

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

NUMBER 24, SUMMER/FALL 2017

EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

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

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT

www.sageing.ca

The Voices of Creative Aging

CREATIVE AGING is a powerful new social and cultural movement that is stirring the imaginations 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.

CREATIVE AGING

STORIES FROM THE PAGES OF THE JOURNAL
SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE
SPIRIT, GRACE AND GRATITUDE
EDITED BY
Karen Close and Carolyn Cowan



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Okanagan Institute

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Cover image by Geri Thom

FROM THE EDITOR

With Issue 24 the Journal marks six years of publication. When I look at our index page www.sageing.ca/index2.html and see the 24 vibrant covers I am filled with pride. I look back at the first issue in Autumn of 2011 with a sigh of gratitude. In that issue we put forth a general call out. Our online existence six years later is your response. It was our hope that together we could build a community of 'sagers', generous individuals eager to embrace their creative urges and share their best with a broad audience. Today we are a volunteer publication produced by an international community of talented and generous individuals sharing their stories. We sagers are twentyfirst century elders leading our culture forward.

We encouraged you to not just read us, but also to participate with us. Whether you were an experienced artist or just beginning to explore your own innate creative impulses, we urged you to join your voice with ours. We said we wanted to expand our content into unforeseen territory in the same authentic way art evolves organically from its seed of inspiration. Our dream was to evolve together trusting that the best in each of us would facilitate *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit Grace and Gratitude* into becoming the voice of a generation.

During this first part of 2017 both Robert and I celebrated turning 70 and have discovered "we ain't what we used to be".

We've missed our intention of releasing on the equinox and the solstice. We've questioned the future of the Journal, but the dream of a generation self actualizing through sharing in creative spirit is too important. Others have offered assistance, and perhaps our reach out will stretch further. You'll still be hearing from us.

If you are a regular reader, you will recognise previous contributors in this issue. Together they have helped define our message. Fearful that this could be the last issue, seasoned poet Susan McCaslin, (who will be launching a new book, *Into the Open: New and Selected Poems* on September 27, 2017) wrote two special poems for this issue, collectively titled *THE ELDERS*. Geri Thom was a beginning painter when her image appeared on our cover in Autumn 2017. In this issue she contemplates her growth in *FINALLY, THE ME I DIDN'T ENVISION*. As I read a sample of submissions from Antoinette Voûte Roeder, I saw emerging what I believe to be the gift that creative expression brings to self actualization. With that perspective in mind, Antoinette re-read her submissions. *IN REFLECTION* became a real life manifestation of the sage-ing process.

Preparing this issue, I was asked if there was a theme for submissions. Impulsively I responded 'how creative expression is our muscle of transition through times of change and growth'. Times like we're living in today. Like all muscles it needs regular

ISSUE CONTENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 5. COMING HOME
Jim Laing | 23. POETRY
Dobbie, McCaslin, Wyman |
| 7. GOING BACK TO ROLL FORWARD
Karen Olsen | 26. PORTRAIT OF A BACK ALLEY:
1966-1989
Lori Stewart |
| 10. FINALLY, THE ME I DIDN'T
ENVISION
Geri Thom | 28. CARE FROM THE HEART
Katrina Pavlovsky |
| 13. PLEASE MEET MY BUDDIES
Keith Routley | 30. TAKING TIME FOR ART IN THE
OKANAGAN
Suzanne Chavarie |
| 17. IN REFLECTION
Antoinette Voûte Roeder, | 33. PRIMAL JOY: PAINTING WITH
FLOWERS AND DIRT
Lisa Lipsett |
| 21. CORE CONNEXION
Transformational arts
Barb Reid | 37. FINDING THE DEPARTURE POINTS
Robert MacDonald |

use to remain fit and at the ready when needed. Lisa Lipsett founder of *Creative by Nature* <http://creativebynature.org> has been faithfully bringing her creative fitness 'exercises' to each issue. Have fun with PRIMAL JOY: PAINTING WITH FLOWERS AND DIRT.

Looking back at the founding intentions of the Journal, being located in the Okanagan was a driving motivation. It is a setting of choice for many inspired by its geography. Our beautiful lake nested in the mountains of the Okanagan Valley possesses a beauty that feeds the soul. Indeed the waters gained a quiet mysticism when spring flooding prevented humans from being on the lake. Each issue brings us new perspectives on *TAKING TIME FOR ART IN THE OKANAGAN* with Suzanne Chavarie.

Both the new and past contributors make this an outstanding issue. Wherever you are, in this universe, and in your personal creative journey, this Journal extends an invitation for all to share in creating a community for successful generous aging in the 21st century.

– Karen Close, Editor

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 December 10th, 2017**
- 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

COMING HOME

Jim Laing



Recently the thought: “I am an artist” floated into my consciousness. Somewhat startled, I considered it dispassionately, then concluded with some wonder and joy, “Yes, I am!”

