

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE
NUMBER 19, SPRING 2016
EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.
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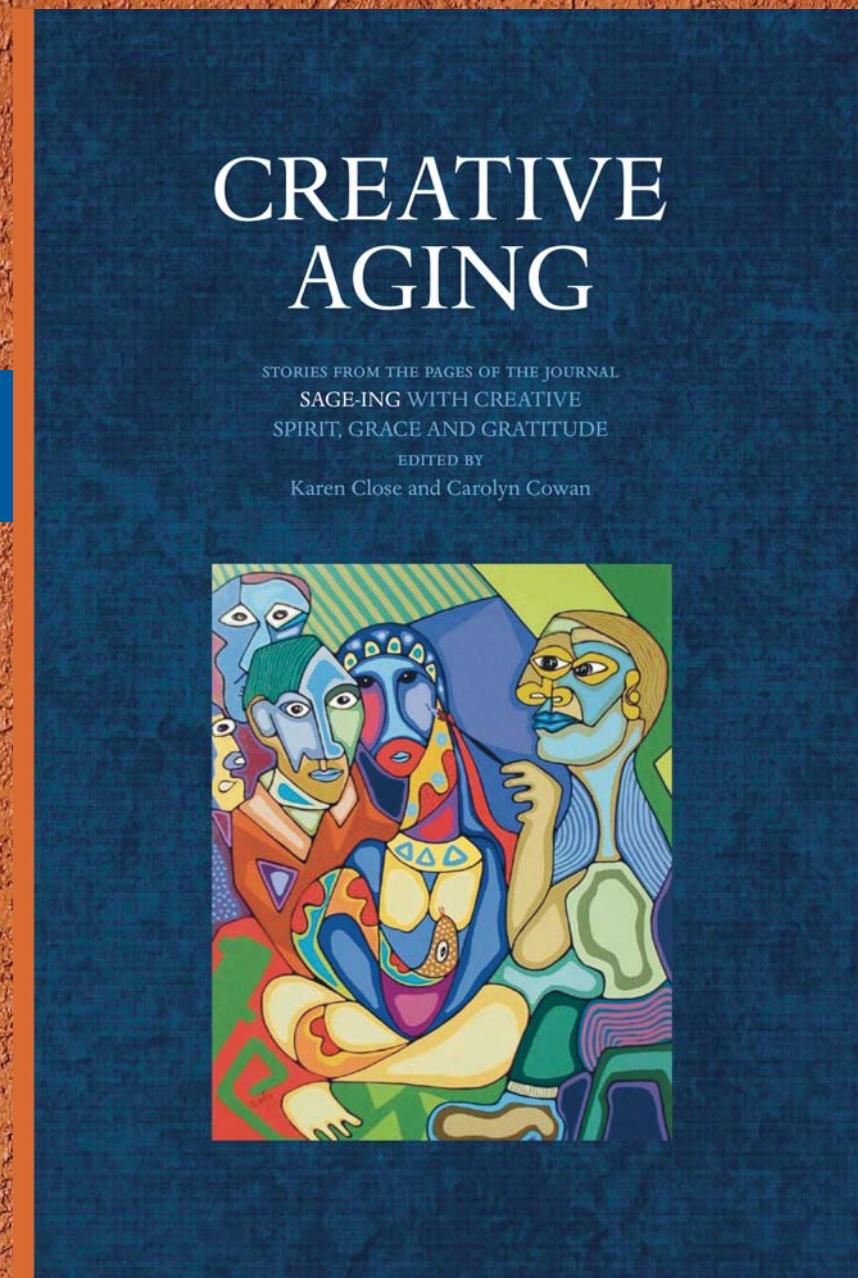
The Voices of Creative Aging

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

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

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

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



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

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

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A PUBLICATION OF THE
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Cover image by Wendy McAlpine.

FROM THE EDITOR

As I watched this 19th issue of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* take form, I could feel my heart fill and my enthusiasm soar. In the articles I could hear echoes of the consciousness that is this Journal's mission. In 1943, four years before I was born, Abram Mazlov presented "A Theory of Human Motivation". At the top of what he describes as a pyramid of human needs is 'Self-Actualization' - self-f fulfillment through the pursuit of moral ideals and creativity for their own sake. We all require devotion to something more than ourselves for lives to be endurable. In more recent times above the level of Mazlov's self-actualization, psychologists suggest there is a fifth tier called Transcendence - the existence in people of a transcendent desire to see and help other beings to achieve their potential. That transcendent power is the spirit I hear in the articles in this issue

In the introduction to the first issue of *Sage-ing* we noted, "*The internet has redefined community. Together we can direct change in*

ways never before imagined. This magazine is an invitation to share in creating a community for successful generous aging in the twenty-first century." When poet Derryn Yeoman sent me her article, she offhandedly called us the magazine of **esageing**. She was in Alberta. Electronics, email, allowed us to work seamlessly together. We were transcendent - going beyond ordinary limits; surpassing; exceeding expectations of the generation we grew up in. Should we change The Journal's name slightly? There is a common thread among submissions to this issue of those pursuing 'moral ideals and creativity for their own sake'. There is a spirit of generosity. This publication is written and produced by volunteers. Online it is free to our readers. For me this is how I envision a particular transcendent power for Creative Aging in Canada.

This issue's opening article HOW A LIBRETTO WROTE ME by Okanagan poet Lesley-Anne Evans allows a very personal glimpse into the magic that is creative process and the contagious power that

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magic possesses for the creator and all those touched by the product. In CREATIVE MAGIC: PAINTING AS IMPROVISATION Lisa Lipsett shares how her family creatively celebrated with her 80 year old mother.

There is an underlying theme in this 19th issue of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*: creativity requires being in the now, but it is a gift to the future. Art has always had that role. In LAKE COUNTRY ART GALLERY'S 3RD ANNUAL INTERGENERATIONAL EXHIBITION two grandmothers enthusiastically share the joy of creatively engaging with their grandchildren and developing rich and sustainable connections between generations. The articles in this issue give glimpses into Transcendence.

Imagine how together we can direct change and **esage**,

Karen Close

SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

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

Antiquity identified a sage as a wise person ... wisdom is a form of goodness, and is not scientific knowledge but another kind of cognition.
– Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b

HOW A LIBRETTO WROTE ME



Lesley-Anne Evans.
Photo by Wendy McAlpine

Lesley-Anne Evans

My creative love is writing poetry. In November 2014 I choose to step into a new role of librettist for Opera Kelowna's LAKE OF TEARS. Alexandra Babbel, Artistic Director of Opera Kelowna invites me to arte voce / art voice, a collaboration in which visual art comes alive in drama and music to a theme of water within an Okanagan context.

Opera Kelowna, while offering one main stage performance each season, also "bring[s] opera from the theatre to a diverse and inclusive audience with unique and accessible expression." There is alignment with my own work, vernacular themes of poetry that engage the public through installation and social media. I am captivated and begin to research opera. I stretch myself in every way with the challenge of learning a new dialect of poetry ... libretto. I know I will be tested, but I also trust:

"Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,
Come to me now, disguised as everything."
Malcolm Guite, poet, priest

Let me share with you some excerpts of my thoughts and conversations with our amazing collaborative of Alexandra Babbel, Jane Everett, Tao Gaede, Sherylin Fritz, Imant Raminsh and Rob Mason-Brown. These bits I have chosen are my mind's meanderings expressing hope, joy, doubt, and the labour of my process. I read. I reflect. As I listen to my heart, I hear the voices I seek to create. Within me I find a story I am chosen to birth.

It took a masterful team to deliver this operative work, but story was conceived and grew to term in me.

5 December 2014 17:06

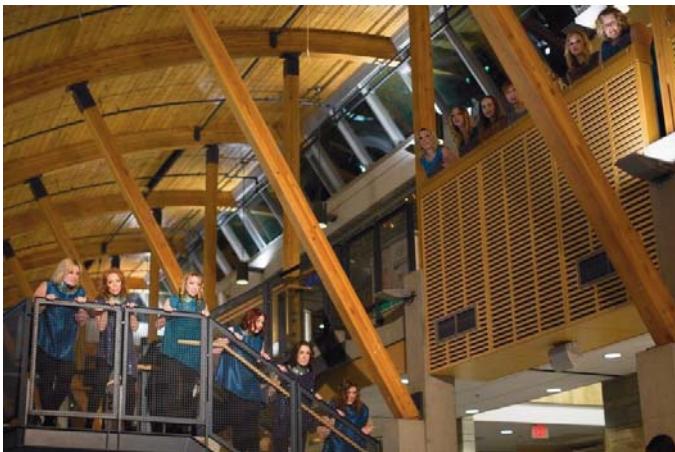
A story is becoming ... an openness to where Spirit will take me. I feel a great melancholy ... I don't even know what that means, only the foundation is an opening through pain to light ... parallel images ...

pain of a ballerina, feet torn, ravaged, required for her to dance,
pain of a composer who cannot eat, sleep, because
music is tearing him to come out,
pain of a poet trying to translate elusive thoughts into
words.

*I sense something lovely, human...journey toward one's
creative voice, intimate and life changing discovery. I sense there
will be resonance. I feel the story is emerging with its deep truth...
The more we speak of it, the more it becomes because it is already
within us, it is our own story and the story of all humanity.*

Lake of Tears, Performed at the Rotary Centre for the Arts Atrium, Kelowna BC





Top: Viviana gives Masika a vial of tears
(photo by Apryl Stead)
www.whitewillowphotography.ca

Above: the chorus warns Masika (photo by Apryl Stead)

8 December 2014 12:17

Things line up ... I'm enrolled in Booming Ground writing mentorship at UBC. My mentor Shauntay Grant says, "Congratulations on your work with Opera Kelowna! Let's talk libretto. I have a BMus degree, studied voice and did 4 years with the opera workshop, so am familiar with libretto and excited that you are writing it."

2 January 2015 09:51

I'm not married to my story at this point. One idea. I'm researching water, will consider options... This morning I'm listening to water music, allowing my mind to roam ... Now I'm learning libretto format and beginning to identify plot ... then the lyrics. A learning curve.

SATURDAY 10 January 2015

What if water is woman/mother/spirit? I read religious/cultural thoughts ... commonalities ... water as life ... redemption. Water source is hope, spring, holy well where water springs up clean and clear and potable.

Perhaps a place, or old story ... my character believes in stories of ancients...what does she leave behind ... perhaps a choice, she must leave some precious thing behind ...

Mary Oliver's The Journey implies purification. Can the impure be made pure? Can what looks hopeless have hope? What is our directive? Try harder? Observe? Surrender? NO! Drink! The journey implies a choice ... a series of choices ... we recognize we are thirsty ... what we have been doing is not working ... so we turn and seek ... it is in 'unless' that we change, hope, trust, shift ...

All of this is going to have to be made real and tangible ... yet symbolic of more. Yes ... obstacles, for sure. We choose to step out, like Mary Oliver says, there are voices (sirens) sticks and logs on the road, it is dark, well dark, still we go ... on and on until we leave what? Behind us ... purity growing ... knowledge growing ...

I sense there will be grief in the piece ...

I found a name for our young heroine ... MASIKA ... 'born during rain'. It is Persian.

5 February 2015

I've been playing with long vowel endings... Please feed me with other words that are particularly meaningful to you and for their appropriate oral operatic capability ... a list of sounds that are best sung by tenor, soprano etc.



Top: Masika unites with her father Gavia
(photo by Apryl Stead)

Above: Turmoil entranced by Masika (photo by Apryl Stead)

28 February 2015

My most recent draft of story/character/scene development. Tao and I have met several times and worked diligently on the integrity, delving into the deep places of the characters, story and musical intent, continue to ask questions to be certain of the truth of what we are writing. We collect words, sounds that will naturally flow into libretto/score.

Anything I put my hand to must become steeped in me and only then can it truly come out into its necessary form. This is my process. I feel the story is grounded now.

While I have sent you the storyline outline, with multiple revisions over the past few weeks, I have not sent my research that I feel will inform the text. Pages of chicken scratch ... I look forward to the next steps.

INSIDE I AM DANCING with joy of being involved, working with you, the potential and wonder and glorious engagement in a project such as this! Glorious fullness! Yes! THANK YOU for asking me.

The story becomes. As I am mentored by experts, learn libretto format, complexities of aria and recitative, do the work of character development, dialogue, and consider staging, I grow in confidence. The characters often tell me what must come next. I see poetry belongs. My heart is full.

