit, I was sitting alone with this young woman and we were venturing into new conversational territory. "Your novel..." she said. "I know some of your biography. You're a mother of three like your character. You're about that same age. You've spent time in Italy. I'm wondering: how much of this novel is true? How much of it is you?"

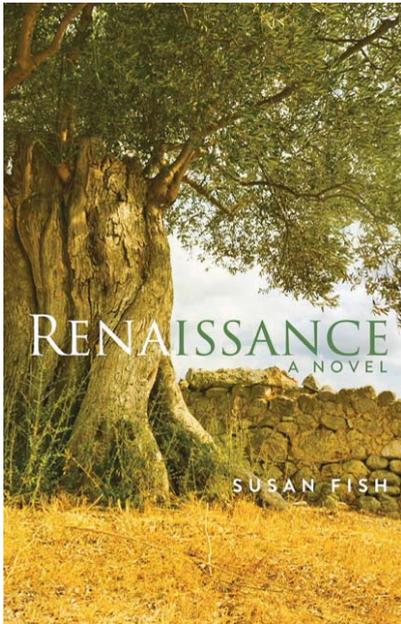
It's the question I'm always asked. When my novel that featured a widow who hosted a weekly soup supper was published, I was asked repeatedly when my husband had died (he hadn't) and what kinds of soup I served at my weekly gathering (I didn't). With *Renaissance*, this fall, I was at a book club where people kept referring to my first-person narrator as me "You believe that..." (and I don't but my character does). I got an email asking for the real-life sex-ed books my character used with her kids (they're sadly fictional, I had to reply). My other son's partner was approached by a woman who had read the book and who addressed her with a wagging finger, saying, "I hope that character wasn't you..." (of course it wasn't).

At the same time, I remember once watching a gripping crime drama and thinking that if I wrote for a thousand years, I would never be able to invent some of the crimes of the show's recurring villain; they just weren't in my repertoire.

During the holidays, this same girlfriend and my son watched the *Star Wars* trilogy for the first time. I walked through the room occasionally as they watched. One of the things that struck me was how young the actors were particularly the baby-faced Princess Leia.

And it is Princess Leia I think of Carrie Fisher when I consider my son's girlfriend's question about fiction. Carrie Fisher said something I come back to often: "Take your broken heart and turn it into art."

What I told my son's girlfriend is what I tell everyone: "There's a lot of emotional biography in my books, but even this one that has a lot in common with my own story isn't me. Fiction is not thinly veiled memoir. It's an artistic way of exploring the questions that haunt you." Sometimes the compelling questions are very personal and sometimes they aren't. I wrote a book that is far from my biography during the Trump presidency when I was struggling to see refugee children kept in cages. The widow book I wrote when I was experiencing the decline of my beloved grandmother. The question there was how a person got through grief, what they did when their settled life was



Cover: *Renaissance*

Ironically my own kids leaving home meant a renaissance of sorts for me too.

thrown into the air. I wrote *Renaissance* at a time when my kids began leaving home.

At the start of the emptying nest, I often thought of the end of the first movie in another movie trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, the moment where the fellowship breaks up, where in fact someone says the fellowship has *failed* because they no longer stay together. I felt that way at the time; my ‘self’ had happily subsumed into parenthood for so long. When my first son turned one, I recall thinking that I couldn’t have enjoyed or savoured his first year more and yet it was still over. That has been much of parenthood for me: it goes too fast and it’s been blissful. But that is not the whole story either: there’s been a strand of trauma in our family too, one that has nothing to do with the events in the novel.

I began writing *Renaissance* after a glorious trip with my husband to Italy, but I came back to it after our own family challenges, thinking, “what if my character didn’t go to Italy as I did but in fact because she feels she *has to*?” This character is a woman whose last child has left home, a woman who believes motherhood has come to an end. I remember thinking about what sorts of events might cause this sort of rupture in a family and how realization crept over me: “Oh shoot,” I thought. “It has to be abortion.” I didn’t want to wade into the culture wars about abortion. Frankly, I wasn’t looking to write a book about abortion at all but I knew it had to be that. Because that is a way that potential motherhood also ends. Because it had to be right *there*. Later in the book the character swears, one single swear word over and over again as her kids used to call it, it is the F word – and it had to be that too because her pain had to be located exactly in the place where she became a mother, where motherhood came to an end. It isn’t a swearing book and it isn’t a book that polarizes discussion or conversation around abortion either; yes, it’s a unicorn. But I drew on my own painful anticipation of motherhood coming to an end.

Ironically my own kids leaving home meant a renaissance of sorts for me too. It also has been less of an ending than I imagined; we had a pandemic year with young adults that felt like a glorious victory lap, and after that we were happy to have them relaunch. Then this past fall, one child moved back for several months when a job fell through and another came back for a few weeks after a delayed visa. The third’s landlord is threatening to sell the house.

My experience has not been that of my character. I could honestly tell my son’s girlfriend that. But Princess Leia was right too about the broken heart and the art because there’s a hopeful turn in *Renaissance* I didn’t expect, a turn that is internal to the character rather than a happily ever after where everyone is reconciled. She does the inner work (and it doesn’t hurt to have some outer distance and to be in a beautiful place working in a garden either).

Writing fiction is a kind of inner work. Not only does my writing surprise and teach me, but the discipline of writing also puts my inner world to rights. The last few weeks while my house has been over-full of young adults (and

They say that reading fiction is good for people because it offers a view into another life, that people who read fiction develop empathy to a greater degree than those who don't.

their pets who came back with them!), I've put myself in order by writing fiction.

But reading fiction is another way of doing inner work too. Let me be clear: I'm not talking about reading moralistic or heavy-handed books, but rather stories we can identify with, even if the facts and details of the characters' lives are very different (or very similar) to our own. They say that reading fiction is good for people because it offers a view into another life, that people who read fiction develop empathy to a greater degree than those who don't, that they imaginatively inhabit the life of another person and find their common humanity. Readers then become a kind of co-creator with the author.

Not everyone will write, but most of us can do the inner work by reading a good story, a story where we come away with new insights about ourselves and the world, stories that inspire us or warn us. When we're going through a challenging time, it's easy to go towards how-to books, but often it is by engaging with art as creator or co-creator that we come to a place of wisdom and belonging to ourselves.