For over 10 years I have been striving to turn my passion for painting from a hobby into a second career, but this was the first time I felt justified in calling myself an artist instead of just a ‘wannabe’. No doubt it all arose from the Federation of Canadian Artists recently awarding me signature status and two of my paintings selling in Vancouver for average prices in the four digit range. It was not the dollar amount of those sales that was important, it was the realization that there were people who valued my work sufficiently to pay such substantial prices. My acceptance that I was truly an artist gave me a feeling of contentment and more importantly, a sense of having ‘come home’. It’s this ‘coming home’ that I want to share with you.

As a youth I was not only passionate about painting, but also proficient compared to my contemporaries. I can remember in the summer swimming, boating and playing games with my friends, then afternoons would come when instead of joining them again, I would quietly disappear to satisfy a compulsion to paint. There was talk in my family of my attending a fine arts program. But it wasn’t that simple. I also had always loved math to the extent of playing with numbers as a young boy just for the fun of it. Later, when I was introduced to calculus, that was a delight too. So science, or engineering, was also on the cards. It was obvious I would have to choose between a career in art or one in science/engineering. In the end I chose engineering.

I never regretted that decision. It took me to England for postgraduate studies where I met and married my lovely wife. As a consultant, I traveled widely and worked on some fascinating projects located throughout Canada and the Canadian north, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. I rose in my profession, and was both honoured and humbled by recognitions awarded by my peers. It was a satisfying and fulfilling career. Still the urge to paint kept

Left: Going Skating

Middle: Chinese Bowl and Peaches

Right: Bowl of Eggs





Sure, ccome join us.

Jim Laing AFCA was born in Montreal, and for many years practiced nationally and internationally as a consulting engineer. He now paints from his home studio in Kelowna BC. Working in oils, acrylics, pen and pencil, Jim is largely self-taught but has benefited greatly from various workshops and short courses. He is particularly grateful for lessons and workshops given by Dennis Weber SFC and other accomplished Canadian artists.

Enjoying a wide range of subjects, Jim's paintings include still-life images, florals, children at play, portraits, landscapes and wildlife scenes. He is particularly interested in portraying light and how it falls across a subject influencing colours and mood. Working in both realistic and impressionistic styles, his paintings have been displayed in over 45 shows and, for 5 years, in a commercial gallery. Selected paintings are in private collections in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Australia. You can view more of his paintings and contact Jim at his web site jimlaingartist.ca

popping up, and gradually developed into a compulsion. Eventually, in my late thirties, I decided to take up painting again. I bought a starter set of acrylic paints along with a book on acrylic painting and re-entered into painting with enthusiasm and joy.

Initially I taught myself, then I enrolled in adult extension classes from the Edmonton Art Gallery and the U of A Fine Arts department. Un-

fortunately, the demands of an active engineering career interfered, and left me no mental space for art. One winter evening exemplified the conflict. I was in Calgary all day for business meetings, flew back to Edmonton in the early evening, at the airport I changed into my painting clothes that had been in the car all day, grabbed some fast food for supper, then drove to my art class. This pace really didn't work. I was exhausted from my meetings, my clothes and paints were freezing cold having sat in -30 C temperatures all day, and consequently I was in no state to either paint or take in what the instructor had to say. In those years I was lucky to complete one painting a year. *Going Skating* shows one painting I did manage to complete from this period.

I was fortunate to be aware that in North America we place too much emphasis on the perceived importance of a person's job and how much they earn, rather than how they conduct their lives and contribute to society. This has led many people to define themselves by their jobs, and consequently on retirement they can suffer an identity-loss crisis. A major American corporation undertook a study of how well their former employees were managing after they had retired. To the corporation's dismay they discovered many pensioners died within 1 - 3 years of retiring. They had been unable to manage the transition from valued employee to faceless retiree. I was determined to avoid this fate and made a concerted effort to maintain my hobbies and other interests so that they would be available to me when I eventually retired. I might not yet be able to fully pursue my hobbies, but I was determined to keep them 'ticking over' and stay alive so that I could pick them up again in retirement. In addition to my love of painting these included fishing, camping, skiing, woodworking, tying fishing flies, and others.

On retirement, painting was always prominent in my mind and gradually, with time, some of my other interests atrophied. I focused more and more on art. I looked back to my youthful choice between careers and the question arose: I had enjoyed engineering, but could I also have made a career for myself in the arts? Thus the feeling of having come home when I acknowledged that "yes, I was an artist". An important facet of my life had come full circle. It was a lovely satisfying feeling.

GOING BACK TO ROLL FORWARD



Karen Olsen

“Life has a way of rolling along and if there is anything important that was abandoned, each of us is given the time to go back to it, before it is too late.”

I grew up in an artistic and multicultural community. As a child, I was surrounded by creative people. Drawing and writing stories were part of my fabric. History, French and art classes were among my favourite subjects in school. However, I never thought of myself as an artist, nor of writing as a career.