My libretto MASIKA, is christened LAKE OF TEARS. This is the story synopsis;

It begins early on the morning of Masika's sixteenth birthday, in the Okanagan highlands, the home of Masika and her mother Viviana. They gather water from a well, almost dry during a 16 year drought. Viviana discloses long kept secrets about Masika's father, the Great Loon Gavia, who lives on the lake, and the ancient enchantment that allowed their people to transform into loons and call the rain. Viviana tells Masika about a girlhood friendship with Gavia and his brother Turmoil, and Turmoil's desire for Viviana's heart. When Turmoil discovers Gavia and Viviana are lovers, he curses them to eternal separation, Viviana on land with her people, and Gavia alone on the lake. Turmoil's curse removes the transforming powers of the loons and upsets the water cycle. Viviana shares a prophecy of a chosen one born during rain who will break Turmoil's curse and restore them to the lake. Masika is shocked to learn she is the Chosen one, the secret love child of Gavia and Viviana. Viviana gives Masika a vial of her enchanted tears that Masika must pour into the lake estuary before sunset. Masika begins a journey following Gavia's song toward the lake, with growing longing to fulfill her destiny and free her people. Turmoil lays in wait to foil their redemptive plans.

13 March 2015

TURMOIL has a lot to say ... he is full of it! GAVIA has distilled wisdom, so less verbage ... VIVIANA is wise, weight to her words, MASIKA is becoming, testing, discovering her voice. It's a duet of words and notes.



Scene 4, GAVIA speaks to me in Darth Vader's voice, saying, "I am your father, MASIKA." HA!

30 March 2015 16:36

TURMOIL subdues, stagnates estuary waters ... yes ... interrupts natural cycle. Our story is a redemptive tale of self discovery, creative destiny, underpinned by environmental stewardship, spiritual themes. I am convinced ... no need to be literal.



07 April 2015 10:18

Substantial completion of libretto by Thursday, April 9th. I forge ahead! Have I simplified MASIKA'S aria enough or should I keep purging?

22 April 2015 10:42

Good morning indeed! I am feeling really good about musicality of words, the repetition of concepts, the development of each character's voice. There is still room for editing ... I will not stop editing until someone says "ENOUGH!"

20 February 2016

After 10 months, "ENOUGH"! Last minute revisions with our soloists and stage director in week long rehearsals, are over. This is the premier.

As I sit in the audience, carried on the memory of sounds I delighted in at rehearsals, the professionalism and breadth of giftedness that has led to now, I am transported by joy yet humbled by the privilege of being part of this beautiful labour.

As Alexandra introduces the work to a hushed audience, she mentions "the sanctity of context" and I catch my breath. This is holy ground. All of my creative angst and awakening brings me to this moment where we extend an invitation to this audience, and surrender our gift. This too is a prayer.

Oh, water of the sky, you flood our arid lives.

Oh, water of the sky, you flood our arid lives.

From LAKE of TEARS, Lesley-Anne Evans, SDG

Although **Lesley-Anne Evans** says, "My sweet spot is writing poetry", her talents are diverse and bountiful. Please visit Lesley-Anne at www.laevans.ca or buddybreathing.wordrss.com

THE ART IN TRANSITIONS

Jane Everett



A couple of years ago I was paired with the BC landscape painter Edward Epp for an exhibition at the Bugera Matheson Gallery in Edmonton. We called our exhibition *Landings* because both of us were interested in where the land meets the water, he in his coastal scenes, and me, in my series of drawings of the Port Mann Bridge construction.

Just recently I was working on a painting of a sparrow, which showed the bird landing. It occurred to me that in spite of my changing subject matter, what really interests me as an artist are transitions; land to water, treetops to sky, and air to ground. In these places the light is transcendent and the motion just a little off balance.

These concerns are evident in my series *Canopy*, which takes the unusual perspective of looking straight up at the treetops silhouetted against the sky. This view also emphasizes the height and majesty of the BC forest and the beauty of the transition from the dark of the forest floor to the light filled openness of the sky above.

This approach also informs the body of work from my installation *Raft*, developed in collaboration with Opera Kelowna, which echoes the work of Lesley-Anne Evans (librettist) and Imant Raminsh (composer) in the opera, *Lake of Tears*. The loon paddles represent the characters in the opera and the panels are a progressive cycle of waterscapes that follow their journey.

While Lesley-Anne's work tells the tragic tale of Viviana and her daughter Masika as they seek to return to the waters of Lake Okanagan, my installation mirrors their journey with a series of waterscapes that move from the darkness of the creek, through the turmoil where the stream meets the lake, to the calm of the open water.

My work, while inspired by my fellow artists, is also about my personal connection to lakes in general, and specifically to Lake Okanagan, the place I have called home for 25 years. When I first arrived here I found the landscape rather brown and uninspiring but before long the valley got under my skin. The beauty of the lake set in a desert landscape has been a recurring and ongoing focus of my practice for many years now.

In this particular installation, the loon paddles are an ironic reference to the gentle past times of the cottage as they existed in my childhood: a paddle on the lake by day, crafts and games to fill the evenings

Landing (oil on canvas)





Above: Jane Everett's installation *Raft* at the Kelowna Art Gallery, October 2015

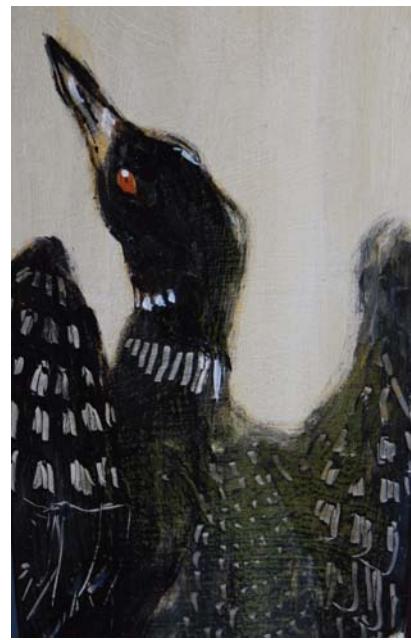
Left: *Canopy II* (mixed media on drafting film)

Right: *Birches 1* (mixed drawing media on drafting film)



and the call of the loon at night. The paddles are freestanding, blade up. I painted each paddle with the image of a loon. The paintings are ambiguous, the birds hold their usual postures for fishing, grooming and resting, yet they appear distressed. This expresses my concern that increasing powerboat activity on the lake is destroying their nesting sites and driving the loons to ever more remote places.

The large-scale waterscapes in oil on drafting film are part of an ongoing investigation of landscape seen in reflection. Essentially studies of light, the waterscapes both allow and require that I blur the image. By concentrating on the water's surface I can explore the effects of light and colour in a pure and nearly abstract way. In reflection, light pours and drips and swirls along in the moving surface of the water. It shatters colour into its component parts and reassembles them with scant regard for the laws of physics. I have found in this subject matter a broad range of expression and a great freedom in its



Top left: Dress rehearsal for *Lake of Tears* with the installation of *Raft* at the Rotary Centre for the Arts, February, 2016. photo credit: Mary Lin

Top right: Detail of a Loon paddle

Above: Installation shot of the Loon paddles, Kelowna Art Gallery

the noise and distraction, and the worry about what I *should* be doing that was a struggle in the early years of my art practice has fallen away. Meanwhile the skill set that allows me to make my vision a reality has had the time to develop. To me that is the joy of sage-ing.

Jane Everett did her Fine Arts degree at Queen's University. Her work has been exhibited across the country in both private and public galleries, from St. Francis Xavier University Art Gallery in Antigonish, Nova Scotia in 1992 to her exhibition of Port Mann drawings at The Reach Gallery, Abbotsford in 2015, and the installation *Raft* at the Kelowna Art Gallery in October, 2015. The artist divides her time between her home in Kelowna and her cottage on the north shore of Shuswap Lake. Her work is available in Kelowna at ARTE funktional and in Edmonton at BugeraMatheson gallery. www.janeeverett.ca | instagram.com/pjepainting

execution. Nonetheless, capturing the kinetic properties inherent in the water's surface remains technically challenging and inherently interesting.

18. photo: *Raft VI* (oil on drafting film) photo credit: Yuri Akuney

At this point in my life it is very clear to me that what moves and inspires me is the landscape in which I live. It is both my refuge and a cipher for all the things that I, as an artist wish to express. By choosing to paint or draw the moment of transition, I hope my viewers find an expression of their own inarticulate longings. Much of

WRITING A POEM A WEEK FOR A YEAR



Top: Opening to being on the path

Above: Derryn and her grand daughter

Derryn Yeomans

CONVERSATION WITH MY GRAND-DAUGHTER

She said, "you're a crazy lady!"

This was just after I led her
to the top of a hill on a dark, frosty night.

To lie on our backs on crisp, icy grass,
count stars and find the constellations.

To stand tall and howl at the moon
like a coyote, upsetting the neighbour's
dogs.

She said, "You're a crazy lady!"
Then she said, "and I'm glad."

I said, "so am I!"

Writing a Poem a Week for a Year began as an extension of my *Write a Poem a Day in Poetry Month* projects which I completed in April 2013 and again in 2014. In 2013, I was retiring from a long and rewarding career. I decided to write poetry as a way to ease my transition. It was so satisfying; I did it again in 2014. Then, I decided to extend the writing so that my poetry would reflect a greater range of time - a year of my life. It was a good decision. The poem a week project produced a literary journal of my life and thoughts over a full year. The 52 poems led me to discover much about myself, the world around me, the creative process and commitment - not to mention self-discipline.

The poems were written in chronological order, but even more importantly, they inspired and recorded kairos time: that time of being fully in the moment, in the now. Committed to writing a weekly poem, my awareness of both internal and external happenings sharpened. Each day, each week, I noticed. More and more, I noticed. I

noticed the beauty of nature, the sadness and the joy that family and friends of all ages endure and enjoy, global events and their impact on our earth - and on my soul. Some poems were poignant; some humorous. They were long, and they were short. Some spoke to my role as an older person, and the legacy we seniors are leaving, as well as to what lies ahead. Some spoke of family, some of the world; one spoke of cows.

SOMETHING I CHERISH

This is something I cherish...
This time before the day begins,
when I sit, quietly sipping
hot, soothing coffee,
my cup warm between my palms.
I watch the dawn, slowly,
slowly light the snowy fields.
The sky turns from dark
to pearly grey, then blue.
Clouds in the west reflect
the rising sun, often gold,
sometimes pink or lavender.
Outside my window,
the birds arrive for breakfast,
ruffling their feathers
and twittering,
like gossips at tea.

This is something I cherish....
Walking in the late-winter woods,
the sun so bright
it scatters sparkling stars
across the snow,
paints long tree-shadows,
striated design of blue and white
across my path.
Wildlife add their mark
with footprint patterns
in the softened snow.
The sun, so strong,
it warms the air, melts the ice,



Top: Time before the day begins

Above: Footprint patterns

speaks of pending spring.
Birds flit and fly about,
chanting a hopeful cheer.

AS I STOOD ALONE, QUIETLY WATCHING

A moose and her calf stood in the garden
placidly munching unharvested greens.
At that moment, for just a moment,
as the sun slipped over the horizon
sending long bars of pink light
through the branches of the trees nearby,
I felt the warmth of pure joy flow through
me.

THE DANCE

At twilight,
the sun is gone, the room is dim.

Carefully,
she sets the record on the spindle,
steps to the centre of the floor.
Her white hair forms a wispy cap.
She wears a cotton nightgown,
and sensible slippers, so that
when the dance is over, she's ready
to stop, lie down and sleep.

The vinyl drops and spins.
There's a pause, a whisper,
as the needle lifts, moves, lowers.
Big Band music fills the room
and she begins to dance.
Forward step, together.
Side step, together.
Back step, together.
Side step, together.

Slowly at first, almost a shuffle,
but then, more graceful, more smooth
as the music and her memory play.
She glides around the room.
Her long hair curls provocatively.
A shiny red skirt skims her hips, then
swings wide, sparkles catch the light.
Dangerously high-heeled shoes
show off her Betty Grable legs.
Her hand rests lightly on his neck,
touching, teasing, promising.

They twirl and swirl.
Laughing, eyes locked together,
they swirl and twirl.
But then, it is over. So soon

the record ends, the music stops.
Back and forth, the needle slides
with only a discordant scratch.

Her arms drop slowly to her side.
In the middle of the room
She is alone again
at twilight.

WALKING WITH OUR SISTERS

Immediately, you know
this will no longer be an ordinary day,
for this is not an ordinary exhibit.

Your journey begins. You smudge,
cupping pungent sweet grass smoke to
your
eyes, mouth, ears, body – to your heart.
Tobacco is carried in the palm of your left
hand.
It is to be a receptacle for your emotions,
your response to the truths before you.

Entering, you feel the silence, the rever-
ence.
A woman starts to hum, a haunting chant,
a hymn to the spirits of the lamented.

One wall is draped with shrouds of black
netting,
symbol of despair.
Opposite, the wall flows with a rainbow of
pastels,
symbol of hope.
Red fabric on the floor, paths of gray create
a background for hundreds of moccasin
vamps,
symbols of those loved, lost, still loved.

Follow the path, view the vamps, admire
the skill
and the spirit of those who care, those who
created
these memorial moccasins; with their
beading, embroidery, painting, felting,
sewing,
with their grieving, their honor ...their love.