Susan Fish is a writer, editor and gatherer of people. She lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her husband, two dogs and sometimes some of her three young adult children. She has a Master's of Theological Studies and three published novels. She can be reached through storywell.ca or her blog susanfishwrites.wordpress.com

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Excerpt from Renaissance

It was chilly but dazzling sunlight. Salvia put the oil can on the low stone wall surrounding the terrace and passed the basket around, offering bread to us. I didn't think we could refuse so I took a slice as though it was a very large piece of communion bread. Then, in the early morning light, she poured oil over the bread we held.

"This," she said. "Here we produce this. It is good to know what it will be before you start. *Mangia*," she said, and we did. I could tell from Honey's face that this hadn't been part of her experience before either. The oil was green and fresh and peppery, all the things Eva's oil had been, with the added benefit of being served in the Italian sunshine instead of indoors in winter on the far side of the world.

My hands were covered in olive oil but I rubbed them together, letting the oil make my hands soft and ready.

"To prune the trees it takes five weeks," she explained. "If we have no rain. We plant the gardens when the frost is no more."

As we ate, an elderly man came out of the convent carrying a box of medieval-looking implements. From his clothes – a long, brown habit tied at the waist with rope – it was clear he was a monk.

"This is *Fra Niccolò*," Salvia said by way of introduction, and Niccolò gave quick bows of his head to each of us. I felt an urge to curtsy, but I suppressed it. "You know Miele. This is Elizabetta. She is just arrived." A second time he bowed his head to me and this time I bowed mine in return. "Each year Niccolò come to help the pruning of the trees and to deliver the olives for the pressing."

"Good morning," he said in careful, accented English.

Niccolò was tall and vigorous, but I suspected he was possibly over seventy. With shaky hands he poured green olive oil from Salvia's jug into a small shot glass he took from somewhere in his robe. He drank it down and then raised an arm to the true-blue sky and swept his hand across the grove of trees with a nod of his head. He smacked his lips, returned his glass to the

intricate secret recesses of his robe, and handed the oil back to Salvia. She gave us a wave and wished us a good morning, and then left us to return into the house.

"*Allora*," Niccolò said, handing each of us a small hatchet before shouldering his own. Mine was lighter than I had expected. "This is my forty-seven year tending the olives. *Se Dio vuole*, I will have fifty years. We begin?"

We followed him, guessing at some of his Italian words, descending into the early morning shadows of the olive grove where the grass was wet and cold.

Niccolò looked at a small slip of a tree and shook his head. He found another tree that was large and lush and full, and lifted his hatchet and began hacking away at the branches in the center of the tree. His movements looked violent and almost haphazard. I had to stamp my feet to keep them warm as he cut away at the tree while we watched. Twenty minutes later, he had cleaned out the entire lower center of the tree, while leaving the outer branches virtually untouched.

I hated to say it, but the tree had looked far better and healthier before he started. Cautiously I told him so and asked the reason for the extreme pruning.

"No oil from a beautiful tree," he said, chopping away at the remaining small branches that had grown out of the main trunk.

It reminded me of the time I had tried to take a pottery class. I could never understand when my work was good and when it was not. I'd been to pottery sales before and other than the ones where the glazes were clearly uneven or there were cracks or pieces missing, I couldn't tell a good piece of pottery from a poor one. My instructor said that my pots were uneven, that one side was thinner than another, but I honestly couldn't see this or feel it with my hands. It was like that in the olive grove too – I watched as Niccolò pruned the tree, and I was confused by which branches were cut off and which we left. I had quit my pottery class. I hoped I could do better at pruning.

Niccolò moved on to the next tree, which was gnarled and ancient and taller than the first one. There was a small stepladder under this tree. He handed Honey his hatchet while he mounted the

stool and climbed into the branches in the center of the tree. I held my breath as he rose.

Before taking his hatchet back from Honey, he turned as if on a stage, to face us, his audience of two. "You hack and chop an old tree. Is very good," he said, making a chopping motion with his right hand as if to remove his left arm at the inner elbow. "He will crescendo again from the energy in the roots and trunk. A young tree will not.

"He requires *ferrite egregia* – the large, egregious wounds – to grow the fruit. If not – " Here he waved his fingers as if making jazz hands – "he becomes chaos."

I didn't even know what the word 'egregious' meant but there was something satisfying about saying the words under my breath – *large egregious wounds*.

We were to walk up to a perfectly healthy, lush, full olive tree and slash away at it until it looked spindly and bare. The important thing, Niccolò told us, was getting light to the center of the tree, lopping off all the vigorous young shoots that filled its core, only leaving a few to grow. The energy of the tree could then go into producing olives rather than leaves. "A bird, he can fly through the center of a well-pruned olive tree," he explained.

It was not what I'd expected but it felt even more satisfying than my anti-gardening at home. Still, at first, I was over-cautious. Niccolò had to call me back three times to my first tree. "Good to be careful," he said. "This tree is probably five hundred years old, and you no want to kill him, but he can accept the pruning."

His words fell into a deep place in me, like olive oil finding every hole in a piece of bread, saturating it. He meant the trees. Of course he did. It was I who read into his words.

PICTURING A NEW PASSION



Katie Hughbanks

Sometimes we choose growth; other times it chooses us. Four years ago, March 2020 specifically, brought each of us myriad challenges, but it also brought opportunities to explore new perspectives and possibilities. The pandemic changed us all, but, four years later, I recognize that it changed me for the better.

Writing has always been my main creative outlet; it is a wonderful vehicle for self-expression. But in the spring of 2020, an ache in me found words difficult. What word can aptly describe the loss of hugging my grown children, of brushing my mother's silver hair, of seeing my students in person? Writing failed me or I failed it, it seemed. I struggled to pen a line, much less a poem.

During this creative crisis, I found myself taking daily walks with my husband and dog to cope with the pains of isolation. We visited lovely parks, saw interesting birds and flowers and bugs. On one of those walks, I decided to carry along the camera I'd bought a few years prior, one that could zoom in on a deer's wet nose or the centre of a yellow daffodil. Soon, the camera became a necessity. It helped me, saved me, became my fifth limb. I was still a writer, but I was developing into a photographer, too.

As the pandemic loosened its grip on the world, I tightened my grip on that camera. We could take trips again and, along with a pen and journal, I always packed my trusty Canon. My photography slowly improved as I learned editing techniques through trial and error. Friends and family generously marvelled at the images I caught.

Planning a trip to a tropical island, I started shopping for a new camera to document sunrise beaches and emerald geckos. A friend suggested getting one I could use underwater, so I splurged and bought a tiny camera with lots of functions. But how could I put this expensive little chunk of technology in water? It felt like heresy. Nonetheless, I held my breath and submerged it a first time, in the sink of my powder room, no less.