Languages became the focus of my life and a teaching opportunity drew me west. A few years later, I left for Europe to teach in Germany. I travelled extensively and visited the great art museums from the Hermitage in Russia, the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, to Van Gogh’s permanent collection in Holland, and many more.

During a tour of the Impressionists at the Musée D’Orsay in Paris, I realized my calling was some form of art. Standing among these masters of colour, I was in awe and wanted to learn all that I could to understand the mysteries of colour as a form of expression. I rediscovered my artistic inclinations.

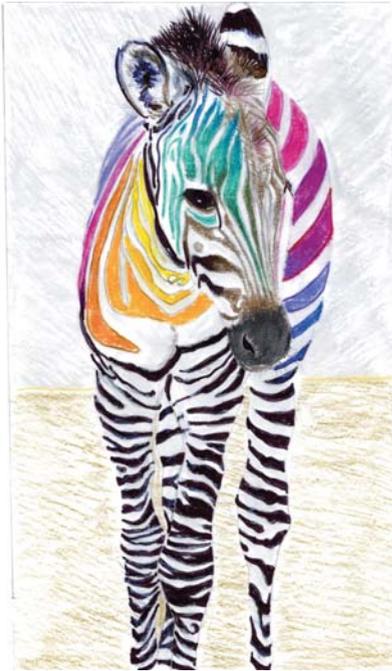
That set me upon the path that I find myself on, some two decades later. Life has a way of rolling along and if there is anything important that was abandoned, each of us is given the time to go back to it, before it is too late. I had forgotten about my passion for art. I hadn’t drawn in years! It was like some very important part of me had disappeared. I started teaching art to children. In order to do a better job of it, I started taking classes towards a second degree, this time in Fine Arts.

The classes I took in drawing and printmaking (etchings on copper plates) had an enormous impact on me. There is a certain strength and freedom in that medium, although I still found that the element of colour was missing. I began to etch images on canvas and add acrylic colours. The result was a collection of paintings. The *Milk River Series* was based on ancient petroglyphs, the first form of writing on stone.

Like most artists, I am expressing a part of myself in my work. The subject of my paintings are feminine forms which carry their own energy. Women in advertising

Pause





Osemo Mixed media, Berol Prismacolor pencils, Pen and Ink

Osemo, whose name means “rainbow” in the language of the Masai, was born a strong and healthy foal with bold black stripes inherited from his father. Gradually he displays his difference through the subtle colours, of sunsets and peacock feathers, that begin to appear on his coat. Being different is not without its costs, as Osemo learns when the other young zebras taunt him. Less visible, but more important, is his unique ability to detect water. Using this talent, Osemo leads the herd from water hole to water hole during their long migration from the southern plains of Tanzania, west and then north into Kenya. So different in appearance from his peers, he is taunted, jeered and excluded. But the one whose name means rainbow, one day, leaves them a very special gift.

have become objects of desire and consumption. When in reality, we are spiritual beings who thrive on nurturing.

A few years ago when I did a series of pears, and particularly liked the forms and the colours, the mother of one of my friends commented on how feminine they were. I was also incorporating metallic inks that gave the pears in the basket a particular glow. The idea of mineral, connected to the earth, our mother, brought me to think about our interconnectedness. We all have a past, a history, that we carry with us. It is the basis of our humanity. Unfortunately, in this day and age, we sometimes forget about being aware and respectful of ancient cultures and protecting all creatures in our dominion. What is our role in this world if not to care about each other?

At the end of my teaching career, I felt a need to connect text with images in children’s books. Studies have show that in literacy programs, young readers do very well in assessments when they read fiction. Their scores drop dramatically when they have to read non-fiction. This awareness led me to the creation of *Osemo The Rainbow Zebra*, a book dealing with the topic of intolerance. The non-fiction text teaches about the important role of the zebra in the survival of all the grazing animals on the vast Serengeti plains, and the incredible migration they undertake each year.

In 2009, the story of *Osemo The Rainbow Zebra*, which I also illustrated, was nominated for a Saskatchewan Book Awards for best first book for children. It was also nominated as best educational resource. In the years that followed, I set out to write a first teen novel in French, *Elise and Beethoven*, published in 2014 by Les Éditions David of Ottawa. *La Bonne de Chagall*, my first adult novel followed in February of 2017 by the same publisher.

This past winter, I read Frank McCourt’s *Teacher Man*. It is a touching and at times hilarious depiction of the years he spent in the classroom, before he found the time to actually write. He was in his sixties when his first book was published.

I spent 20 years teaching and the last 10 years of my career writing curriculum and pedagogical resources. Without knowing it, I was honing my craft to say now what I need to say. It was only at the end of my years in the teaching profession that I gave myself permission to express my own views and values in my writing. I am deeply grateful to the people who supported and encouraged me to write as I discover my new life’s path.