Within the skeleton of a simple wooden
lodge
are smaller vamps, symbolic of the children
who lost their mothers, family, tribe,
culture –
their innocence, and often their very

existence.
Such tiny moccasins – such short and tragic lives.

The path goes on – the vamps, the stories, the losses, the memorial goes on.
Mothers, daughters, sisters, aunties;
Over 1200 indigenous women and girls still loved, still remembered.
Children – lost and grieved.

Today, in this room of love and loss,
we seek truth, hope for reconciliation.
Today, we are Walking with our Sisters.

And what of tomorrow?

COWS

Cows are stupid.

Out there all day, grazing in a grassy field, just munching and chewing their favorite greens.
Sometimes lying lazily in the shade of leafy trees,
surrounded by their bovine buddies; or strolling down to their favorite watering hole.

I see them as I hurry to work, where I will spend eight hours in a windowless room, alone with the flickering light from a screen,
anxiously waiting for lunch hour, so I can quickly devour tasteless fast food, more caffeine.

Cows are stupid!

I was a Registered Clinical Social Worker, working primarily as a counsellor for employee assistance programs and mental health. I had been involved in programs for persons with Alzheimer Disease and their caregivers, and had been a member of the provincial Children's Services committee composed equally of aboriginal and non-aboriginal persons. All of those roles required that I listen and that I learn.

LIVING IN AN ALIEN WORLD

What haunts me most is their vacant eyes – those doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses,

mothers, fathers, even sons and daughters. Their bright interest and intellect replaced by stark confusion and fear of the everyday. What was well known, even loved, is ominous.

Once they walked with purpose, striding through life, confident, competent, able. Now, they slowly shuffle, timid and uncertain – or pace endlessly, searching, searching for something unknown. Ultimately, even that small release, motion, is denied.

Brilliant rhetoric has been reduced to unintelligible patter, repetition, sobs; sometimes screams of anger, of anguish. Slowly, the brain retraced the steps of its development, losing all it gained, regressing to infancy, the fetal pose.

Fragments of the past erupt, then disappear. Memories and emotions of their life span are broken into incomprehensible pieces, an agonizing puzzle that cannot be solved. Bewildered, frightened, still they survive – reluctant refugees in an alien world of Alzheimers.

A VERY MODERN FATHER'S DAY POEM

This is a poem about fathers; appropriate on this, their special day.

Father, dad, mon pere, papa, pop – there are many titles to be found, but it used to be much more simple. A father was a father if he sent his sperm to the right place, at the right time. Even if the question arose – legitimate or not? – a father was a father, just ask those British kings.

But in these modern times, there are bio-dads, step-dads, adopting dads, single fathers, sperm donors, foster fathers, father figures, weekend dads, straight, gay and trans dads. Sadly, even deadbeat dads.

There are teen dads, septuagenarian dads and all the ages in between; there are

Our past certainly informs our future, and I discovered that many stories had remained in my mind to emerge in heartfelt poems. The recent death of my very-vibrant, 90-plus mother seemed to mingle with my own aging process; this too was represented in my poetry.



A father

fathers-in-law, fathers in love,
stay-at-home dads, workaholic dads,
absentee fathers, helicopter dads,
fathers in suits, fathers in sweats,
dads in boots and dads in dresses.
Rich dads, poor dads, homeless dads,
ordinary working dads,
hugging dads and handshake dads,
distant dads and heartless dads.
Fathers who are loved and fathers who are
not.

This is a very modern poem about fathers –
It isn't simple anymore, and
you'll never find it on a Hallmark card.

Our past certainly informs our future, and I
discovered that many stories had remained
in my mind to emerge in heartfelt poems.
The recent death of my very-vibrant, 90-
plus mother seemed to mingle with my
own aging process; this too was repre-
sented in my poetry.

IT IS JUST AN OLD CHAIR

It's just an old chair, time-worn,
armrests rubbed shiny and smooth,
concave seat with once-soft stuffing
grown hard with decades of use.
There are subtle stains
left by un-noticed drops of
morning coffee or afternoon tea,
perhaps the occasional crumb.

In my mind, that chair is never empty.
I see her sitting there, as she always did,
head bent, hair shining silver under the
lamp
as she did her crossword, read the paper
or her latest crime novel.
It was her favorite chair,
it was where she sat.
It was "mom's chair" for years.

Then, it came to me, to my home.
But, it never really fit in.
It was uncomfortable, shabby, out-dated,
un-used...not loved as before.
Now, it's just an old chair and today
It is on its way to the dump.

Why do I cry
as I watch the truck drive away?

Frequent trips to the West Coast and a
deep belief in our need to protect the
environment for our grandchildren inspired
the Great Bear Rainforest poem.

THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST

What will our grandchildren's grandchil-
dren
and their grandchildren know
of The Great Bear Rain-forest?

Will orcas, great whales and
the singing of the humpbacks
still exist, or be known only
in stories of "before"?

Will the pink, the sockeye, chum,
coho and chinook salmon
be merely myths; their journeys,
their valiant struggles to travel
upstream told as allegories?

What of the ivory spirit bears,
the Kermodes? Will they inhabit
islands of wilderness, or will only
their ghosts hide in the forests?

Will forests still stand?
Will bald eagles fly overhead,
grizzly bears fish the water's edge,
wolves howl mournfully at night?

Will dolphins play, beaver toil,
the waters run clear and pure
in The Great Bear Rainforest?

What of the people of this land?
Haisla, Owikeno, Haida, Kitasoo,
Heltsuk, Gilga'at, Namigis?
Will their grandchildren's grandchildren
and their grandchildren take pride
in their ancestors? Will they know?
Will they carry their culture forward
in The Great Bear Rainforest?

Will we honour our duty to preserve,
to protect this sacred legacy,
The Great Bear Rainforest,
for our grandchildren's grandchildren,
and their grandchildren?

Or will we ask them to pay the price
of all their tomorrows
to fuel our pleasures today?



The Great Bear Rainforest

The joys inherent in being a grandmother were natural grist for the literary mill. I believe poetry lurks just beneath the surface of us all and a consistent "putting pen to paper" brings the words, the emotions and the beliefs to conscious expression.

RECKLESS ABANDON

Whatever happened to
Spreading your arms out wide and
running into the wind,
hair tangling and twisting cheeks
reddening in the cold,
laughter caught and blown away behind
you.
Going nowhere, stopping only when
there's no breath left.

Whatever happened to
Standing at the top of a hill astride a two
wheel bike,
taking a deep breath or two, then
pushing off and
careening downward, bike and body
shuddering -
brazen whoops of fear as speed
accelerates.

Whatever happened to
Spinning around and around, round and
round

until your eyes can't focus and all you see is
a blur.

Nausea hits and bile rises in your throat
just before
the ground reaches up, grabs you as you
fall, giggling.

Whatever happened to
Lying on your back in the middle of the
lawn
with someone called Linda or Mary or
Rick,
ignoring the grass stains growing on
your shirt,
as you interpret the clouds and time
drifts by unnoticed.

Whatever happened to
Catching tadpoles, walking barefoot in
squishy mud,
running into a cold mountain lake,
rolling down a hill,
making angels in the snow, skipping
down the sidewalk
singing out loud for the sheer joy of it,
just because.

Whatever happened to
Reckless Abandon?

I owe much gratitude to my virtual friends and I am very happy that our creative communications are continuing, as is our writing. Even in the golden years, it takes a village.

Integral to this project was a group of readers who helped me all the way. Three virtual friends faithfully read my poems which I sent to them each week by e-mail. Staying committed to weekly writing was incredibly enabled by these gentle friends who provided encouragement, feedback, and sometimes, poems of their own which further sparked my creativity. Writing can be an isolating act, but the camaraderie of a cohort group made the project even more stimulating. It was one of these readers who suggested I try to write a poem in the diamonte style, which led me to branch out to try a ghazel, and a limerick. Google these for the guidelines, but I must warn that writing a ghazel is a challenge I will not repeat. Our group shared favorite poems, which led to explorations of the creative output of poets through the centuries as well as new poets of today. I keep a file of favorite poems now, and revisit it often. I owe much gratitude to my virtual friends and I am very happy that our creative communications are continuing, as is our writing. Even in the golden years, it takes a village.

As mentioned in my former article for e-sageing (Spring 2015) each poem in the *Write a Poem a Week* project was a valuable lesson in giving time to the arts, to my thoughts, to my observations, and to my emotions. Our senior years give us the freedom to do things simply for the joy of

doing them, rather than as a means to an end. Taking the opportunity to delve deeply into the creative wells within gives one the opportunity to leave a legacy for those who follow. As we age, it is not only a time to nurture our own creativity, but also to inspire, encourage and support the arts and creativity in others of all ages. Yes, from my four year old grandson's perspective, "Did you ever see a moose, kissing a goose?" is in fact a poem. It is a starting place for amazing creativity to come.

So what was best about the *Writing a Poem a Week for a Year* project? The feeling of satisfaction in completing a task was great. The literary exchange with other writers helped to keep me going when the muse seemed to desert me. I became more aware of my own beliefs and the thoughts stored in my mind. However, the best reward was constantly learning to be more aware and to notice, truly notice, and to translate that increased awareness into creative writing.

Am I repeating the project in 2016? I've already started. In fact, the joys of living creatively have enticed me to expand. 2016 is to be the year of the novel. It might be a good novel; it might be a not-so-good novel. It might only be seen by me and a few trusted friends, but it will be written...it will be done. One more of my creative goals will be met. Check.

P.S. Derryn esage-ing, March 13, 2016

While my 8 year old granddaughter and I were walking in the beautiful and unusual sunshine yesterday....her wearing pink snow boots for whatever 8 year old's reason....I threw out the first line of this poem....and it took off from there. We walked and created and revised and came up with rhyming lines. Soon, Gramma discovered that creativity is enhanced by doing cartwheels and handstands at the park (her, not me). The words started to take on a sing-song rhythm....and the generational separation emerged. She became all excited about us creating an

original song which could be videoed and sent viral (gramma said - What?). When we got home.....we did exactly that.....got out the ipad and did a video of our original song...complete with intro and sign-out by Annabelle. Annabelle wrote out our words and then directed which lines were to be said by whom...and which lines were to be repeated and which lines were said in duet! She was a great director, and it is a jazzy video....BUT Gramma is really hoping that it is NEVER posted !!! Fun all around....and she picked up very quickly on rhyming words and scanning lines. So here it is.....my weekly poem....with a very cute collaborator.

Snow Boots In the Sunshine

Snow boots in the sunshine
Temperature is over nine.
We can have a real good time,
Walking in the bright sunshine.

Say goodbye to all the snow.
Grass and flowers start to grow.
Say hello to summer fun,
Wintertime is done, done, done.

CULTIVATING CREATIVE CURIOSITY



Sharing treasure

Beach drawing



Karen Close

My years as a Visual Arts and English teacher convinced me that creativity is perhaps the most important life skill we can nurture in our children. Curiosity is innate. When it is cultivated a child gains independence of thought and appreciation for the self directed inquiry, growth and understanding that is creative expression. Feeling one's heart beat with the excitement of creative passion builds confidence. We learn how to be with ourselves. This knowing is precious and provides a firm foundation for a child to create all they can be.

Because it invites us to pay attention, creativity builds a sense of empathy and belonging. We open to ourselves and to our union with the natural world and our environment. We ask questions and make connections. The Journal's regular contributor Lisa Lipsett proclaims we are *Creative By Nature*. Primitive artists understood this union. Their works were always in the service of natural spirits and the culture. Their art played a pivotal role in ensuring continuity of the group, the teaching of the young, the transfer of power from one generation to another and the peaceful departure of souls. "When a culture places more value on art as a commodity, rather than as an opportunity for personal exploration and expression, there is a loss. The healing sense of union with oneself, the earth and one's community, suffers."

On April 29th, 1999 *The Globe and Mail* front page read: *The pain of the teenaged outcast: Scorned, teased and bullied, many young people endure years of abuse. Others 'take it into their own hands.'* The column presented interviews with teenagers and their reactions to school shootings. Their words of alienation reinforced observations from my years teaching. It's not a cure all,

but when I could motivate struggling youth to find their creative voices, their confidence grew. I saw sensitive beings gain peace and union with themselves and others. I became a passionate spokeswoman advocating for the need to show our children how to develop creative confidence. Education needs to do more to nurture self knowing, not competition. I proposed encouraging an idea I called ***ABC Experiencing: Experiential Adventures in Arts, Biology and Culture***. I took direction from the native creative process.

"In the past Native Aboriginals of North America lived their lives in harmony with nature and their own nature... It was a way of thinking, a way of being... Their ways were to understand



Top: Watching the sunset, particularly at low tide, was an important conclusion to our days.