It was, in a word, magic. Who knew that air bubbles could be so fascinating, so beautiful? Who knew that flowers underwater became fairy-tale creatures?

Ever since, my vision has danced with the ideas of light, air and water. Those three elements, so necessary for living, are now necessary for my creative life. Light, to me, is like a violinist's sheet music; air, like a painter's canvas. To me, water is a sculptor's block of marble. My camera is the potter's clay. Every day, photography offers me new eyes with which to see and a new way to express my love for the world. What a joy it is to learn, to develop, to

Sunrise Salutation

she sings a melody through
pine needles and bare branches.
each flutter, a breath,
early spring delicate.
maples, poplars, pin oak
dance her refrain
in chill air.
sycamore and spruce, too,
relish her psalm.
the harmony embraces
stem, leaf, thorn as
the sleepy forest and meadow
wake to her canticle -
grace upon creation.



Top left: *Autumn Light on Field*
 Middle: *A Little Impatiens*
 Above: *Clouds on Water*
 Above right: *Tears from a Tree*
 Right top: *Below the Surface*
 Right bottom: *Waterdrop Ballet*

share beauty with others.

Out of a difficult time, we have emerged changed people. Through photography, growth found me, and today I am transformed: I don't only *take* photos; I *make* art. My next creation is just a snap away.

Katie Highbanks is a writer, photographer and teacher whose writing has appeared in a variety of regional and national publications, including *Making Waves*, *Trajectory*, *Round Table*, *Calliope*, *Kentucky Monthly Magazine*, *Kudzu*, *Pegasus*, *Dodging the Rain* (Ireland), and *Flight Writing* (Ireland). Her photography has been recognized internationally, including two honours from the London Photo Festival. Her photos appear in various literary publications, including in *Peatsmoke Journal*, *In Parentheses*, *L'Esprit Literary Review*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Glassworks Magazine*, and *Black Fork Review*. Her poetry chapbook, *Blackbird Songs*, was published by Prolific Press in 2019, and her short story collection, *It's Time*, will be published in June 2024 by Finishing Line Press. She teaches English and Creative Writing in Louisville, Kentucky. Her email: address is katiehighbanks1021@gmail.com and her Instagram handle is [katiehighbankspics](https://www.instagram.com/katiehighbankspics).

RUNNING FROM WHAT'S COMFORTABLE

Jim Demchuk



I have always had a very keen interest in creative painting. I remember early days in grade and high school when I had a strong desire to create something outstanding for the world to see. I spent some time secretly painting pieces that I did for myself. Nobody else knew or saw what I was creating. Life interrupted my art. I got busy with university, began working, married and had two busy children. Work and family dominated my life, and before I knew it some 40 years had passed. I didn't totally give up on my desire to paint but only created one maybe two pieces a year, which was not enough to stay enthused.

In 2014 I took early retirement and moved to Kelowna. I was amazed how easily I began painting again with passion and urgency after 40 lost years. I immersed myself in painting courses, books, seminars, the internet etc. in an effort to learn different and new painting skills. I also began experimenting with all kinds of different materials and mediums to help expand my depth and breadth of creativity.

I am a big advocate of mindfulness and try to follow many of the teachings of Eckart Tolle. A mindfulness approach is how I typically start a painting. When I have a blank canvas in front of me and am painting I'm not thinking about the past or future, but rather putting myself entirely into the present. I intuitively move using strokes, colours and rhythms to develop a composition. My mostly *White Painting* is a great example of this. In the underpainting I laid down big bold colours with lots of black markings. I came back to this painting a number of days later and began adding white paint with huge swooshing strokes using a rubber squeegee. I let my hands guide me, saving some of the underlying colours and markings until I arrived at a composition that I liked. I have to be honest, I have days when pushing/pulling/scratching paint doesn't work. But I deeply love the process, so nothing is lost.

In this painting I had a little different approach. Before I started, my goal was to paint an abstract flower arrangement, but I didn't know how I was going to get there. I started with laying down a messy grey background that I thought would be a great contrast for a floral arrangement. Then I began laying in the green foliage using bold random strokes with many different layers of green without intentionally drawing one leaf. I

Below left: *White Painting*
Below right: *Floral Painting (Someone Like You)*





loosely and sparsely added some no-name resemblance of flowers. I added a part of a flower vase, then obliterated it with big bold splashes of red and pink. I added a lot of acrylic markings and lines everywhere to enhance a feeling of movement in the painting (as opposed to traditional 'still life' floral paintings). I finally added some additional markings to the grey background to give it more grittiness and a street-art feel. The final piece is big, bold, loose, bursting, colourful with movement. I named it *Someone Like You*.



I don't typecast myself into a specific painting genre because I love to experiment with many different styles and approaches and I love being bold and loose in my works. My style is abstract, contemporary, impressionistic and expressive. Primarily I now paint in acrylic, but I've explored watercolour, pastels and other mixed media. I'm particularly experimental in how I apply paint using brushes, knives, squeegees, sponges – really any materials I can find to slap on paint.

During this past year I've enjoyed using my bold approach to do a number of 'expressive portraits' for friends and family.

I firmly believe that the present moment is the most precious thing in life, and painting helps keep me in the present. I also try to live by the wise words of the thirteenth-century scholar, theologian, poet and philosopher Rumi: "Run from what's comfortable. Forget safety. Live where you fear to live. Destroy your reputation. Be notorious."



First generation Ukrainian-born and raised in Saskatchewan, **Jim Demchuk** completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Administration (with honours) at the University of Regina and later obtained a Chartered Management Accountant designation.

Although primarily a self-taught painter for over 40 years, Jim has taken numerous painting courses/classes/seminars through universities and community colleges and from painters-in-residence, supplemented by studying painting techniques from books and the Internet.

Top left: *Abstract 1*

Top right: *Abstract 2*

Middle: *My Good Friend Bob*

Above: *My Five-Year-Old Grandson*

SEARCHING FOR HIS ORIGINAL FACE ...



Penn Kemp

How does a person find himself through art? Growing up in post-World War I and the Depression in Toronto and then the Second World War, Jim Kemp always knew he was not in sync with the times. Nor did he fit into the stiff hierarchy of his employer, the London Life Insurance Company. He found himself in painting through a decades' long search for truth. He would pose Zen Buddhist koans, and ask himself, "What was your original face before you were born?" He sought this face in painting after painting. Though a handsome, charming and gregarious guy, he showed an odd humility about his own work, always referring to himself as a painter rather than what he thought the more pretentious term, 'artist'.