My second book was a novel for adolescents entitled *Élise et Beethoven*. Inspiration always comes from the strangest places. I always listen to the radio in French when I am driving. One day I heard a news report about a composition by Bach which had been found in Europe. Bach was an outrageous character, and for some reason, I thought it would be more interesting if it was a Beethoven sonata instead and the story unfolded in my mind from beginning to end.

When I visit museums, I find the art work fascinating, but I am more curious about the backstory. I want to know about the story that no one tells about the artists. This inquisitiveness, led me to write my third book, and my



Left: *Élise et Beethoven*
Right: *La Bonne de Chagall*,



first adult novel. *La bonne de Chagall* is a story of a woman who lived with Marc and Valentina Chagall during the last decade of their lives. During that time, it is estimated that she stole hundreds of lithographs and gouaches from the studio of the artist while she worked as a maid in their villa in Saint-Paul de Vence.

The source of the story was a newspaper article of the trial that I found on line. Each morning when I worked at my computer, I felt like I was being guided through the process by an invisible force. The story about the maid, became more about the interconnectedness of the women in

Chagall's life: his first wife Bella, his daughter Ida, his second wife Valentina, the maid Irène and Charlotte who served to unravel the mystery.

When people ask me why I write in French, I jokingly reply that it is my only talent. In fact, I choose to write in French because of the beauty and richness of the language. I write in French because it is my first language and a gift from my mother.

English is in fact a mutant stepchild of German and French. It acquired most of its genes from its Gallic side. For several centuries French was the official language of the English court. Also, the list of English words with French roots is basically endless. Therefore, as a friend once told me, "You have the best of both worlds."

Languages, have truly been my window on the world and during my travels, I never felt stranded or lost. In fact, languages have guided me to my true self. In my numerous notebooks, I found recently the outline of a first novel in English.

Karen Olsen et la passion des arts

Born in Trois-Rivières, Québec to an Acadian mother and Norwegian father, She now lives in Kelowna, British Columbia, where the lakes, forests, and mountains remind her of her origins. She grew up hearing the mythical stories of Evangeline and the Nordic sagas. Both awakened her imagination and coloured her view of the universe. Three narrative threads seem to have traced her path. The first was the ability to listen to what others had to tell her through their language. The second was the discovery of others through travel, and the third was to the ability to express in images and words what she had learned during her travels." Fortunately, my studies and my work provided me with the opportunity to travel. I first left my province to teach French in Manitoba and then spent five years in Europe, thanks to a teacher recruitment program for positions in Germany. When I returned to Canada, I moved to Regina, Saskatchewan with my husband to teach in the immersion program. During that period, I pursued a Master's degree in Education/Administration at the University of Ottawa and later a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Regina."

FINALLY, THE ME I DIDN'T ENVISION

Gerri Thom



Issue 17 of The Journal in the fall of 2015 featured Gerri's paintings when she was just beginning.

My vision of retirement and becoming a painter was to finally become a private me. I would travel inward indulgently rediscovering my creative spirit. My life would become self directed and fulfilling. I would no longer dance to other's tunes.

Throughout most of our lives our identities are defined by the career paths we choose. One of the first questions asked of us upon introduction to new found acquaintances is, 'What do you do?' From that moment on we are largely identified by our answer.

I loved my chosen career in mechanical and structural drafting and design, and identified deeply with it. I fully expected that upon retirement that identity would remain intact and be enhanced by my newly discovered painting abilities. That was not to be.

Once away from my career, surprisingly my identity drifted away too, and I found myself entering a new era in the aging process of life. Mortality has reared it's inevitable head. My deeply loved sibling, relatives and friends started dying sending me even further adrift. I have preserved them in my paintings.

I am now coming to terms with this stage of life as we all must, and am immersing myself even further into painting - searching for more stability and new roots. My expectations that painting would be an inward private journey have become anything but and it feels wonderful. I am not an Island after all.

My friend Karen and I often discuss the impact of discovering and developing painting skills in the later years of life. We talk for hours and I

come away from those conversations energized and excited to paint more. It is my great fortune to paint with a group who encourage, appreciate and respect each other's talents encouraging each other in our growth. Such a contrast from my competitive career life. I attend these painting classes as much for the pleasure of the group interaction and encouragement as for the painting lessons learned.

In addition I paint regularly with a close friend I've known for 30 years and she is also part of this painting group. We have been painting together now for about 2 years and rely on each other for input and a fresh vision of each other's paintings. We have discovered it is easier to see what needs to be done on



Portrait of Laurie (first shown incomplete in Sage-ing issue 17)



Top: Morning's Promise (the one I sold)
 Middle: Portrait of Ken K
 Above: Swiss Alps

someone else's painting than on our own. During this past two years our painting skills have grown in strides and painting together has become invaluable to that growth, as well as the deepening of our friendship. We carry on talking about all aspects of our lives and sometimes just paint in the easy silence of close friendship. One of the most validating experiences of this process for me was the first sale of one of my paintings.