Middle: The tide pools are cool

Above: A hand full of treasure

human nature and the environment and their part in it... the life force involved in and articulated through the unique ‘creative process’ used by Native people is one which could make a necessary contribution to the thinking of many peoples.” Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal

My idea did not find many supporters among a culture focused on the quality of products rather than process, and on making arts cuts, especially in education. Now, seventeen years later, I have four grandchildren, ages three to seven. I take every opportunity to stimulate their creative curiosity and cultivate ‘harmony with nature and their own nature’. *Pura Vida*, spanish for “pure life”, is the law of the land in Costa Rica, a second world country, where we were fortunate to holiday together this winter. We savoured the beach, the sun, the wind, the surf and especially the tide pools.

Close/Williams Family Collaborative Poem

At the gate
You go straight.
We love low tide
Because the beach is wide,
And the shells don’t hide.
To look for treasure
Is our pleasure.
Inside the tide pool
It’s ever so cool.
A howl in the tree
Means a monkey you’ll see.
But watching the sun go down
Is the best fun in town.

Hunting and gathering - looking for nature’s treasures and gathering memories - filled our days. Showing each other what attracted us opened awareness. Moments seemed magical.

There were questions. There was awe. There was communion.

When I taught Visual Arts the curriculum theme was *Towards Visual Awareness*. I love the description of creativity as the art of paying attention. Recently I read popular novelist Elizabeth Gilbert’s new non-fiction book on the power of creativity called *Big Magic*. I hope it will be another best seller. It brings an important message.

Under an awning in the garden of our casita, an art table was always at the ready to receive our treasures and transform them into art. There was a supply of watercolours, water soluble and permanent felt tip markers, crayons and glue. Art is a form of energy. I encouraged my young artists to think about the energy they had felt on their beach excursions. We looked at the shells they’d collected and talked about how the natural forces of wind and water had changed them and left marks. Were the shells broken or just changed? What did we like about these marks? Look at the patterns and colours.

I believe it is good to set an intention as one begins to create. The creative process is like planting a seed, but once in the ground, the seed has its own



Photos top to bottom

- Jaxon turned 3 February 15th. He loves orange, and the blue of the water.
- Corbin turned 4 February 13th. I think he has a gentle and thoughtful touch with his brush; he likes to keep his works simple.
- Abby's loves pink and was delighted to find pink shells
- Xyla's painting with shells
- Xyla's sunset

direction. After the first mark, so does a painting. If you allow it, each piece of art becomes alive and the process becomes an energetic conversation between the work and its maker. I encourage everyone to talk to their works. Ask what colours it wants. How does the brush want you to move it? Do you want to use a brush or some other tool? I encouraged my grandchildren to throw paint at the paper, to lift their works and dance with them so the paint flowed. I encouraged marks which would embody each child's our own unique nature.

We stuck things to the surface. We tore things off and let them leave an imprint. In the 1950's this was called 'action painting' and the emphasis was always on the action; the painting itself was simply the result. I wanted to discourage representation, and encourage *Pura Vida* - release, abandonment, flow and energy. These are Costa Rican paintings. In 'action painting' the only search was for one's own special kind of visual signature, something intrinsic to a work which would instantly signify that it was the work of the particular artist. Pride of personal expression was valued. Although I did make my own paintings with my grandchildren, I didn't direct their efforts. They would look over to get ideas, but then proceed in their own directions. Encouraging the confidence to take risks and see what happens is important.

From very young ages all of my grandchildren have been to the heART Fit group I began at Kelowna's Rotary Centre For The Arts. They understand Spontaneous Process Painting and each knows the feeling of relaxing, feeling and following intuition while creating. During our vacation we left their works taped to the table which allowed them to go back at any time, have a look and maybe add something. This also gave a sense of working on a wet or dry surface and watching a work build up over time. They learn to observe and consider. Skill and techniques can grow slowly and naturally.

One afternoon I was watching Abby who turned 5 last August. She walked by a couple of times and looked at her work taped to the table. Then she sat down and made some important additions. I knew she had heard her work speaking to her. "Way to go. You're an artist." I called out.

My eldest granddaughter Xyla turned 7 February 27th. Her inner critic has begun to develop, but she and I have been painting together since she was six months old. I've written about her creative expressions in issues 1 and 4. Now she is asking questions and pushing herself to understand and see the connections.

"How does collecting shells help me to be a better artist?" she had asked, and then she saw. "I like the texture of sand. Doesn't the purple make the design on that shell pretty?"

My grandchildren are developing healthy creative curiosity and I am very proud of them. This is a way of being that will bring pleasure throughout lives.

ART & IDENTITY

CONNECTION & CREATIVITY AT THE ALTERNATOR CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART



Peter Green. Photo by Wanda Lock.

Artist-run centres are very different because of their financial model, and the art they subsequently have the liberty to show. By not selling art or charging admission, artist-run centres have the freedom to show work purely based on the viewing experience the work can stimulate.

Peter Green

After a very publicized crash and burn, the disastrous circumstances that spring semester were a blow no university student was equipped to deal with. As I pushed through the exhaustion of final exams in April, my confidence was at an all-time low and I was burnt out like never before. When I completed my fourth year of six at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, my mental health had plummeted. In a couple of days my lifelong friend and partner-in-crime was journeying to Haida Gwaii. In need of something new, I packed my bags and we drove out west.

Landing in the Okanagan, that summer I learned the cathartic power of art and the supportive community it can create. Landing a job at a gallery, I was surrounded by artists, cultural workers, and creatives of every walk. That summer the potency of art became clear to me; it rebuilt my confidence, cleared my head, and I looked forward to returning to study at the summer's end. The process of connecting with art, creating art, and even speaking about art was therapeutic. My time amidst the Okanagan arts community made me feel rejuvenated. I graduated two years later, and my experience that summer led me to take a job managing Kelowna's Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art. Working at the Alternator for the past twelve months has been a similarly formative experience. I've been inspired on a daily basis, and this year has solidified for me the valuable role of the arts in society.

The Alternator is an artist-run centre founded in 1989 and located in Kelowna, British Columbia at the Rotary Centre for the Arts. We are a non-profit organization and Kelowna's only artist-run centre. We're very proud to be the largest and oldest Canadian artist-run centre between Vancouver and Calgary.

An artist-run centre is very different from a commercial or public gallery. Commercial galleries largely stimulate the art market in a region, and are bound by showing art that sells rather than nurturing creative expression. On a basic level, the purpose of most public galleries is to inspire citizens with works of civic and historic significance. The difficulty of trying to separate art from the motivation to show mass-appeal exhibitions, crucial to selling admission tickets, is commonplace. Artist-run centres are very different because of their financial model, and the art they subsequently have the liberty to show. By not selling art or charging admission, artist-run centres have the freedom to show work purely based on the viewing experience the work can stimulate.

The art at artist-run centres is no better or worse than that at commercial or public galleries; the art shown and these galleries simply serve different



Top: Troy Nickel's exhibition *Process, Place and Perception*. Photo by Troy Nickel for the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art.

Above Artist Crystal Przybille working on a major public sculpture of Chief Skncut in the Alternator's Studio 111. Photo by Shelly Wood

purposes in society. A healthy arts community is best served by having all three of these kinds of galleries: commercial, public, and artist-run.

At the crux of an artist-run centre is its ability to embrace risk. These types of galleries function as arts incubators, and serve to both inspire and display innovative artworks. The Alternator's community is indicative of this role as an arts incubator. Nearly sixty percent of our visitors are artists, and nearly all of our four hundred or so members are as well.

The primary goal of the Alternator is to support emerging and alternative artists. The Alternator does this by providing mentorship, studio space, workshops, referrals, professional opportunities to exhibit, and artist access to our cultural networks. As an advocate for artists' rights and artists' ability to gain self-determination through their work, an artist-run centre unequivocally compensates professional artists to show their work. We determine the fee to pay an artist based on industry standard rates set by CARFAC(Canadian Artists' Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens). This fee is based on quantitative variables, like the amount of wall space in the Alternator and how long an artist's work is displayed.

Displaying an emerging and alternative artist involves risk, and contrary to the majority of commer-

cial or public galleries, artist-run centres exist to embrace this risk. In doing so, the Alternator creates exhibition opportunities for emerging artists that otherwise would be unavailable to them. The Alternator actively serves to counteract the very strong pull felt by creative professionals for cities like Vancouver and Calgary.

The second goal of the Alternator is to present exhibitions that are engaged in contemporary cultural issues. We specifically select art that challenges dominant structures of gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation. Often art that tackles social, political or environmental themes can only be shown in artist-run centres, as these galleries are free to explore alternative values and identities that otherwise come secondary to financial goals at other institutions.

This brings us to the third part of the Alternator's mandate: we ultimately seek to inspire our members and the community. "Art has never stopped a war and never got anybody a job. That was never its function," said composer Leonard Bernstein. "Art cannot change events, but it can change people ... [And when] people are changed by art – enriched, ennobled, encouraged – they then act in a way that may affect the course of events by the way they vote, they behave, the way they think." Art is a platform for



Top: Ann Nicholson's exhibition *The Chilcotin War: A Colonial Legacy* in the Alternator's main gallery space. Photo provided by the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art.

Above: A packed house for the Central Okanagan Hospice Association's exhibition *Expressions of Death: Dying, Grief and Life After*. Photo provided by the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art.

sharing knowledge and values, and we at the Alternator want to give alternative voices that stage.

Over the course of a year, the Alternator will display six major exhibitions, each lasting six weeks in length. Additionally, each of our artists has the paid opportunity to create an extension of their exhibition into a public space. This might include for example a banner, a public performance, or an outdoor projection.

As a part of the *Intermission Series*, in between each professional exhibition the Alternator hosts weeklong pop-up exhibitions by University of British Columbia Okanagan visual arts students.

The Alternator also runs an artist co-op program out of its studio facilities, called Studio 111. This program is designed to allow access to a dedicated studio space for emerging, designers and makers interested in a concentrated period of community-focused arts practice.

One of the Alternator's most popular programs is the Members' Gallery. The Alternator's Members' Gallery is a community programming venue dedicated to supporting the development of local emerging artists and community groups. In 2015, with the financial support of the Central Okanagan Foundation, the Members' Gallery program was expanded to present seventeen two to three week exhibitions a year. As a benefit of having a membership, members get the exclusive opportunity to develop a solo or group show in the Members' Gallery. The member artist develops an exhibition, and staff members help them execute it. This is an incredible opportunity for emerging artists of any age to get a show under their belt, to

test out new ideas, to take creative risks with a build-in feedback process, and to learn practical gallery skills like installation, documentation for their portfolio, and networking skills at their opening reception. Now rivaling the main space in popularity, the Members' Gallery has grown to become an integral part of the Alternator, and a linchpin in the institution's role as an arts incubator.

My time at the Alternator will soon come to an end in March 2016. My year as Gallery Manager has been inspiring, particularly in my interactions with gallery audiences. During Ann Nicholson's exhibition *The Chilcotin War: A Colonial Legacy*, I remember fondly a Chilcotin woman weeping with pride, telling me of her mother's role in her nation's precedent-setting title case victory at the Supreme Court of Canada. During the Central Okanagan Hospice Association's exhibition *Expressions of Death: Dying, Grieving and Life After* in the Members' Gallery, I remember the tears of a woman connecting with a piece that mirrored her experience with her father's death.

Just as happened during my summer in the Okanagan three years ago, I'm reminded of art's transformational power. Art can inspire, heal, anger, any number of things really, but most importantly, whether it be willed into stone or spilt on a canvas, art is the expression of humanity that connects us.

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Peter Green is a recent graduate from Queen's University. He achieved a BA (Honours) in art history and a BSc (Honours) in biology. His professional experience is in arts management, public relations and communications. Moving to Kelowna in the spring of 2015, he is the Gallery Manager at the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art, the 2016 Guest Curator at the Lake Country Art Gallery, and a contributing writer for the Okanagan Art Review. Hailing from Toronto, Peter has worked in strategic partnerships with public relations agency Arts & Communications. While attending university in Kingston, Ontario he was the Executive Producer for Theatre Mies and the Communications Chair on the board of the Union Gallery.

MY LIFE WILL BE MY STORY

Donna Sheppard



I am delighted to introduce (and include) myself in the rapid escalation of the over 60 population. When I was a teenager, anyone 30 and over seemed old and uninteresting, with the exception of two or three of my parent's friends who filled the room with their charismatic persona. I admired them for their ability to draw out the best from every person in the room, including me. They engaged me by listening and responding with a persuasive charm, laced with a sense of humour that was infectious. Above all, they illustrated, by example, that being 'old' could be fun! It's a matter of perspective.

I plan on living until I'm 100. And, I plan to arrive there with my mind and body intact; able to think and speak clearly and get around without the help of a cane or a motorized, digitalized robot on wheels.

I cannot turn back time or prevent aging, but I can recognize and let go of a generation of old, fixed habits that not only don't serve me, but that get in the way of living fully.