A master of texture and colour, in oil, acrylic and watercolour, dad's influences included Bonnard, Turner, Vuillard, Matisse, Monet, Braque, Cézanne and Jack Bush. As well as being recognized as a fine abstract painter, Jim was pivotal in instigating several new institutions like the Western Art League, the Art Mart, The University of Western Ontario's Artist-in-Residence program and the re-opening of its McIntosh Gallery. Loved and respected by London's old guard and the new, he acted as a mediator between both sides in the tumultuous '60s art debates. He was a mentor to young artists in southwestern Ontario. He served on Western University's Art Advisory and Acquisition committees from 1960 to 1970 and in an advisory capacity for the new art gallery that became Museum London. He was President of the Western University's Art League (1950-1953), giving painting seminars across Ontario.

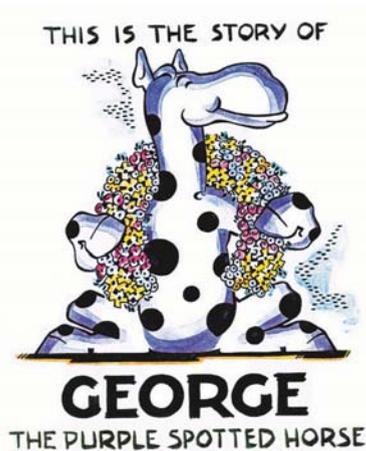
Jim's work was featured several times in *The London Free Press* in glowing articles by art critic Lenore Crawford. Renowned gallerist Leo Castelli twice asked him to show his work in New York City, but serious heart attacks prevented him from showing. He was represented by the Thielsen Gallery and Nancy Poole Studios in London, and his paintings are in many gallery and private collections throughout southwestern Ontario.

My mother and father often hosted painters from out of town, including Jack Bush, Clement Greenberg, A. Y. Jackson and other members of the Group of Seven. The parties often included the unexpected and show my father's 'face', as I describe in the poem opposite.

Dad had a wicked sense of humour that was expressed in satirical wartime cartoons, now archived in the Ottawa War Museum and sometimes published in *The Montreal Standard*. As an abstract painter in the staid fifties

My Artist Father, James (Jim) Kemp:
October 6 1914- March 9, 1983)





Left: This is the story of George
 Middle: *Air Raid*
 Right: *The White Goddess*



in London, Jim stood out. His graphic story, *GEORGE THE PURPLE SPOTTED HORSE* (Pendas Productions), is about a similar horse of a different colour who, despite obstacles, wins both race and girl. Just as Jim did ...

When my father became an invalid, I would find interesting objects for him to paint, while I was walking home from school: cardinal eggs, dead birds and moths, even fish skeletons were transmuted into paint. These studies underlie my father's perception of art transmuting mortality and his search for meaning.

From his youth, Jim was a seeker after spiritual truth. He graduated in Religious Studies from Trinity College, University of Toronto. Finding 'his original face', his meaning through his painting, became a constant theme in his art: he faced death as a bomb disposal expert in the Navy on war-time Corvettes crossing the Atlantic, and again through a series of heart attacks from 1955 when he was forty, to his death in 1983. Wartime experience drove Jim to art as a way of expressing his fascination with death and the macabre, and his way of confronting mortality. The horror of war is expressed in an early oil painting, *Air Raid*, now in Museum London's collection.

During the London Blitz, Jim experienced a vision of the White Goddess as death when a buzz bomb exploded the wall he leaned against. Robert Graves's book, *The White Goddess*, was pivotal for him. He gave it to me to read when I was fifteen. Long philosophical discussions on Existentialism, Krishnamurti and Buddhism ensued when I sat by his easel as he painted. He and I formally became Buddhists (took refuge) with Kalu Rinpoche in 1974.

On annual vacations south, he would pick up shells and take photographs of fish, alive or dead. When back home, he would depict marine life in lustrous underwater hues. His colours and textures are gorgeous, particularly his reds and deep blue greens (surprisingly, because he was red-green colour blind). His life-long interest in the unknown is reflected in later abstract watercolours as an attempt to articulate the transience of things. The Zen paintings of his last decade advance his search and lead out and out into openness, expanding further into white space, as if reaching for whatever is beyond:

When Dignitaries Visit

Several elderly Group of Seven painters attended my parents' party. Dad had me – shy, age ten – serve them cocktails and

for nibblies chocolate-covered grasshoppers – identity undisclosed

until my tray was empty.

No-one asked for seconds but the rush was on to fill those empty glasses in

a flurry of coughs! feared would kill the ancients.

In the Fifties they'd be already in their Seventies and frail as cricket.

London ON, 1954-5, published in A NEAR MEMOIR, Beliveau Books.

Left: *Abstract 1*Right: *Abstract 2*

I wrote this poem in response to my father's painting *Abstract 2*.

**How I wish I could meet
you on that other side
beyond saturated
green in gathering tints
of paint.**

Becoming

Foxfire in the marsh leads viewers further
within, deep into mires of mixed illusion, to
the texture of coats applied layer upon layer.
Fairy lights float through bright tangle, tempting
me to follow those flames through impossible koan:
"What is your original face before you were born?
"Faux-fire, fool's ghost among darkening shades –
how I wish I could meet you on that other side
beyond saturated green in gathering tints of paint –
Turner's red daub lighting your masterful flourish.

James Kemp's paintings are in Museum London's collection

<http://collection.museumlondon.ca/search/Kemp>, the Woodstock Art Gallery collection,

<https://5116.sydneypus.com/public/final/portal.aspx?lang=en-US>.

Three Figures with Tall Hats was on exhibit in *Portals* at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.

Penn Kemp's poem celebrating her father is included in her book of poems, *Local Heroes* (Insomniac Press, 2018). This collection of poetry is a celebration of regional artists from Greg Curnoe and James Kemp to writers Alice Munro and Bonnie Burnard. Penn has participated in Canadian cultural life for 52 years, writing and publishing poetry and plays as well as editing anthologies. She has published 30 books of poetry, prose and drama and 10 CDs of her Sound Operas along with several DVDs. The League of Poets celebrated Penn as "a foremother of Canadian poetry" with the 2015 Award for Spoken Word Artist. Penn's new collection, *INCREMENTALLY*, is up as an e-book and album on <https://www.hempressbooks.com/authors/penn-kemp>. See www.pennkemp.wordpress.com and www.pennkemp.weebly.com.