This painting was the first one done, from inception to completion, outside our workshop environment and was sold within half an hour of completion. Selling that painting was the most empowering and validating experience I've had since beginning my painting journey. The approval of another for something I had created impacted me deeply. It was difficult to let this painting go because I have discovered that my paintings are not just canvas and paint - they are the fabric of my life and layers of peace, angst, joy and persistence.

At the start of every painting I feel trepidation as I stare at the blank canvas. Where do I start? Can I do this? Will it be good and will I love it? It is vital for me to love them. They are a tangible result of my inward journey and the discovery of the me I yearned for, but did not believe existed. Then comes excitement and anticipation. I am beginning a new journey. Who will I be at the finish? Every painting brings self discovery and affirmation that this is the perfect path into truly learning about me. When I paint I am free from the confines of employer's objectives and rules of design where there was no room for self expression. Every layer on my canvas contains alternating emotions and layer by layer I tell my ever changing story. With every painting I become freer from past restrictions of how to paint. I gain confidence and an assurance of self. For much of my life acceptance from others was of great importance to my self esteem. Now it matters little. Now I am comfortable in my skin. I am told I carry myself differently. I am more relaxed and self assured.

The painting I am doing now is my largest, most challenging and exciting to date. The subject is a Chinese water city filled with irregular shapes and texture -perfect for freer strokes and gobs of paint.

I love the freedom I am able to express with this piece. I feel like a child



Top left: Italy

Top right: Water City (layer 2 and I'm still journeying)

Above: Tofino

with crayons and a big piece of paper. I am free to be without the stifling filters planted on us as we grow. I have travelled full circle to rediscover the wondrous gifts within. This is the me I didn't envision.

Geri Thom was born and raised in Prince George B.C. She enjoyed a long career in mechanical drafting and design starting with her father's logging equipment designs then on to pulp mills, Western Star Trucks and finally aircraft modifications with KF Aerospace. She retired about 10 years ago to concentrate on her family of husband Ken, two step daughters and five grandchildren. She is also enjoying her love of gardening, traveling, entertaining their Airedales, and family research. In past years she enjoyed doing stained glass and concrete benches with glass inlays, running and hiking. She has participated in a number of community volunteer efforts most extensively around suicide intervention and youth suicide prevention and education. She found the most fun volunteer effort was working with "Making Memories" Nutcracker performance. It was a program developed by her husband Ken and staff, Lori Larson and Mel Brown's Canadian School of Ballet, Debbie MacMillan and a number of community agencies to bring a Christmas performance to children who were unable to attend a regular theatre performance

PLEASE MEET MY BUDDIES

Keith Routley



Keith and Samson

I haven't sold any art for quite awhile; I like having my art surrounding me, it's the real me buried in those paintings. Maybe it's because I am a scavenger at heart and now I'm scavenging for me. I collect. I ride my bike everywhere, cruising with regular dips into new places, checking out and looking closer at whatever catches my attention. My mind sees connections

In my seventies, I'm truly enjoying my paintings and finding me in my works. They are my buddies. Let me introduce them. Enjoy my laughs and delight in what I'm seeing revealed.

This first buddy came from another work when I spread paint at random over its surface. I let my moods direct my paint choices and my brush. And then I waited. Weeks later I saw two eyes, only suggestions mind you. Most people would not see the eyes, nor the one line that became her nose or the faint outline of her lips, but I was seeing a beautiful face arise from the paint. From just those features, I used other markings that I had done earlier, without intention, to suggest her high turban and her dress. I added the stripes; I saw an arm or at least the suggestion of an arm; I gave her breasts, she became alive. I called her my Nairobi Lady.

I cannot sell her, she is my shaman overlooking me in my loft studio.

This landscape is my very first real painting and I did it from a photograph sort of. Years ago I took dozens of black and white photos and they have rested in my mind's eye. When I began this painting, I did not sketch any lines to guide me on the canvas; instead, I just tossed the paint on with no fear. My heART guided my palette knife to form the road, the fields on either side. I put in the horizon with no intention other than what the earlier black and white photo composition, still alive in my mind, suggested. The sky is truly amazing. I had never painted a sky, but my heart and brain (right or left side?) did the sky. This road exists near Fort Saskatchewan and the Yellowhead highway. I keep this painting to remind me I am an amateur artist/painter. At my age I am so happy to be able to paint like this. I only started painting in 2013 at heART Flt, a spontaneous art painting group in Kelowna.

I had never drawn a person with a stick of charcoal. I researched the world of hobos and did this drawing from my own experience. In my teens a friend and I would hop on a slow freight train as it passed through our little town. We would sit inside an empty car until it reached the outskirts of the big city. As I decided to draw a dozen hobo charcoal drawings, my heart sang along with memories stored up in my brain. I am happy that these charcoal drawings still hang on my walls. I cannot sell them.

I even wrote the poem from my heart. I just imagined what it must have

Nairobi Lady





Top left: Fort Saskatchewan and the Yellowhead highway
 Top middle: world of hobos
 Top right: I have walked the roads
 Above: Daphne Odjig

been like to be those men.