Since 'retirement', 20 years ago, I've had ample time for self-examination and conclude that I've fulfilled my biological obligations with the addition of two responsible children, who have blessed me with the addition of four grandchildren. Now it's time for me to get back to my creative roots; to rid myself of extraneous 'stuff' and concentrate on what really matters to me; to salvage those dreams put on hold because of lack of time, or lack of resources or lack of what I perceived to be support in other areas. Yet again, I am reinventing myself and in so doing, I vow the following:

1. I vow, between now and my inevitable earthly demise, that I will collect stamps on my passport, not more 'stuff'.

2. I vow to never stop indulging myself in my life-long joy of learning new things; seeing new places and meeting new people.

3. I vow to devote serious time to urging seniors to mindfully rewire their brains; to let go of old learned thinking habits that don't serve them or prevent them from living more creatively. As Alan Kay put it: "A change of perspective is worth 80 I.Q. points."

Admittedly, there have been times in my life I have been stuck; times when I intuitively understood the need to reinvent myself - to kick-start my brain cells into accepting the new intellectual habits necessary to accept new thoughts and ideas. It was hard, oftentimes fearful work, but I feared the being stuck alternative even more.

"I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better."

~ Maya Angelou

Age is simply an indicator of how long you've been taking up space on

I cannot turn back time or prevent aging, but I can recognize and let go of a generation of old, fixed habits that not only don't serve me, but that get in the way of living fully.



Top: dressing up helps "attitude."

Middle: seeing new places (photo by Donna Sheppard)

Above: look for the humour (photo by Donna Sheppard)

this earth. Investing time concentrating on fearful thoughts surrounding age, is living in your head, not being present to life. I'm going to live passionately, fiercely, and spontaneously. I'm going to embrace my free spirited creative soul. I'm going to use the wealth of knowledge and experience I have, and from which many valuable lessons need to be extracted. *Carpe Diem*

Last Wednesday, I was the unhappy recipient of my grandson's croupy, coughing cold. I landed in L.A. late Friday afternoon, feeling sick and exhausted to begin a long anticipated vacation house sitting my girlfriend's home. Suddenly the fiasco of getting her car and the trip to her home became a very long exercise in frustration. Was I being tested?

First I had to wait for Air Canada to find my luggage; this took an hour after everyone else had picked up their luggage. Finally, luggage in hand, I phoned the parking lot where Jackie had her car parked to request a shuttle to pick me up. So far so good, but when I got to the parking lot and pulled out the photo Jackie had sent me via her phone, of the parking spot number, her car was not there. I had to wait around and have one of the office staff find an employee who took the car keys Jackie had sent me and then proceeded to take another half hour locating the car.

Jackie had emailed that once in the car all I had to do was hit 'home' on the GPS system and it would take me directly to her home in Oceanside. Wrong. Jackie has two homes; one in Oceanside and one in Palm Desert. She had the GPS set for the home in Palm Desert. It wasn't until I was halfway there that I realized I was not heading towards Oceanside.

Jackie's car is a 2015 Lexus, sports model, low to the floor, beautiful hunk of auto engineering, in every respect, down to the rich red leather interior, and amazing sound system. For the first hour and a half, I was floating on air savouring the comfort and really not in the present moment. Suddenly, jolted into the present, I realized I was going to be geographically challenged to find my way to Oceanside. I tried to reprogram the GPS.

It is a sophisticated, complicated version of my rudimentary GPS, but I could not, short of stopping the car and reading the manual for an hour or more to figure it out, turn off the voice or the GPS's insistence that I proceed to Jackie's Palm Desert home.

Every few moments, came that damn voice insisting that I turn around every few hundred yards and head back to Palm Desert. I kept pushing



Top: Carpe Diem

Middle: GPS blues

Above: and then I noticed my shoes

buttons hoping one of them would silence her and calm my growing frustration and anxiety - no luck.

The bit of luck I did finally manage was to stop at a convenience store where the young guy behind the bar took out his android cell phone and input detailed info, word for word Including the number of miles between each change, to get me from where we were to my Oceanside destination. It took me 20 minutes to write it all out.

Back to the car. Now I'm driving (at night) with the overhead light on, directions propped up on the dash with Ms. GPS droning on and on and on and on.

So I get to within about 3 or 4 miles from Harbourside Marina, which is difficult to find under the best of circumstances, but GPS doesn't recognize the address of the building Jackie is in. I have no idea why. Now I'm within a stone's throw distance, but keep driving around in circles, unable to stumble upon the almost hidden turn. Oh yes, and I hasten to add at this point it's fogged in.

I spotted a cab, opened my window and flagged him down while flashing my lights at him at the same time. The driver thought I was nuts when I told him where I wanted to go and that I would follow him, and, of course, pay him. I couldn't believe it when he said he would need collateral money up front. According to him he'd been fleeced before. I pointed out I was asking him to take me to the destination I'm staying at and wouldn't be taking off anywhere. Nevertheless, I gave him a twenty and that satisfied him to start out but he required another five dollar bill when we arrived safely. I might have paid double or triple at that point. I've never been so happy to ARRIVE in my entire life.

The first thing I did after I walked in the door was to pour myself a healthy shot of tequila which I dislike, but I needed it. I sat back and thought about those friends of my parents who I'd admired: 'They engaged me by listening and responding with a persuasive charm, laced with a sense of humour that was infectious.' My day's frustration became my muse, my inspiration to embrace my free spirited creative soul.

Donna Sheppard is retired, and has Carpe Diem stamped on her soul. Her hobbies are photography, writing, traveling and making every day an adventure.

CREATIVE MAGIC

PAINTING AS IMPROVISATION



Lisa Lipsett

One real joy of painting is that it develops our ability to improvise. According to violinist and philosopher Stephen Nachmanovich, in his book *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, “improvisation is intuition in action, a way to discover the muse and learn to respond to her call . . . The whole essence of bringing art to life is learning to listen to that guiding voice”.

With practice we learn to shift from planning and thinking about our art to being responsive to the world and ourselves as we create. That way we may experience the joy of being in synch. We practice the moment co-creation that improvisation demands.

Improvisation is from the Latin *improviso* ”unforeseen; not studied or prepared beforehand”. It is when we do something spontaneously on the spur of the moment in relationship with another. When we improvise, if we don’t study or prepare before hand, what is it that we are actually doing?

According to neuroscientist Charles Limb, “creativity is magical but it is not magic”. In other words what is happening is scientifically observable. He has successfully married improvisational jazz piano with the precision of modern brain imaging technology by placing jazz musicians in an fMRI machine. He looks into their brains to see what is happening while they improvise.

Limb found that as each jazz musician began an improvisational session they “deactivated” their dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). This area is one of the most recently evolved parts of the human brain that undergoes a prolonged period of maturation that lasts until adulthood. So it is less matured in children and at full capacity in adulthood. An important function of the DLPFC is the executive functions, such as working memory, cognitive flexibility, planning, inhibition, and abstract reasoning. It is also a manager and is the highest cortical area that is involved in motor planning, organization and regulation.

In layman’s terms, the musicians turned off part of their conscious mind to let the unconscious mind do the work. As Limb says, “musical creativity vis-à-vis improvisation may be a result of . . . the suspension of self-monitoring and related processes that typically regulate conscious control of goal-directed, predictable, or planned actions.” In other words, when pianists improvised they were inhibiting their inhibitions. (Watch Limb’s TED lecture www.ted.com/talks/charles_limb_your_brain_on_improv?language=en). So to improvise we need to enact a weird dissociation where self-monitoring functions turn off and free expression turns on.

But despite being able to peer into people’s brains and see improvisation in real time, some worry that we lose sight of the magic involved. Isn’t it

With practice we learn to shift from planning and thinking about our art to being responsive to the world and ourselves as we create. That way we may experience the joy of being in synch. We practice the moment co-creation that improvisation demands.



The progression of an improvisational painting

"Looking out now, over the ocean, the birds, the vegetation, I see that everything in nature arises from the power of free play sloshing against the power of limits.... These creative processes inherent in nature are called by some people evolution, by others creation."

Nachmanovich

amazing how new things are born right before our eyes as we improvise? How is it we can co-create in synch with each other, the living world and ourselves in shared moments of unspoken creativity?

Author Tanner Christiensen of Creative Something <http://creativesomething.net/tagged/neuroscience> says by breaking creativity apart into a science, something we can explain clearly and plainly, we might be irreparably damaging what it means to be creative and how we utilize the ability. "Because, while creativity primarily takes place in the mind – based on very real factors we can identify and measure and impact – the act of creativity itself has always been about serendipity, uncertainty, and wonder; the opposite of what science seems to be trying to turn it into. Part of what makes the creative process so enthralling is the basic wonder of it".

What if improvisation still feels magical because we can be in awe of the vitality and joy that comes when an idea strikes, when we come up with a hot solution to a problem, when we invent a concept, or when a new yet somehow familiar image appears in a painting?

When we improvise we tap into a deep underlying evolutionary pattern and we participate in a great creative unfolding of ourselves in an evolving creative world.

"Looking out now, over the ocean, the birds, the vegetation, I see that everything in nature arises from the power of free play sloshing against the power of limits.... These creative processes inherent in nature are called by some people evolution, by others creation." - Nachmanovich

This for me is where artful magic resides. We take our rightful natural place in the world as creatures. In addition to being in awe of improvisation's magical qualities, I find myself relieved by brain scan results. It is somehow empowering to learn that creativity results from an observable mind shift, not a gift given to a select few by a higher power.

Maybe talent lies in being able to make the shift into improvisational art mind. If this is easier for some than for others then maybe a fitness model will help. If sit-ups strengthen our abdominals, then maybe the more we practice making a shift into improvisation, the easier it becomes to access. This has certainly been true for many of my students and myself. But how can this be taught?

In an effort to help others to learn to shift with natural ease I have built some simple actions into the Creative by Nature Art Method. We can develop a ritual, light a candle, close our eyes, listen to a bird call.... We can slide into body sensation, feel the grass, and listen to the wind, watch shadows, light and movement. We can drop in and pay attention to our breath, slow it, or expand it. I encourage experimentation to discover and strengthen what works best. We can do this before we put paint on the page. We simply take a moment and consciously shift gears then commit to staying tuned in as we follow where the paints lead. Soon this becomes automatic.

We also learn to improvise by taking a leap and simply doing. In fact I believe that painting goes best if we commit to just doing something and



Left: From an Art-Trade session



Right: Painting together

seeing what happens. We need this skill to cope with our ever-changing lives. According to Barbara Diane Barry author of the book *Painting Your Way Out of a Corner*, improvisational painting helps teach this. She describes painting as a form of ongoing inquiry where we free ourselves to create and then engage with the creations for self-understanding.

At the same time it is important to realize that to improvise does not mean to simply make something up. We are not being haphazard. We commit to working with whatever comes, sticking with a connection we feel and expressing what bubbles up in ourselves as we respond to what we are shown. As Stephen Nachmanovich states:

“It is sometimes thought that in improvisation we can just do anything. But lack of a conscious plan does not mean our work is random or arbitrary. Improvisation has its own rules . . . when we are totally faithful to our own individuality, we are actually following an intricate design. This kind of freedom is the opposite of just anything.”

We also don't always need to venture into this territory alone. We can learn to shift and stay with improvisation in the company of others. The freedom and adventure of painting with the living world and our wild hearts can be expanded when we co-create with others.

To this end, we can welcome our colleagues, friends and family into a fun art encounter I have come to call Art Trade- a form of group improvisational painting. With Art Trade we create an environment for creative interplay. We make art magic alone-together.

Art Trade at the Cottage

Recently my husband, two sisters, daughter and my 80-year old mother were together at the family cottage in central Ontario. While not overly arty my mom has a gung-ho attitude that serves her well in those instances when her daughters are pumped to try something new. Both my sister and I are avid enthusiastic painters so we were excited.



We had fun

The process is simple. Start each person with basic watercolor materials (or whatever paint is available), paper, wipe cloth, water container. Maybe add some watercolor pencils, pastels or crayons for fun. Sit close together, within arms reach. Begin by making a conscious shift to improvisational mind (see above) then begin. This can be as simple as a few moments of silence together.

Close your eyes and paint whatever comes. Then open your eyes and respond to what you see. Carry on for 5 minutes or so. Now pass your work to the person on your left (or right, it

doesn't matter). When you receive your neighbour's painting greet it a like a new friend or a guest in your space. Turn it round to look at it from different perspectives. What is this painting calling out for? What does it need that only you can provide? How can you be of service to its becoming? If you are uncertain what to do, trust your hands and simply close your eyes and let your hands paint the way forward. After five minutes of painting, pass the painting to the next person in the circle. Carry on this cycle of greeting, painting and passing until your original painting is returned to you.

Finish by painting as long as you'd like with your original. Then take turns sharing what it was like to send off your work and to receive each other's treasures. Were there any surprises? Any challenges?