THE ART OF RELATIONSHIP



Antoinette VouÛte Roeder

What actually constitutes art? Is it always something we make, craft, do? Is there always a product involved? Or could art be a will-o'-the-wisp, difficult to define, invisible and inaudible as such...

I have been musing about the art of relationship. One cannot really put a finger on it but it is surely as real as a piece of pottery, a painting or a rag rug. Sometimes relationships occur when an outsider might wonder, *How on earth did those two get together?* There might be no obvious commonality, but a spark, some chemistry has caused an attraction and suddenly two people are connected where they weren't before. Romantic relationships might be among the most inexplicable ones, but what about friendships? They are more likely to be intentional, not like falling in love, but rather finding something that pulls two people together.

Friendships are precious, and when we cultivate the art in them they can be deep and long-lasting. They require attention and attending, giving and receiving, regular "stroking," and, in my experience, the ability to listen deeply. In a loving relationship one becomes more, not less. We find ourselves mirrored and reflected in and by the other and grow and expand in that, finding greater treasure within ourselves as we do in the other. Relationships within families may be much more complex. We do not choose our parents or siblings, and I am frequently reminded of the fractured relationships that exist within families. Has 'the art' failed in these situations? Do we stand too close and lose perspective? I have no answers. But here is my story of a unique family relationship whose art has been carefully cultivated.

Imagine this: a young woman gives birth in circumstances in which adoption seems to be the only option, according to all the advice given her. It is deemed preferable that the birth mother and the adoptee have nothing to do with one another. The baby is born under anesthesia and whisked away. There is no holding of the baby, there is absolutely nothing. And so this child disappears from the birth mother's life nine months after she entered it.

Now it is the autumn of 2023 and this child, my daughter, one year shy of 60, whom I never knew or saw until thirty years ago, has come for a rare visit. And when she comes, all the years of not knowing fall away. The years in which we have forged our relationship form the foundation for a reunion that feels both very special and quite ordinary. Back in 1993, when she first reached out to me, it was breath-takingly extraordinary, and our first meeting is something we will never forget. The elation, the pent-up love, the ability to hold one another in person were overwhelming. But this happened only after an exchange of letters and the bold decision to meet. She had left a letter

Imagine this: a young woman gives birth in circumstances in which adoption seems to be the only option, according to all the advice given her.



The family, complete at last

Ordinary late August day

Ordinary late August day and I

on the verge of taking a walk
hear the phone ring
pick it up
long distance.

"This is the Chaparral Adoption Agency.
Do you have any idea why I might be
calling?"

BOOM! WHAM! HERE I AM!
ARE YOU HOME? YOO-HOO!
Big breath breathes me
deep inside
Something stirs, says "yes"
I have been waiting.

Here at last and all at once
the girl/woman I was then
steps out of the shadows,
states her claim, enters me and
I can tell she means to stay.
No more nonsense, the game is up.
"You'll look at me now, no matter what."

Yes.
I will.
Indeed I will.
I'm ready, have been for some time.
I have been found.
The unknown child of my youth wants me.
I am her mother.

with a social service agency that went about looking for me. I was living in another country by then. When that blessed phone call came I was so open to the request to connect, my answer was an absolute YES.

After the initial meeting on her own turf, I invited her to come to us to meet her two half-siblings. She was quite nervous on that visit, dealing with a multitude of emotions, as was I. Her half-siblings, however, took to her right away and welcomed her with open arms, as did my husband.

How does one start to create a relationship where there ought by nature to be an intimate one yet circumstances prevented that for years and years? She and I both realize that many adoptees don't succeed in finding their birth mothers, or their birth mothers reject them, or all the adoptee gains is her biological background. No relationship ensues. How many sustain a deep bond for the rest of their lives? Especially when they may live far apart.

Thirty years of relationship doesn't just happen, especially when preceded by thirty years of no relationship at all, filled with wondering and imagining and longing. Call it my Dutch stubbornness perhaps. Once the connection was made it never even occurred to me that this might be just a temporary phenomenon.

We feel very blessed. The relationship that grew certainly had its ups and downs but it grew because we tended it like an exotic flower. We listened deeply to one another, we cried a lot, we hugged a lot, we made intentional visits back and forth. Eventually we had to settle for phone calls, letters, cards, occasional gifts.

We do not share proximity. She has her life with her husband and aging parents and we have our lives with our adult children nearby. When I look back upon almost thirty years of this precious relationship I really do think she and I and all other family members on both sides have created a lovely multi-stranded web, one in which we each have our place, one that is as real and palpable as any work of art.

Antoinette Voûte Roeder (M. Mus.) is a poet and spiritual companion. She has published six volumes of poetry and offers spring and fall poetry writing retreats in Edmonton, Alberta. Her last retreat focused on writing a sonnet. Her books are available on Amazon. ca.

Art has played a big role in Antoinette's life. Her mother was an artist who painted in oils. Her father was an amateur violinist, and, from the age of five, Antoinette gave her heart to music and the piano. This led to a long career as pianist and piano teacher. She was fortunate to meet a man equally passionate about music, which they have been able to share for 58 years of married life. Poetry was always the background music. It came fully to the fore when Antoinette was following the Pacific Jubilee Program in Spiritual Direction and led to publication of her poems in various journals, newspapers, newsletters, anthologies, and finally in books.

Antoinette is twice an immigrant. Having effectively lost her extended family at age 10, she especially treasures family and dear friends. She is the mother of three adult children and grandma to one grandchild. Relationships become more precious as one ages and keeping those relationships alive and vibrant continues to be an art that requires tending and unfolds every day.

BLOSSOMING

INTO MEANING, PASSION AND PURPOSE

Patti Edmon



Below: *My Mother's Garden*
Bottom: *Sweet but a Little Salty*



This has been a long journey. Twenty years ago, an autoimmune illness pulled the rug out from under me, and my life came to a grinding halt. I was a young 46 with two kids in elementary school, a successful design business and a fledgling greeting card company, and I had become fully invested in writing short stories. I was in San Francisco in an advanced fiction program and, one morning, woke up in my hotel room and could hardly move. I was swollen head to toe, and tiny hammers were pounding against every joint in my body. I'd been fine when I went to bed, exhausted after revising a draft, but energized and ready for the next full day of class. My thoughts slogged about in a foggy mess as I tried to make sense of what had happened to me while I slept.