I have walked the roads not as a hobo but as a young man travelling across Canada, hitch-hiking on the Yellowhead in the early 60's. Riding the rails, but in the VIA passenger train. I think I am in this sketch; my inner spirits are on canvas.

In a recent painting for 150 years since Canada became a Dominion, I did a preliminary sketch from a photo of Daphne Odjig a famous indigenous artist who recently passed away this year at age 97. This was another painting from my heart. When asked to honour what I like about Canada, I decided to paint her on a banner canvas. This lady painted with her heart. This will be another 'keeper' and Daphne will be my 'muse' looking over my shoulder. For me The spirituality in my paintings is so real. Each has a voice that speaks to me.

Here is my first sketch that I took to the 150 Banner painting studio. It took me less than three hours, and I mixed the blue with titanium white and captured the colour of my birthstone 'turquoise' and Daphne's favourite jewelry.

I paint my spontaneous 'Land'escape' works quickly. For this scene of a bird sanctuary near the Delta hotel in Kelowna, I tossed and sprayed water on the acrylic colours and within an hour this appeared. I have learned when to stop painting; one gets a feeling. Your heart says to stop; it's best to follow your heart; 'let it be' as the Beatles sing; maybe come back later.

This kind of spontaneous painting is the most illuminating; it's fun and the evolution can be revealing of your inner-self. As this painting began, it had no Tusked Woolly Mammoth, no Don Quixote man either; at first I saw the long stroke across the canvas; it became the long lance for our Don Quixote to hold. At that point he was on a horse, but my inner-feelings told me to make the horse a mammoth beast. The other people at first were just marks, thin lines, but my eye and my heart brought them out of the canvas to be seen. It truly is amazing to have this gift of seeing with my inner eye, but I am not alone. Many people see things in clouds or trees. It's this gift that can bring great pleasure if one relaxes into it.

This is another Okanagan lake with sail boats all made up from what I have seen from shore; I don't paint what see, I paint what I feel it should look

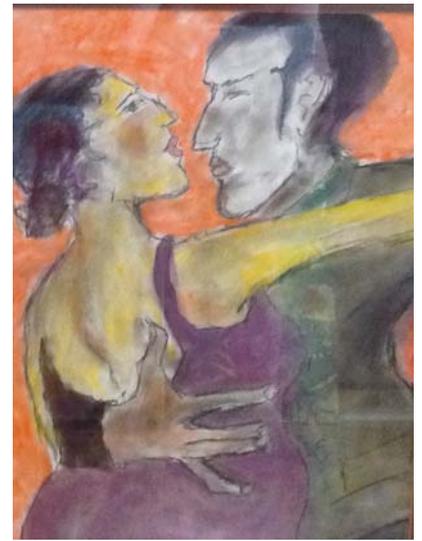


Left: 'Land'escape'

MMiddle: Tusked Wooly Mammoth

Right rapture of our love

Below: Okanagan Sail Boats



like. This was done indoors, but an artist stores so up many paintings in one's brain\heart and these become your guides. The longer you live, the more paintings you have. *Imagine*, as John Lennon sings, and paint what you *Imagine*.

Sometimes a work becomes very personal. I saw a record cover of two people dancing the tango and then I drew my wife and me. Later we took Tango lessons. We loved the Tango, and the food that came with music at our dance club meetings. I have captured the rapture of our love. As an artist I took the liberty to give me more hair. This is a keeper. It also hangs on the wall up to my studio.

Oh my gosh, I love painting Shamans, and this is my latest work done in three hours; the painting changed three times before it was completed after this Shaman with a brilliant head-dress of wild feathers and holding a gourd appeared to me in the last few minutes. It's not done by a professional, but it has been done by someone who loves to paint - someone who loves to have fun painting. I will always be an amateur, we are all amateurs at what we do, only the odd person will become a Picasso or a Rembrandt or a Salvatore Dali. I've created who I am and I am happy with that.

One of my first 'land'escapes', from up in the Toovey area of Kelowna, was done painting on the trail overlooking the famous hill that hides Hillside Cherry Farm and market - a great eatery!

I just set up my 2 X 4 easel, tossed on it a 30" X 40" canvas (completely white) begging me to cover it, and I did within three hours or less. I started at 6AM and finish by 9AM when the mornings get too hot. I do not pre-sketch in any areas; I let my palette knives do their work. I paint thick and thin; I even toss on a thick moulding paste to accent knife strokes. It's all for fun and keeps the juices flowing.

If I don't have supplies I make pictures with my camera and keep my eye in training. Here is an abstract.





My paintings are my buddies; they make my days. I don't paint everyday, but I do set time to draw and doodle and sketch everyday. Making my works is like doing Yoga or Tai Chi or exercising. You visit with your imagination when you feel like it and you let the friendship develop.