Learn more about **Lisa Lipsett's Creative by Nature Art Method**, read her book *Beauty Muse: Painting in Communion with Nature* and see her elemental images in paint at www.creativebynature.org

MY AGE HAS NEVER BEEN AN OBSTACLE TO PURSUING CREATIVITY

Elisabeth Maas



Opening presentation by Elly



I grew up in the Netherlands in a family with seven sisters and three brothers. My youth was filled with singing and performing arts, at home, in a choir, and occasionally on stage. Classes with the *Brabant's Orchestra* during high school contributed to my lasting impression and my appreciation of music. My ambition was to go to university to obtain teaching diplomas. Instead, after high school graduation I had to accept a secretarial vocation due to financial family circumstances.

My journey into discovering the visual arts critically began in 1968 in the Netherlands. I was fortunate to be surrounded by incredible architecture, castles, numerous museums, art galleries, sculpture gardens, artists and their studios. It is of little doubt that this experience and continued learning influence my health and well-being.

I recall an eight-year project my artist husband Geert and I undertook to renovate a dilapidated brick one-hundred years old farmhouse as a major accomplishment in creativity. We made one of the large attics into an art gallery, and the surrounding grounds became our sculpture gardens. We left this behind in December 1979. At this time our family of five, landed at

Kelowna Airport to engage in new challenges. Except for two-weeks holidays in Ontario the year before, we had never been in Canada, and did not know anyone in British Columbia.

A month after our arrival we moved onto an 8.8 acres property we bought in North Glenmore. Once again our home needed major finishing and additions. Again, creativity and perseverance has brought us to where we are today. I am living my life surrounded by art inside and outside of our house, the critically acclaimed Geert Maas Sculpture Gar-



Top: Removal of wax from mold

Above: Heating bronze sculpture for patina application

dens, Gallery and Studio Inc., is open to the public. During opening ceremonies of special exhibitions I welcome guests.

For commissions and large projects I also work in the studio preparing clay and mold making in plaster. Especially, artwork in bronze requires such specialized skills that I have acquired.

Often, I am doing photography as a requirement for public art commissions. Generally, thinking up ideas and working out concepts for new artworks I find exciting and invigorating.

Other tasks keeping me busy are bookkeeping, inventory, artist's archives, and spending time with

visitors to our gallery. I seek collaboration in achieving something significant by creatively working with others. Working together with a prolific and versatile artist like my husband Geert ensures that my training in visual art is enjoyable and ongoing. I have embraced these opportunities and challenges throughout life as an indispensable part of existence.

Over 36 years in Kelowna, I have been instrumental in sharing and passing on knowledge of creativity in various art-forms to hundreds of visiting youth, seniors, docents, students, and visitors from around the world during tours and hands-on studio classes. *The Spirit of Kelowna* medallions public artwork is an example of such community and learning engagement. More than 100 participants varying in age from 11 to 78 years old learned the different stages to create their own unique medallion cast in bronze for permanent display in the lobby of Kelowna City Hall.

Laura Widmer's statement reads: *The Spirit of Kelowna Medallion Project encompassed learning, creativity, art, connection, passion, process and community.*

In 2010, I was enrolled at UBCO as a full-time student. I graduated in June 2015, obtaining a bachelor's degree with a double major in Anthropology and in Sociology. Via UBC, I was selected with 22 other students for the *Go Global* program to spend six weeks in Tanzania in 2013, as part of Anthropology course credits - this was an amazing learning experience. My professors as well as my classmates highly appreciated my dedication to fulfilling my dream of obtaining a university degree at my age as a mature student. I did not have that opportunity previously. My life was full with earning an income, raising children, and personal and family medical issues. Finally, I seized my opportunity with the combination of overcoming these former circumstances and the availability of UBC Okanagan in Kelowna.

While I immensely enjoyed my classes and studying, the three inter-generational classes I took with Professor Dr. Mary Ann Murphy stand out. Her three-hour sociology classes once per week had students varying in age from 17 to 101 years old, phenomenal! The senior students, however, did not take this as a credit course, so I was an exception. Creative spirit and the engagement by all for the assignments, and during class, were overwhelm-



Elly and husband Geert with Spirit of Kelowna permanent display in the lobby of Kelowna City Hall

ing. This seems evidence that continued learning expands possibilities at any age.

My academic studies have enriched my life, and I share the results with young and old because I like to be involved with people. I have often heard the compliment that I inspire persons of all ages. I feel privileged and energetic, simply ready to share and pass on my knowledge. I enjoy good art in its many shapes and forms.

For many years, I have been fortunate to travel, one of my favourite hobbies, and see the world. Highlights are attending art related international congresses with workshops, visiting or mounting exhibitions, experiencing sculpture gardens, and artist studios. Also memorable was attending the unveiling of Geert's bronze sculpture *Destiny* at *Tachibana* at the University in Kyoto, followed by a tour of Japan.

Through the arts I have made many friends, and I am looking forward to new discoveries and adventures.

Contact info: **Elly Maas** | Email: e.maas39@gmail.com | Website: <http://www.geertmaas.org>

EXHIBITION

LAKE COUNTRY ART GALLERY'S 3RD ANNUAL INTERGENERATIONAL EXHIBITION

INTRODUCTION

Katie Brennan, Interim Director, ARTSCO, Arts Council of the Central Okanagan

A great idea that began in the Okanagan continues to grow with *Lake County Art Gallery's 3rd Annual Intergenerational Exhibition*. In 1993, while growing up in the Okanagan, I had Sharon MacKenzie as my grade 6 teacher at Kidston elementary. We have kept in touch over the years. In 2008 Sharon MacKenzie founded the *i2i Intergenerational Society of Canada* <http://intergenerational.ca/i2i/>. The society works to promote intergenerational programs and learning opportunities, and to assist in developing rich and sustainable connections between generations. In 2013, when I was curator of The Lake Country Gallery I was most pleased to find a way to bring her work into the gallery and activate the visual arts in an intergenerational way. For the past three years the gallery had offered an exhibition of work by the local elementary and secondary students. An Intergenerational Art Exhibition would offer a new twist: We put out an open call to art makers of all ages to submit work that they've created in collaboration with someone of a different generation. I'm delighted to see the exhibition now continuing under the direction of the gallery's new curator Wanda Lock.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Wanda Lock

This year the Intergenerational Exhibition will be from May 25th to June 25th. These are some images from last year.

- **Artists are asked to submit 2D works at 12" X 12" OR 16" x 16" OR 24" X 24"-** on paper, canvas, board, wood, illustration board, etc., in any medium - drawing, paintings, mixed media, collage, etc. OR 3D / Sculptures measuring 12 " X 12" X 12" or smaller will also be accepted.
- Submitted artwork **MUST** be created through a collaboration between two or more people of different generations. This could be any combination of the following:
 - parents and children
 - grandparents and grandchildren
 - siblings
 - elementary students and high school students
 - high school students and university students
 - any generation working with ANY other



generation * a generation is defined as anyone who is a different age than you.

- Intergenerational art collaborations can take any of the following forms:
 - two or more people of different generations working on a single piece of artwork
 - two or more people having different roles in the making of a single piece of artwork - for example: one person models, the other draws / paints model; one person tells a story and/or provides some kind of inspiration, the other illustrates it / turns it into art
 - each artwork is to be accompanied with a written statement, no longer than 1 page in length.

This statement is to describe the following:

introduce the artists involved in making the submitted piece (names, ages, etc.)

describe what the participating artists learned by working with someone from another generation - did you explore ideas you'd never thought of before? Did you work in a way that was new? Did you gain a new perspective about people of a different age? Did your preconceptions/ stereotypes about what people of a particular generation are like change, shift or grow? What can we learn from working with different generations?

2016 Submissions can be dropped off at the gallery on May 19/20/21st.

FROM TWO PAST PARTICIPANTS

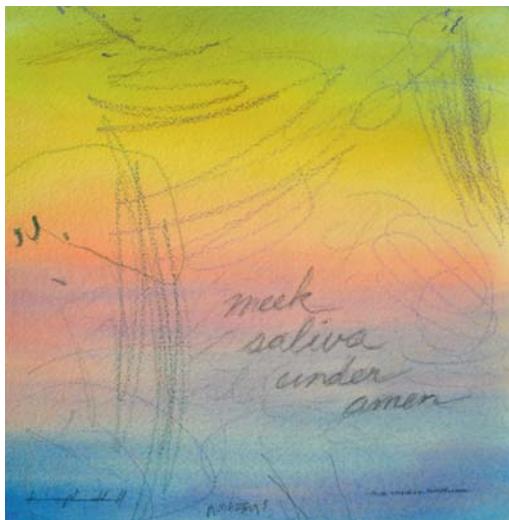
Grandmother, father, and son. Drawing bloodline unified in a trio of three-part visual harmonies. An honour of our spiralling AND ... NDA ... DNA! Tracing the layers of colour and shape, line and shade unveils the intergenerative nature and nurture of inspiration. The backwash rainbow, a kind of firm familial belief of hope or trust, with the waxy, spectral lightning to foreground this inherited present, while words persist as maybe both the least and most genetic (fragile and gluey, here and there, past and future). All together – we hope, I think – modest tints evidencing God's joy of creation, communion, and infinity. Mother, son, and grandson. ~ Kevin

When I learned that the Lake Country Art Gallery was holding a new 'Intergenerational' exhibition in spring 2014, I was immediately inspired by the combination of encouraging creativity, fostering relationships, and sharing that experience with the community.

I invited our oldest son Kevin, who lives in Armstrong, B.C., to participate, along with his 16-month-old-son Amadeus (our only grandchild at the time). As we discussed the collaborative possibilities, we decided to build a triptych combining our preferred media: wax crayons and felt markers for Amadeus, written text for Kevin, and watercolours for myself. We broke the process into three stages, starting with the youngest. Setting three pieces of watercolour paper in front of Amadeus (Ami), I watched him make his marks on the paper. With curiosity and wonder, he drew like he lives – in the moment –

Our submission by Marlene McPherson, grandmother, ageless; Amadeus Eckhoff McPherson, grandson, 16 months; Kevin McPherson, son, 33 years





Left: meek saliva under amen



Right: Kevin & Ami McPherson creating

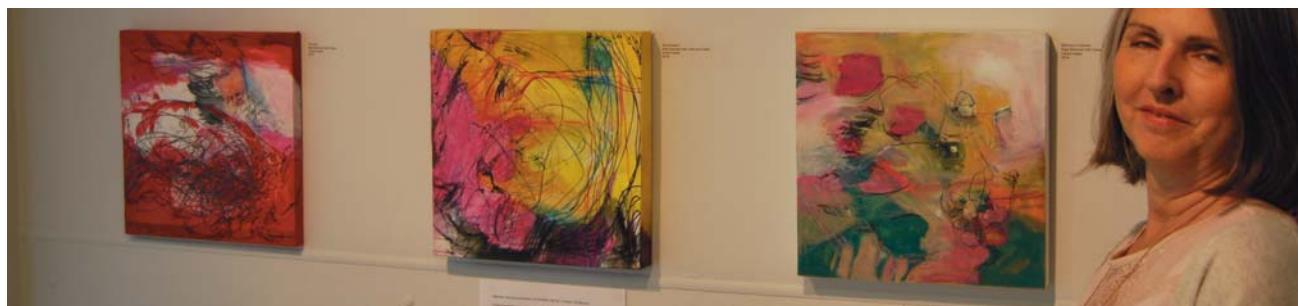
free from self-judgment or criticism. Every stroke was celebrated. Seeing him colour was a new and delightful experience for me.

Later, back in my Winfield studio I continued the project. As I mixed watercolour washes I studied Ami's seemingly random marks planning how best to proceed and decided on a rainbow effect. Using the three primary colours, I allowed them to graduate and blend creating secondary colours, thus providing a soft backdrop for the final step. From his Armstrong home, playing with the idea of 'Generational', Kevin then added words to each of the three paintings, using pencil and transfer letters. My favourite, "Meek saliva under amen" beautifully summarizes this triptych, combining all the letters of our first names, creating four key words alluding to our shared DNA, Mennonite ethnicity and heritage of faith.

I would have preferred a process whereby the three of us could have created the pieces at the same time because the experience would have been more immediate, in the moment, and as an art teacher I receive pleasure supporting and encouraging others while they create and also enjoy sharing my own attempts too. However, it just wasn't possible with the busyness of life. It was still a work of collaboration, allowing us an opportunity to discuss and plan the subject, mediums and method, with each of us working in our medium of choice.

The Intergenerational Exhibition provides a fascinating way to connect with others in our lives and offers us an occasion to pass down the joy of creativity to other generations. Participating in this Exhibition gave our family a unique opportunity to explore our individual creativity while experiencing the pleasures and challenges of collaborating together. It also persuaded me to be more flexible in my creative thinking as I built on the ideas of others, causing me to explore new directions I may not have otherwise chosen. I highly encourage others to participate in this wonderfully inspiring opportunity. I'm excited to see what kind of exuberant collaboration will be in the works for this year with the recent arrival of two new grandchildren!