I was at the top of my game, engaged in a life I loved. My amazing husband and I had a successful business partnership and I was an active participant in my kids' school and hobbies. As a dedicated dance mom, my evenings revolved around the trips to the ballet studio and the parents who became our social group. We'd just moved to a beautiful brick four-square home in a historic neighbourhood that included a lovely park where my new neighbours, kids and friends gathered often. I was riding and showing horses and going to the gym, volunteering with our public radio station, attending parties and dinners and events.

Then it all came to a grinding halt. If you, or someone close to you, has a chronic illness chances are it manifested quickly, though in retrospect there were clues. (I may have crammed a few too many interests and activities in an already busy life.) Similar to a sudden heart attack, car accident or traumatic events that jolt you right up out of your seat, a new illness alters every aspect of your daily life. The difference is there is no cure for autoimmune diseases like mine (psoriatic arthritis), and it often, as in my case, takes a few years to diagnose.

By age 50, I was on disability and felt such shame, having always been an independent, vital, successful person. Housework, cooking and errands were now difficult if not impossible. My husband took on many of my responsibilities, like having to leave the office to pick up the kids after school, take them to lacrosse or ballet or music class. Before long I was isolated, afraid and as invisible as my sickness. Quite simply, when you stop showing up you might as well disappear.

The next decade was spent trying different drugs, mostly all ineffective and usually accompanied by a wallop of side effects. Prednisone became my best friend; my weight ballooned along with my face, and I no longer recognized myself. Chronic illness can be invalidating, one becomes an invalid (null and void), learning the repetitiveness and tedium of recovering from daily



Top: *The Way I Remember You*
Above: My studio table

Patti Edmon is an intuitive abstract painter living and working in downtown Lexington, Kentucky. Her creative passion is born from insatiable curiosity and fuelled by a continuous cycle of growth and discovery. Abstract art is her language for communicating the complexity of human emotion and experience, particularly the joys and griefs of living a mindful, intentional life. Her work conveys honesty, compassion and intention, with themes of love, healing and self-awareness. Patti's work has appeared in multiple regional and national exhibits. pattiedmon1@mac.com

life, having done just a little too much, but never nearly enough. I no longer had the physical or mental energy to continue writing but had long hours to fill, so I started dabbling in scrapbooking, which led to mixed-media projects. I remember telling my compassionate rheumatologist that I felt like an 80-year-old with a young person trapped inside and that by the time I got better it would be too late to have a fulfilling life. She shook her head, hand on my shoulder, and encouraged my art practice.

How many times have we heard, “we aren’t human doings, we’re human beings,” or “we’re unique because of who we are, not defined by our status, career or accomplishments (or failings),” but when all those things start falling away like dominoes, it doesn’t conjure a feel-good mantra. Not even close. And what was even harder was the lack of any outward signs of illness, the “you look fine, how can you be sick?” and “why can’t you do ... this or that or anything else?” I could write a book about guilt, the horrible disbelief, the tedium of recovering from a flare, but I’ve already lived it and learned well to sit with my grief, process it and turn it into fuel for creativity.

“The only journey is the one within.” – Rainer Maria Rilke

So, this isn’t a sad story about defeat, loss and despair. It’s about falling down 10 times and getting up 11 times, a hard-earned wisdom that imbues my life with meaning, passion and purpose. It is a love letter about healing for women (and men!) like me, complicated, deep as the ocean, rife with stories of great love and crushing loss, yet still able/willing to search for gratitude when being one’s best self comes up short. My story is for those who take time to think expansively, seek wisdom and meaning, and find enormous colourful pockets of hope in spite of circumstances. And, in my case, it all goes on the canvas.

As a highly sensitive, intuitive introvert I was misunderstood by my parents, family and teachers. When I was in Grade 3, a note on my report card said, “Patti is often in her own little world.” There were few rewards for being lost in imagination, but that world was and is an infinite well for inspiration. My creativity has always given me a way to make sense of the world and has been a path to believing in myself without the trappings I had prioritized in my outward life. When I am painting, I’m 10 years old again, without the gum and roller skates. My mind empties and I’m not focused on achy, swollen joints or the fatigue. For an hour, or even a few, I am weightless and free. My studio is on the third floor of our house, a spacious, renovated attic, with loads of light, window seats and ample room for my wealth of supplies, paintings, books and treasures. It is where I come to spend time processing and finding the acceptance I need to nourish my spirit.

“The dedicated life is worth living. You must give with your whole heart.” – Annie Dillard

Now, at age 66, with my illness fairly under control thanks to clinical trials, I’m planning a future filled with painting, teaching and writing. I’ve always believed that if I could turn this illness into art and words that might benefit others in a similar boat, I’d be worthwhile. It has been a long journey, with a lot of grief and pain, but the lessons, wisdom and understanding gained are precious gifts that I might not have received had I continued a frenetic, exterior life.

SPRING CLEANING IN JANUARY

Sharon McMullan-Baron



I spring cleaned in January. Why didn't I follow tradition and do it in the spring, you might ask? I live where there is Winter. Most years, our Winter is large, fierce and lingers too long. Once Spring arrives, I am not interested in chores indoors. I'm inspired by the heroic darts of geese flying northward with wings and honks in unison. Delicate spears of tulips pierce the earth until the rabbits with coats of butterscotch and white mow them down. Ah Spring, when we brave the wind, unbutton our coats, and lift our faces to the sun.

Instead of cleaning, I prefer hiking trails with my dog or riding my bike. Or poking about in the garden soil nurturing bounty and beauty. There are beetles to stalk, hopscotch to jump and tree branches to climb when the grandkids visit. Don't get me wrong, I find joy in winter. Every season has her gifts to savour. It's simple, really. After all the Christmas decorations are packed away, I was energized to get cleaning.

Mid-January, I studied my sewing studio. You are next, I said. The heaps, piles, bags, and boxes of treasure stared back at me. The studio is a good-sized space in the basement with a door to hide the chaos that is mandatory in artistic endeavours. Perhaps you've noticed this too? The aftermath of Christmas gift preparations threatened to spill into the rest of the house. I was undaunted by the magnitude of the mess. I was ready to clean.

My three-year-old dog Kelly strolled past me to assume his supervisory position under my cutting table. He eyed the spray bottle and broom I carried. Once he outgrew the frenzy of his youth, Kelly learned to enjoy the chill vibe in the studio as I work. Maybe it's the tunes I play? I know it's the treats I use to settle

him. Who doesn't like a treat, right? I sure do.