When **Keith Routley** was asked to send a bit of a biography to accompany his article he pondered, and queried, "What is a bio? Like when I was born, where, when was my first art lesson? Did I draw all the time? Did I take night courses, Did I go on art camping trips? Did I go to art school for one year, then to photography school for one year? Did I take wedding photos on weekends for 30 years as a hobby? Did I work for ad agencies and commercial print shops? Did I take just baby photographs at the homes of customers? Did I do aerial photography? Did I take photos of a coal mine underground and aboveground? Did I build and dismantle grain elevators? Did I ride a Norton motorcycle at speeds up to 90mph and steer it with my legs against the gas tank? Did I build cooling towers for Fluor Corp? Did I pave/tar roads and roofs? Did I build a subdivision on the outskirts of Saskatoon in 1959? Did I take photos of people who strolled along Jasper Avenue, and then hand them stubs to buy the photo. I was in Sea Cadets and capsized at least 4 times. I played the golden Bass Horn in the Cadet band and school band. As a mature student, I took a Tarot card reading class, a writing class and tai chi at the University of Alberta for ten days I lied about my age and told the registrar I was still a child at heART. I

play a Mean Gutbucket guitar. Oh, and I ran a 26 mile marathon in Edmonton a dozen years ago in 4hrs, 20 minutes and I wasn't tired one bit!. I've created me and that's been Fun!

Top left:: Hillside Cherry Farm

Top right: Photo abstract

Above: Shaman

IN REFLECTION



Antoinette Voûte Roeder

Introduction

I do not write according to a disciplined schedule. I am very disciplined in many areas of my life but writing is play; it is freedom for me. I write on inspiration; when something I see, hear, or experience seems to well up, or hover nearby, I catch onto its coat tails and off we go.

All artistic endeavour surely comes from the within, this mysterious inner life that wants out. It is my expression of creativity which seeks community, which seeks to find kindred spirits who say, “Yes, oh yes, that is exactly how I feel. You have just put into words what I, too, have tasted.”

That communion gives still more credence to my own experience and welcomes me to a place in the world, and in myself. In some lovely way we “see” each other, we connect with one another, we support one another.

Karen Close saw a connecting thread, a flow, in the writings I had submitted at various times in the last little while. It was a connecting thread that moved from observations of the exterior world (“under an umbrella”, “In this world...”) to the more intimate relationship of mother and daughter and even more intimate than that, the relationship with my heart. To conclude with the poem *Too Much* may be perceived as ironic on a certain level, but it also speaks a universal truth: all the preceding words are “*so much straw*”, to quote Thomas Aquinas, if one has not lived the experience of what is described. As Buddhists maintain, “*Experience is the best teacher.*” In biblical terms, it is the “*taste and see*” of life lived fully in the moment.

Under An Umbrella

Every time we leave our hotel in Vancouver, we are given a large navy blue umbrella. And we need it. Skies are slumped down over the mountains. It is misting, dripping, leaking, showery, or just plain raining. We unfurl our deep blue canopies and head out.

It never fails to remind me of my very first umbrella. I was only eight or nine. Who knows what a child considers really grown-up or why? I felt incredibly posh and mature with my umbrella, almost like I felt when I received my first watch. I couldn’t wait to use it and am pretty sure it wasn’t even raining when I walked under that taut bit of nylon for the first time.

Now that I am truly mature and then some, I have different thoughts about my umbrella. It creates a small world all its own, sheltered and focused, quite intense. Things at ground level, flower borders, dried leaves, bits of trash, uneven sidewalk are the reality one deals with. One needs to develop a sense of passersby because it is not difficult to get one’s umbrella entangled with somebody else’s much to the chagrin of both parties. Walking side by side is almost impossible for that same reason. Forget about holding hands



Safe?

with your loved one or walking arm in arm unless you are willing to share one umbrella.

As we age it is easy to watch our worlds shrink almost to the point of what is visible under an umbrella. Easy to forget about the world out there, to shake off all its problems and challenges. We may feel increasingly powerless or maybe truly lose interest. I find that my ongoing passion about world affairs can irritate my close friends. Is it inappropriate in one my age? Or does it make them uncomfortable because they too feel so powerless in the face of overwhelming concerns like climate change, false information, schizoid leaders, power and wealth run amok?

The desire for peace and harmony may sometimes seem more like passivity, fence-sitting, making no choices or no decisions that could make a difference, no matter how small. I would like to think that rather than sheltering under my private umbrella, symbolically speaking, I would be willing to brave the

elements, whatever is out there that wants to thwart justice, impede goodness, kill enthusiasm. The French Jesuit paleontologist and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, had an amazingly optimistic vision for humanity. He felt we would all come together in a process he called divinization. But he did indicate that the thing that could throw that process off entirely would be our passivity. He talked of building the earth, by which he meant discovering the full potential for the creative, the spiritual, in the human. He included the natural world in his vision. Teilhard's vision was a cosmic one. No confining himself to the view from under his umbrella.