The Intergenerational Exhibition provides a fascinating way to connect with others in our lives and offers us an occasion to pass down the joy of creativity to other generations.



Top: Kara Barkved at the exhibition

Middle: painted by Claira, age 3, with help from her grandmother

Above: painted by Josh, age 6 with help from his grandmother

Whenever I go to visit my grandchildren, who live far away in Alberta and Northern BC, they only have one thing on their minds from the moment Grandma (me) walks through the front door. "Grandma can we paint?" We paint all together at the kitchen table. My daughter Vanessa, and her children, Claira (3) Josh (6) and Tayla (8). And Kelsi (23) (also my daughter). My job is to direct the flow of the creativity: to know when the painting is finished, to mix colours or give imaginative suggestions, and to supply water and materials.

I was able to spend a little time painting along side each grandchild as well. Afterward I could add my marks, paint, edit and help to present it as a finished piece. For me, I delight in painting with children, who are really completely fearless and uninhibited. Young children do not worry about making mistakes, using the wrong colour, or making the wrong line or shape. There is no wrong - just happy creativity. They do not hesitate; they just know. And they work really fast too! I believe in art education, and I believe it is most important to nurture creativity in children, and pass on the skills and joy of painting to the next generation. They may not grow up to be artists like their grandmother, but creativity will be a part of their lives and they will treasure the time they got to spend with Grandma painting.

Contributors

Marlene G. McPherson is an art educator and has 20 plus years of intergenerational instruction to local budding artists. She's taught all ages, including one class where she taught 3 generations of a single family. In the Intergenerational 2015 Exhibition she was invited to participate in a companion exhibition titled *Changing Lands*. This series began with deciding what to do with some leftover paint after a class.

Marlene has worked through her Winfield Studio, M.G.M. Fine Art Studios since 1993. In 2008, Marlene was nominated for the 'Teacher of the Year' Okanagan Art Award recognizing her teaching contribution in the Fine Arts and in 2010 her business, M.G.M. Fine Art Studios, was nominated for the 'Creativity in Business Award' through the Lake Country Chamber of Commerce.

Her artwork is in the public collection of the District of Lake Country as well as being featured in C.E. Krueger's book, *Beauty is ... A Collection of Okanagan Art*. <http://marlenemcpherson.weebly.com/>

Kevin McPherson Eckhoff lives in Armstrong, B.C. with his wife Laurel, two young sons, three dogs and a hedgehog. He is a published poet with a variety of publishers including Coach House Books in Toronto. He teaches Creative Writing through Okanagan College. <http://www.kevinmcphersoneckhoff.com/>

Kara Barkved <http://www.karabarkved.com/>

OF CASHEWS AND CREATIVITY

Harold Rhenisch



This is a cashew. *Staghorn Sumac*



The first five of the images below are outpourings of the creative potential of the earth. For some reason that defies respect for the earth and living things the other three of these images are named creative products. They are grown, harvested, roasted, flavoured, dyed (gad), marketed, shipped, sold and consumed. That's called "creative." The true creative energy here, cashew herself, goes uncredited. In its place, creativity is a use to which the things of the earth, which evolved in what is termed a random process, are put. It's not random. Oregon grapes, for example, live in a complex, organic set of relationships. They *are* the relationships. That's not precisely random.

It's balance. The "randomness" is only an echo of a scientific method – one that pulls things apart to study them separately before putting them back together again. The process is not neutral, though. It leaves a human mark: "randomness." It is a mistake to read it as if it were part of the world, but that's technology for you.

Under the effects of scientific method, plants and their evolution are considered separately from their environments, even though they *did* evolve in certain specific environments. Can that rightfully be called random? Did not the environment find its balance together? Yes.

Quite simply, the only way the environment can be separate from its parts is if plants are invasive, independent actors. Here's the thing, though: after four years writing a book about the history of my grassland in the context of the American colonial invasion from 1835 to 1893 and the Canadian one that followed immediately in its north and continues to this day, that looks to me an awful lot like a description of a particular kind of



Photos top to bottom:

- This is a cashew. *Really.*
- This is a cashew: *Poison Ivy*
- There are many other cashews in the world. Mangos ...
- ... and pistachios ... for instance.

unrooted colonial human behaviour. Now it's enshrined in a contemporary definition of creativity, in just the same way that a concept of independent nature made out of separate structures and forces is enshrined in contemporary visions of the earth, without according them creativity (it reserves that for humans) and doesn't include the waterfall on Coyote Bluffs above Kalamalka Lake.

Old concepts of humanity, earth and creativity do include that waterfall. Indigenous ones certainly do, as do Sufic, Christian, Asian, African, Polynesian, Meso-American and Nordic ones. Here in modern North America, however, a rather male colonizing principle that rides into "virgin" "wilderness" and plants a stake into it, is enshrined, even though many of the men who did that kind of thing were murderous vigilante sociopathic, psychopathic bastards. Nonetheless, researchers who try to get at some other way of talking about creativity are constrained by the limitations of scientific definitions of creativity, in ways little different than the ones that constrained Methodist and Presbyterian women who settled this West around 1855, isolated from the genocide that was making their honest, gentle, nurturing lives possible and turning their sisters, the Indigenous women of the Northwest, into sex slaves and corpses. I'm sorry, but it happened too often to set aside, and it's still not safe to be a brown woman in Canadian society. We all know that. Luckily, there are healthier forms of creativity, such as the ones which conclude this essay:

Dangling from a Tassel on the Fabric of Socially Constructed Reality: Reflections on the Creative Writing Process

Liane Gabora and Nancy Holmes, University of British Columbia

In A. Cropley, D. Cropley, J. Kaufman, & M. Runco, Eds. (in press) *The Dark Side of Creativity*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Here are some of Gabora and Holmes' conclusions:

SUSTAINABLE INVENTION EMERGES FROM A SUSTAINABLE WORLDVIEW

Some posit that creativity is a deadening process, a means of dominating, of fencing things in and boxing them up, creating new conventions that some future innovator has to break, or to kill the creative energy and freeze it in a poem or painting. However, as commented upon by Frye (p. 38) and as seen in a poem like "Kubla Khan", there is also a highly involuntary, unpredictable, and very much 'alive' aspect to creativity.

I applaud the work of these scholars, but I'm not going to do so without giving them the respect of challenge. The quote above, for example, needs a second look. It claims to be universal, but isn't. It's culturally specific. Why, for example, is creativity about a choice of life or death? Isn't that a human characteristic? Isn't that about gothic novels? Isn't that culturally specific? The rest of the earth chooses life:

Yes, gothic, have a look at the essay again:

Artistic forms (narrative structure, poetic form, compositional fields and limits) may be inherent safety nets for artists as well as audience. The artistic forms order and shape the



In reaction to various environments, these plants transformed themselves in new shapes, with new characteristics.

chaotic content whether in the world around or from the depth of the subconscious. They are the ladders or ropes that help the artist in and out of the dark. Emily Dickinson is a prime example of a poet who broke every rule in the book in terms of traditional poetry, yet did so in a relentless straightjacket of hymn-meter and four line stanzas; rule-bound she wrote poetry that prefigures modernist experimental aesthetics by several decades. The rise of the gothic as a mode in literature has paralleled the rise of the industrial revolution and the scientific revolution and the demands of women and others for equality an age in upheaval.

When American, Canadian and British settlers came to this country they took it from its Indigenous people, who knew better than this. Settlers employed the philosophy that people who did not create the fences of private ownership (Indigenous ownership rules were complex but invisible to settlers) actually had no right to the land they had lived with for 8,000, 12,000 or even 16,000 years. What's more, settlers brought spiritual philosophies that were really quite beautiful, about humility, grace and subjection to order, but they were then used to culturally dispossess the region's people. Gabora and Holmes' conclusions are equally beautiful, but there is a context to them which needs to be foregrounded as a call for caution. For example, the colonial drive for order and obedience is a ghost in the quote below, which narrates the story of a bimodal human intelligence, one able to switch between two functioning methods depending upon circumstance – a beautiful conception:

Associative processes are hypothesized to occur during idea generation, while analytic processes predominate during the refinement, implementation, and testing of an idea.

It has been proposed that during the Middle Upper Paleolithic we evolved the capacity to subconsciously shift between these modes, depending on the situation, by varying the specificity of the activated cognitive receptive field (Gabora, 2003, 2007; for similar ideas see Howard-Jones & Murray, 2003; Martindale, 1995). This is referred to as *contextual focus*¹ because it requires the ability to focus or defocus attention in response to the context or situation one is in. Defocused attention, by diffusely activating a broad region of memory such that everything seems to be related in some way to everything else, is conducive to associative thought. Focused attention, by activating a narrow region of memory and treating items as distinct chunks that can be readily operated upon, is conducive to analytic thought. Once it was possible to shrink or expand the field of attention, and thereby tailor one's mode of thought to the demands of the current situation, tasks requiring either convergent thought (e.g. mathematical derivation), divergent thought (e.g. poetry) or both (e.g. technological invention) could be carried out more effectively.

It is the authors' intent, if I read the essay correctly, to propose that training "creative" people to switch between modes in different circumstances will prevent them from the negative consequences of creativity, which in the essay's argument include "dangling by a thread", or an inability to integrate with regular society, accompanied by a statistically-high rate of mental illness.

Well, it's like this: for "creative" people, this might be the case. I don't know. There are other people, however, doing work that is often called "creative" but isn't, to whom this just doesn't apply. This gap suggests to me that the argument (and the notion of creativity itself) are grossly incomplete. Many of these "non-creative" creators I know actually feel that society is the

one dangling.

That's not the only troubling gap. These arguments of separation, incomprehension and even madness are very similar to ones that were once thrown against the Cayuse, Palouse, Umatilla, Wanapum, Sinkiuse, Kittitas, Nez Perce, Yakama, Methow, Washaptams, Syilx, Synixt, Secwepemc, Nlaka'pamux and all the other peoples of my country. Contemporary solutions are much the same as the one offered then, too: to transform minds tuned to creation (which view connections) into ones which view those connections as merely being "apparent" (as "myths"), while the "real" connections are analytical and are built around method. Whether these methods are scientific or spiritual makes no difference. They are both built around separation, followed by reunion. They both colour the world with a human signature.

A secondary colonial solution is also at play here: the development of a form of biological nature. Instead of nature, or God, or spirit, or the Earth being actualized within a person, for example, with each person being the world walking (the Indigenous view), that world was shifted outside, behind a boundary of consciousness, as an expression of randomness and time. That's European. In the place of lives unified with the earth, people were given an actualized self, sometimes a miniature Christ, sometimes a stand-in called analytical thought, embodying hierarchies and methods of will and the ability to apply them. Powerful stuff, for sure, but neither inevitable nor neutral.

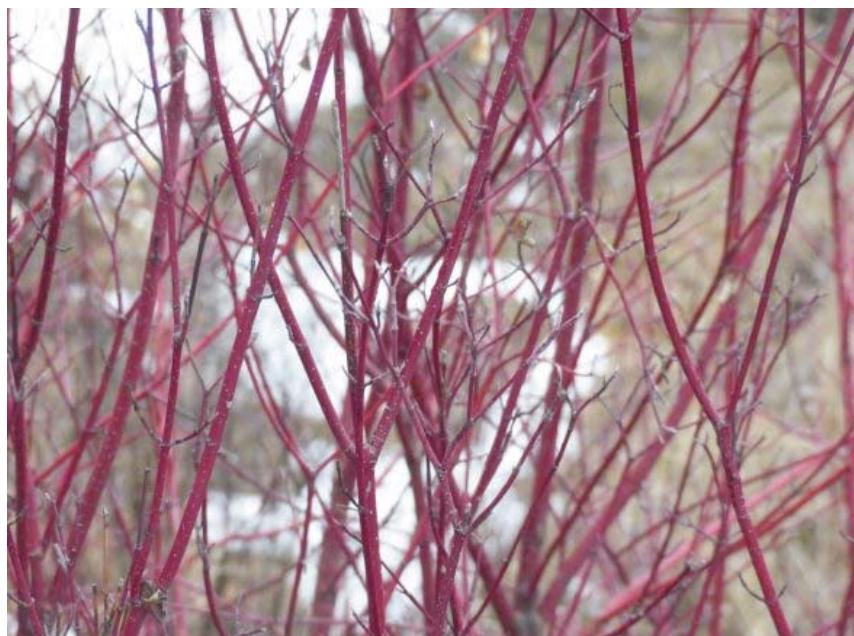
In other words, in the time of colonization a system of earth knowledge and mapping based upon spiritual union, story-telling and social and family hierarchies of respect, all cultivated by practical human activity, were replaced with a "solution" based upon a primordial nature that wells up into the world and which can be harnessed to forms and made to "work". To put this

in simple terms: those parts of the world which were unknown to analytical consciousness were called 'emotions'; when they made themselves known, they were harnessed to analytical thought. That's hardly an equal relationship. It's all tangled up with specific cultural notions of gender and power, but not with universal ones.