Top to bottom, left to right, I sort, wipe, and reset. The poster of an elegant Italian arch hangs on one wall. Another has a Peruvian wool tapestry of women who gaze toward a floral motif mola. I brought it home from Panama. I dust several beautiful handmade signs with sewing or quilting themes from friends and family. I feel my village uplift me as I work. Bulletin boards remind me of bed dimensions and needle sizes. Colour wheels spin. Clipped quotes from magazines inspire

Below left: Design wall
Below right: Tidy painting supplies





Top: Pink Poodles
Above: Scrap basket

me as I press fabrics. A bundle of brushes, colours, canvas, and paper cluster with my painting books. A tackle box brims with beads and gemstones gathered on my travels. A tote hides all my silversmithing tools.

Projects lurk in all states: The To Be Started pile. The I'm Stuck, Now What? heap. The Why Am I Even Making This? mess. This last bunch required tough love. And a donation box close by. Kelly watched the tossing for a while. Then he snoozed. On top of the bookcase, a family of pink porcelain poodle figurines from my step-mother's childhood pose. Behind them, a clear vase

showcases my vintage threads. These were on wooden spools, a relic of my "learn to sew" youth. Sheesh, the stuff from my childhood is now Vintage.

A quick drive down Memory Lane takes me back to junior high school. The Art Room was the only place I didn't feel awkward. I was in heaven. Not so, in the Home Ec. Lab. That was my traumatic place. The diminutive but stern teacher was more intimidating than the disabled war veteran who taught math. I hated every minute of those Wednesday afternoon sewing classes. To be fair, we had to master the safe handling of many sharp objects, power equipment and scalding hot irons. Her strict rules kept us alive and mostly uninjured. I admit asking her for Band-Aids. I wonder if she would be astonished, delighted or would she just faint if she knew how I sew and play with fabrics now. My work is skillful and valued. I share it with many family, friends, and charity groups.

So far, my sisters and daughters don't engage in fabric arts the way I do. The grandkids know Nana's scrap basket is a bucket of fun they are welcome to play with anytime. I direct my passion toward my local quilt guild's education committee. I enjoy sharing my expertise and celebrating our rookie members' achievements. And gifting many creations to the region's charities.

When I got back to the clean up, I unearthed a scramble of long forgotten bits and bobs. A couple of expired granola bars were no major surprise. But the 2 pairs of outdated prescription eyeglasses snug inside their orange cases were. An Air Canada black sleep mask from my trip to China in 2017 was supposed to serve as the pattern to make other sleep masks. There were empty Yankee Candle jars with glass lids patiently waiting to hold something valuable. I can't recall what. Oh well. Recycle! A forlorn pillow form, fluffy as an 18 X 18-inch pancake lay under some books. Yes, books, magazines and patterns roamed free from their shelves or the file cabinet. Many more nestled deep inside the leaning tower of UFOs – what we call Unfinished Objects. The stack had to be disassembled cautiously. Kelly awakened, startled by an avalanche of fabrics, books, and bad words. He gave me the classic German Shepherd grumble. A few treats tossed his way and he quickly settled. His blissful snore symphony resumed.

Quietly, I moved the 2 white commemorative cowbells from the 2023 Biathlon World Cup I attended in Canmore. Let my sleeping dog lie.

He didn't notice when I exhumed the head of a toy duck from a box of scraps. The duck was made with a heavy yellow nylon fabric with a bright red beak. The



Time Capsule

manufacturer was overly optimistic about the toy's durability. It was one of those dog toys advertised as "Indestructible For Heavy Chewers." During his velociraptor puppy phase, with his crocodile razor teeth, Kelly chewed the head right off. Easy as pie. The rest of the duck was destroyed or digested in a matter of days. I wonder if he dreams of that delicious duck.

I tidy the kids craft cupboard. I check the seal on the tub of blue playdough, gather yellow pom poms escaped from their bag and sort the colours: markers, crayons, chalk, and paint. With a giggle of anticipation, I set a stash of surprises to kindle their creativity: a roll of ribbon, a collection of cardboard rolls and boxes, popsicle sticks.

Under a binder, I found a quilt label ready to be stitched to the back of a quilt which lies on our bed. The pattern was called Broken Tiles. I made it between 2004- 2007. Two of those years were my cancer treatment years. I'm well now and warmly reflect upon the many who supported me through that struggle. I named the quilt *Sunshine and Shadows* as the colours were yellows and blues. Quilters "sign" their quilts with their name, the date, and the name of the quilt. The label is now stitched to the back of the quilt. Please note: Any Quilt Police reading this, you need not arrest me.

From the bookshelf, my grandmother's mantel clock set the pace as I swept. Tick tick tick. Sweep sweep sweep. Kelly's black velvet ears flicked a twitch. He slept through the mini tornado of thread bits, dust bunnies, an orange Halloween candy wrapper that swirled past his nose. Three green buttons rolled by. They clattered softly when I tossed them into my button jar.

In the corner, under a stack of fleece stood a tall floral tin. It once held popcorn. I used to buy popcorn by the bucket when we had 3 teen ski racers' hollow legs to fill. It was a 'Family Time Capsule' tucked out of the way and out of mind. The note taped on top announced: To Be Opened December 31, 2019. It's a few years late, I know. I cannot wait to share it with the family and reveal the trinkets inside to the grandkids.

Sharon McMullan-Baron loves the arts – visual, textile, literary, music and ballet. Her angsty teen diaries shifted to a daily gratitude journal practice. She's an avid reader and participated in a book club years before Oprah! Sharon is a buyer of books, a user and advocate for public libraries. She has taught school and served on numerous Boards for literacy, libraries, the Alberta Arts and CKUA. She's a wife, Mum to 3, Nana to 4 and has a betta fish named Hal. Sharon is the proud parent to a successful visual artist.

Her short fiction is published in 7 anthologies. She's written health and wellness articles for Sharp Magazine In 2021, her commissioned poem *The Colors of Canada* was performed for the University Women's Club. She performed her poetry at the Edmonton Poetry Festival

Sharon shares her skills as a volunteer quilt instructor at her local guild. She is intrigued by modern design and recently incorporated her grandchildren's artworks into fabric collage. They thought it was "Awesome!"

When she's not writing, reading, quilting, hiking, cycling or xc skiing, she's teaching yoga at Wellspring, hanging with family and friends, or romping with Kelly-pup.

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MOMENTS OF DISCOVERY

THE ARTS REVEAL BEAUTY IN IMPERMANENCE

Susan Burnham Neilson



This is my personal story about some reasons I love making art, and why I live next to a forest. To anyone who feels an inner need to find stillness in nature every day, perhaps some of these thoughts will resonate with you. There are many ways to be an artist. For me it often starts with a walk in the woods, or drawing in the garden. Through art, I celebrate subtle balance of order and disorder in nature. I draw intimate portraits of flora and fauna at all stages of their lives. Art is my way to follow curiosity and find beauty everywhere. I love earthy natural materials, living growing things and the magic of the painting process itself.

“Art slips through the psyche’s barbed wire. It lessens division and increases kinship.” – Jane Hirshfield, poet

Witnessing Resilience

I live on the fence line of an 8.7-hectare nature conservancy in Kelowna. Woodhaven Park opens to the hills and trails at the back, but with tall chain-link fences on three sides. For wildlife, the fence seems to create a dead end before housing and roads. In this painting, I express something of nature’s spillover from within the contained areas, the beauty of what was once there, the hopeful glimpses still present and the potential for rebound.

Below: I met a baby bird my first inspiration for the painting

Bottom left: *The Forest Gate*

Bottom right: Sumi ink experiment: “A moth on my windowsill”



Hope for a Caring Future: What Inspires You?

We each find our own ways to learn about, and communicate to others, the things we love. Some of my friends make music, others find words and turn them into beautiful poetry. For me, pictures come more easily than words. My art combines figures, symbols and abstraction. To me, it feels like wordless poetry celebrating belonging and noticing connections.

My work has been called “Art for Curious Optimists,” but what really is optimism? Perhaps optimism is hope based on evidence of resilience and

positive potential. I am interested in ways that all of the arts and sciences intersect. It seems that experimentation and experiences of wonder bring us all together.

“Notice what is ordinarily unnoticed, what’s out at the periphery, and learn from that.” – Jane Hirshfield

Even a moth on my windowsill



"To watch is to see
 To see is to focus
 To focus is to love
 To love is to care
 To care is to calm the deepest part of the
 soul ..." – Clare Walker Leslie



Top left: Meeting You: Lifelines Series #1
 Top right: Close-up
 Middle top: Lifelines Series #2 Migration
 Middle bottom left: Back on day two
 hoping to finish, but the deer had eaten
 the flowers
 Middle bottom right: Pollinator Explorers.
 Sumi Ink and gouache on paper
 Above: Woodhaven, Western screech
 owlets

or a long-legged fly can be inspirations for small sketch studies of beauty in impermanence.

A lovely neighbourhood fawn inspired this almost life-sized translucent painting on a piece of cedar. It was a tribute to the mother doe when her baby did not make it through the spring season.

Portraits

I am fascinated with the forest next door, and I also love exploring local hiking routes. While outdoors, even in my own garden, I am almost always thinking about ideas for new paintings. Nature inspires both the abstract and figurative elements in my work. When flora, fauna and human figures enter into the compositions, I think of them all as portraits, including the plants. To understand each of them as individuals I need to meet them directly, so I spend a lot of time outdoors. Sometimes I just sit, watch and listen. Sometimes I bring a sketchbook or a small easel, and on walks I often bring a camera to help me focus in on patterns and details that interest me along the way.

Conservation

Art makes me aware of life cycles and adaptations to change. The more I learn, the more I care, and the more we share our responses the more we all connect to each other. I have joined two groups with people who share these interests. One is local, friendsofwoodhaven.ca, and one is international, artistsforconservation.org. Any little opportunity to learn helps each of us feel that there are ways we can make a difference contributing to positive changes for our children and grandchildren.

What is Next in Forest House Studio?

I am starting a new series of semi-abstract botanical projects on the theme of *Kinship*. They are larger works as compared to recent mini panels and studies on paper. Portability was essential when I was travelling to artist residencies, but this spring I will be sticking closer to home. I am excited because this week I finished setting up a special wall easel to make bigger pieces possible in my small studio space. Staying in Kelowna this spring, I will also be able to grow more in my garden, so I am hoping for lots of paintings inspired by the plants, flowers and pollinators right here at home. I will also be able finally to start up a monthly newsletter and reach out more actively in our own community. A plan for a small spring art release is already in the works!

Susan Burnham Neilson is an oil painter and an art education specialist, with personal interests in science, natural history and literature. In her studio at the edge of Woodhaven Nature Conservancy in Kelowna, B.C., Neilson creates quiet contemplative images that integrate sensitive figurative realism with symbolism and lyrical abstraction.

Contact Susan Burnham Neilson through susanneilson.ca

You can also find a few examples of Susan's paintings in the beautiful new Kelowna Art Book kelownaartbook.com, curated by @sarahrboldart as a special celebration of our art community, and to raise funds and awareness for youth arts programming at the Kelowna Art Gallery.

The Journal of Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,
GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Our Manifesto

This journal (and our associated website) is about you, and the possibility of you creating the next chapter in the book of your life.

You're familiar with how the other chapters worked: early, childhood, teenage, tempest, tragedy, trial, temptation, partnering, breaking, birthing, making, solving, earning, learning, building, growing, mentoring, celebrating, wising up, and ending up here after all that.

The road of life goes on from where you now find yourself, you're still on it, and the vistas that open before you promise more and maybe better rewards, but only if you engage in the possibilities.

You now get to decide if this next chapter will be a rich and fulfilling one for you, or only the last.

Rather than fading into that good night, might we offer an alternative?

Creative aging is a powerful social and cultural movement that has stirred the imaginations of many communities and people. Also referred to as sage-ing, creative aging takes many forms, and elevates people in many ways.

Most importantly, creative aging encourages and facilitates individual and collective creative pursuits, including writing, crafting, painting, dancing, and an almost unlimited number of other ways to express your creative energy.

It encourages you to find your inner artist, to discover the opportunity to celebrate and elevate, to make the most of the wisdom you've accumulated through the lessons of your life. It pleads for you to speak the truths you've learned, to share your wisdom, to be wise, to sage.

Creative aging helps you discover the source of wellness, which is in your spirit, your will to be, to be well, to share your gift, to explore, to create, to be whole.

Creative aging encourages you to engage with your inner life, to experience the grace of knowledge, to express gratitude for your gifts, and to share them with others on the same journey. By doing so, you open the door to the creative person that lives inside you, the insights you possess, the lessons you can learn through your experience, the discoveries you can share with fellow creators, and the wisdom you can gift to future generations.

Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging exists to help you document your creative pursuits with care and integrity, to honour your truth. It's time for you to join us. Tell your story, make your next chapter.