Today, this concept of nature has evolved and is portrayed as "genetic" and "evolutionary" history, or, in Gabora and Holmes' words "during the Middle Upper Paleolithic we evolved the capacity to subconsciously shift between these modes, depending on the situation, by varying the

Photo 14: Nature Welling Up

The red bark of dogwoods is a natural product of photosynthesis, which allows these wetland plants to survive in relatively dry and extremely hot climates, by dispelling excess sunlight as heat. It's not intentional. It's a natural flow. It was human once. It still is.





Looking good, Mrs. Coyote!

specificity of the activated cognitive receptive field,” applied to “tasks requiring either convergent thought (e.g. mathematical derivation), divergent thought (e.g. poetry) or both (e.g. technological invention.)”

I urge caution. I fully believe that these two leading Okanagan scholars are sincerely attempting to dispel limiting notions of gender and power from descriptions of creative energies. I admire and applaud that work. Nonetheless, “convergent” and “divergent” modes *are* European modes of thought. They are beautiful ones, for sure, but they also are not the full set of European modes, and they don’t include Indigenous modes of creativity and consciousness from the peoples of this grassland, people who grew up with the grass from the moment the glaciers left and the floods of its meltwaters receded. In many cases, these people, our cultural ancestors in the Okanagan, made this human-environmental social space into the “nature” that settlers saw when they arrived 150 years ago, although what they were

seeing was a series of sylx stories and not “nature” at all. At the very least, it was a joint project between Earth and people (usually women). Those are vital contexts. I enthusiastically accept that the story of the Middle Upper Paleolithic that Gabora and Holmes present applies universally to all humans, but also know that merely to dwell on that physical ground is culturally specific and puts the universality of the principle into question. Indigenous modes of thought, for example, include tricksters and other forms of contextual focus, other than just the two mentioned in the essay, including visions and spirit songs, among others.

There is, fortunately, much wisdom in Gabora and Holmes’ essay. This for example:

In sum, there appears to be a duality at work in the creative process. If the contextual focus hypothesis is true, we are able to adapt our mode of thought to the situation we are in.

If I read the authors correctly, they are saying that humans are able to adapt modes of thoughts to situations. That’s like our friend Cashew, evolving in different ecosystems. It’s like Indigenous peoples, evolving land use strategies adapted to the land they live on, in its own forms. The essay’s observations, however, express only two dominant European modes – not even minor ones, or ones buried in history. Just two. The essay doesn’t bring in Indigenous ones, either, from this place in which the essay is written. Just the two European ones. Nonetheless, despite that oversight, created more by the boundaries of the research tradition that gave rise to the paper than by any failing or intent, the paper’s argument allows for a recombination of modes, and hints at a mechanism by which it might take place:

When we are stumped, or need to express ourselves, or break out of a rut, we adapt ideas to new contexts and combine them in new ways using a highly creative but potentially emotionally overwhelming associative mode of thought. We then engage in a more even-keeled analytic mode of thought in which we fine-tune these strange new combinations. In this way the fruits of one mode of thought provide the ingredients for the other, culminating in a more fine-grained internal model of the world. Thus we get maximal benefit from the bright side of creativity while minimizing its dark side, though often not without feeling some guilt at the application of the analytic mode on profound human feeling.

"Involuntary, unpredictable nature of creativity?" That's the anti-Coyote message again. It reminds me of the continued positing of an "Other" instead of union with it that characterized European settlement of this land. It's really hard to see how union with the planet is going to be achieved across the gulf of such a myth.

That's the preamble to the idea, and it's welcome. Mind you, I think it gets off on the wrong foot. As a person who is engaged in "making" daily, with twenty-eight books of my own, hundreds of thousands of photographs, over 70 books edited for writers and publishers and two degrees in creative writing, I appreciate that I am not a creative person as defined by the technological culture these scholars –my friends –live in, and appreciate that they might call that "dangling by a thread", but that doesn't mean that associative thought necessarily has a propensity to be "emotionally overwhelming", or that analytical thought is more "even-keeled" or that associative work is "strange" or that analytical work is "more fine-grained", or that one form of thought is light and another is dark, or that I am actually "dangling by a thread." Those are cultural choices. They speak of a notion of creation that lives within a certain cultural matrix, one in which these choices are true because they express the skeletal framework of this matrix of embedded and realized selves. The thing is, though, as I have been demonstrating in my blog Okanagan Okanagan for three years, and as I have spoken of in a series of posts on creativity since late 2015, this is neither universal human experience nor representative of the full breadth of the work of makers. There's another troubling set of conclusions in this essay, too:

These ideas about the relationship between constraint and freedom may have implications for building a sustainable world. Clearly if our creative brains had not evolved, we would not have invented the vast array of different ways in which we are polluting, perhaps irreparably, our planet. Although we cannot curtail the involuntary, unpredictable nature of creativity, by weaving sustainable perspectives and practices deep into our worldviews we may alter the trajectories of creative thought processes on this planet in such a way as to nurture creative ideas that are in harmony with the world at large. Atwood, in the same chapter that details artist guilt over sacrificing human feeling to one's art, shows that artist's perspectives can end up providing huge social gains: "The eye is cold because it must be clear, and it is clear because its owner must look: he must look at everything."

"Involuntary, unpredictable nature of creativity?" That's the anti-Coyote message again. It reminds me of the continued positing of an "Other" instead of union with it that characterized European settlement of this land. It's really hard to see how union with the planet is going to be achieved across the gulf of such a myth. There's more:

"Then she must record" (p. 121) Atwood's final pronoun points the way to how the inclusion of women into the formerly perceived male-domain of creativity might alter ideas about the nature of creativity and its dark side. New literature by women employs other metaphors of



Commonage, Vernon, British Columbia,
Looking to Silver Star Ski Resort (A Haunt of
Elves for Sure!)

Hill: Land rising, caught in the energy of transforming into a skull and never losing this state between worlds; in the sea, it is a holm (or helm; a helmet is a small holm) or island, floating on the waves like a drowned man or a troll frozen in the act of stepping into the world. These are old memories of a world in which the human body was the land walking through forces far greater than human ones but of the same kind: dwarf (from which comes "quartz"), elf (from which comes "alp", both for their whiteness and for the propensity of elves to live with rock; likely Celtic), troll (from circular tracking of territory, like a bear or wolf, or "trolling" [tread + roll]) and so on. All are rock creatures, the ruins of an ancient world through which humans walk. It's not the same from a car. When you move by foot they shift around you at the speed of your consciousness and as part of your bodily space.

creativity besides dangerous chasms and destructive breaking and crashing of old boxes. Women are slowly returning the imagery of birth, from a woman's perspective, to the discussion of creativity: although the birth of a monster might have been nineteen year old Mary Shelley's dark fear in 1818, critic Pascale Sardin suggests that contemporary writers like Nancy Huston, a Canadian novelist, are proposing new models of creative energy: "in her *Creation Diary*, [Huston celebrates] the artistic possibilities contained in pregnancy and mothering" (Sardin 2007 p. 164).

That's fantastic: women's voices and female modes of thought get to be included and used as tools. Absolutely, the more the better. Please. Now. Forever. The "dangerous

chasms and destructive breaking and crashing of old boxes," though? That's some kind of myth-making, again, because that metaphor is certainly not respectful of the breadth of male experience, if male experience is meant by it, or of pre-Marxist female experience, if that's what's being expressed. Human experience is richer and broader than that. The thought, fortunately, continues positively:

Mothering and birth, though fraught with risks, can be positive and fertile metaphors for an organic and nurturing creative power.

To take nothing away from the primacy of mothering, fathering and nurture, are, of course, complementary forces, no less positive and fertile. But this isn't about gender, or I'd like it not to be. I think it's about respect. Organic form belongs to all humans, and we all need women to bring new modes forward. We also all need men to do the same. We also need rich discussions of human nature and of nature itself, often together, in more than standard modes. Gabora and Holmes have introduced many intriguing threads here. I hope they return to their essay soon and revise it to include the modes they missed – no doubt under the constraints of space —as well as the most important one: the earth. This is a vital ethical issue.

It's not about us. It's not about "self"-actualization. It's about actualizing Her.

GETTING BACK TO AWE



Robert MacDonald

Why do we humans experience awe? Awe is the ultimate collective emotion, that motivates people to do things that enhance the greater good. Through the many activities that give us that goose bumpy sensation that we associate with awe – collective rituals, public celebration, music and dance, creative acticities of all kinds, communing with nature, religious gatherings and worship – awe shifts our focus from our narrow self-interest to the interests of the group to which we belong.

Awe binds us to others, motivating us to act in collaborative ways that enable strong groups and cohesive communities. People who experience awe, more so than experiencing emotions like pride or amusement, cooperate more, share more resources and sacrifice more for others – all of which are behaviours necessary for our collective life.

Why does awe arouse altruism? Because awe imbues us with a different sense of ourselves, one that is smaller, more humble and part of something larger. Even brief experiences of awe, such as being amid beautiful tall trees, leads us to feel less narcissistic and entitled and more attuned to the common humanity we share with one another. In the great balancing act of our social lives, between the gratification of self-interest and a concern for others, fleeting experiences of awe redefine the self in terms of the collective, and orient our actions toward the needs of those around us.

We could easily make the case that our culture today is awe-deprived. Adults spend more and more time working and commuting and less time outdoors and with other people. Camping trips, picnics and midnight skies are forgone in favor of working weekends and late nights. Attendance at arts

events – live music, theater, museums and galleries – has dropped over the years. This goes for children, too: arts and music programs in schools are being dismantled in lieu of programs better suited to standardized testing; time outdoors in unbounded exploration are sacrificed for résumé-building activities.

Awe deprivation has had a hand in a broad societal shift that has been widely observed over the past 50 years: People have become more individualistic, more self-focused, more mate-



The Roman poet Horace popularized the idea of living for the moment in an ode published in 23 BC.

He wrote, "Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero." Loosely translated, this says, "Seize the day rather than placing your trust in the future."

Over the centuries, the words carpe diem, or seize the day, gained widespread currency among poets and other writers as a term for urging readers to make the most of present opportunities.

realistic and less connected to others. To reverse this trend, we all need to concentrate more of our personal and social energy on experiencing more everyday awe, to actively seek out what gives us goose bumps, be it in looking at trees, night skies, patterns of wind on water or the quotidian nobility of others – the teenage punk who gives up his seat on public transportation, the young child who explores the world in a state of wonder, the person who presses on against all odds. All of us will be better off for it.

Anyone who's ever spent a hung-over Sunday afternoon half asleep channel surfing in front of the TV knows how many people are out there selling us happiness. The message we hear is this: It really is not okay to be sad. It's a kind of weakness – admittance to the world that we are somehow unfit. In the same way we cover-up our fatness, baldness, or bad skin, we cover-up our sadness, like it is something deserving shame. A frown in a photo is a blemish like a thumb on a lens, closed eyes, or an exposed nipple.

Sadness is an emotion, something we all feel, agnostic to any conception of right or wrong, strong or weak. It is a necessary precondition to happiness. Perhaps the reason we so often experience happiness only in hindsight, and that chasing it is such a fool's errand, is that happiness isn't a goal in itself but is only an aftereffect, just as the only stars we ever see are not the "real" stars, those cataclysms taking place in the present, but always only the light of the untouchable past.

This is the way humility leads to wisdom. Montaigne wrote, "We can be knowledgeable with other men's knowledge, but we can't be wise with other men's wisdom." That's because wisdom isn't a body of information. It's the moral quality of knowing what we don't know and figuring out a way to handle our ignorance, uncertainty, and limitation.

Maya Angelou said we find our path by walking it. And at the end of the day, for all the advice we get from anyone; from all the books we read about how to live a good life, our best life; from all the self-help seminars that we go to; from all the programs that we watch, at the end of the day, with all this information coming at us, we only find our path by walking it. We have to commit ourselves to being courageous, being committed, being consistent to those principles by which we have decided we are going to live our life. There is no other way around this. We have to walk our path to find it.

And just so, there's no alternative to doing the work. We have to do the work. And doing the work means that we have to walk the walk; we have to walk the path if we're going to find and discover what our life is truly all about. And quite frankly, the joy is in the walk anyway. The joy is in the journey. There is joy in the journey. There are ups and there are downs, but there is joy, and there is awe, in the journey. We may live in a society where we are so caught up with achieving milestones that we end up missing the moments. Milestones can be beautiful and awesome too, if honestly achieved, but it's these moments of awe that really make life worth living.

SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Sage-ing with Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude exists to honour the transformational power of creativity.

It is a quarterly journal intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. It presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement. We invite all ages to contribute their discoveries.

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

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