In these challenging times, I hope more and more of us will shed our umbrellas, even while it rains, and turn our faces toward the challenge, pick up our tools and get to work. There is ample evidence that many are doing so.

Mothers and Daughters

Terry Tempest Williams, author and naturalist, has written a book called *When Women Were Birds*. Terry has been left all her mother's journals at her mother's death. Think of this precious legacy, especially for a writer. Imagine her anticipation upon opening her mother's journals, three shelves of clothbound books in a variety of colors and designs. Imagine her disappointment and bewilderment when she finds that one after the other, the books are empty, blank. And therein lies the story line of Terry's book. What is it that her mother intended to write? What is it that she failed to write?

This book is really a collection of *pensées*. I've meditated upon them, read them over, used some as inspiration at writing retreats I've offered. And the book has made me reflect on my own mother and my relationship with her.

In this world

of lies and unrest,
of malicious mischief,
what matters a poem?

And if a poem
bears no weight
has no power
to transform

what does?

The Cardiologist

Maundy Thursday
and he enters wearing
a lavender shirt, sleeves rolled up,
tie to match.

He won't be washing my feet.

Sometime into the appointment
he leaves the room
returns with a small device
to place against my heart.
On a tiny hand-held screen
he shows me what's beneath
my ribs: a small live animal
mouth opening, closing
pumping steadily within
the dark cave of my chest.

Awe-struck
curved into the event
as if in prayer my Easter
has just dawned.

If women were ever birds, I have neither known nor witnessed it. The women I know are valiant, dealing with struggles of one kind or another, be they ever so great or small. Some of us suffer from self-doubt, lack of confidence, endless questioning of our own motives, our own purpose, our actions. Or am I merely speaking of myself? I don't think so.

I wish my mother had kept a journal. I have, instead, a scattering of her letters, those I was able to save from the flood of 2004. My mother was a faithful letter writer. We were always separated from the time I went to university at age 17. At first we lived in different towns, then in different states, later in different countries. Her blue envelopes would appear regularly in the mail with bits of news not terribly profound but always giving me the sense of her and the home and atmosphere she created wherever we lived. Her feel for beauty mixed with comfort mixed with little familiar rituals came through in her letters. At times the envelope would contain fabric swatches of something she was sewing; or a bit of yarn from her latest knitting project (for a church bazaar); or a photograph of an oil painting she had recently completed and likely given away. My mother also added little smiling faces with wild curly hair long before e-mail made emoticons popular.

My mother shared of herself but little. Sometimes, very few times, she would touch upon something deeper in her conversation. I suspect she had learned at an early age that her stories were not welcome or not interesting to others. Perhaps she shared more of herself with her women friends.

I would like to have been one of those. My mother was not a great model for a girl coming of age, an emerging child-woman who was shy, introverted, sensitive, given to introspection; who herself needed to be invited in, given a safe place to use her voice, to know and understand her sexuality and her power. There was often a distance between us, perhaps a lack of understanding which neither of us seemed able to bridge. I adored my mother and I know I tried to express that in many ways. I even coined a special name for her. She showed love in her own way, by sewing beautiful clothes for me, by her faithful correspondence, by her attention to little things. When coming home from university at Thanksgiving or spring break, a bar of scented soap would be lying on my nightstand. She would have my favorite comfort food,



Left: Mother made our suits
Right: she painted me when I was 10 years old



Too Much

All my life
I have said too much.

I have talked about
the journey
to the Self, the
greater-than-self.
I have said too much.

I have filled the air
with curlicues
with shadowed peaks
cauliflower clouds
red-crested birds

and I have said too much.

Relationships and loves
and lost loves, home and
exile

criticism, protest, praise,
laments found words
and in the end

I have said too much,
I have said nothing
that experience does not
say better.

macaroni and cheese, waiting for me when I got off the train. Maybe there would be a new pair of slacks she had made me hanging in the closet.

My mother left no journals but she did leave us many of her oil paintings which adorn the walls of my home as well as those of my siblings.

We are daily reminded of my mother's gifts, her eye for beauty, her love. I still have some gorgeous gowns my mother made me, including the one I wore for my graduate piano recital at university, and my wedding gown.

We may look for love to be shown in particular ways and then miss the expression of it because we don't recognize it as such. After all these years I can speak of my mother's love in the way she showed it, a way she continued until she no longer sewed.

I *wore* my mother's love. What could be more intimate?

Antoinette Voûte Roeder, M. Music, mentor, author. has been a loyal contributor to *The Journal*. She is the author of *The Many Singings* and *Poems for Meditation*

CORE CONNEXION

Transformational arts



Barb Reid

Dance is meditation. It is medicine. It is an expression of self. It is created and expressed, but never captured. Dance can change your life.

The practise of expressing myself creatively with movement and dance has healed my life. It can teach you how to express pain and sadness, and how to release it. For me, it started as a health practise, but ended up being a profound spiritual experience as well.

Dance is a medicine that helps you experience yourself in new and unique ways. It helps you to grow and to heal. And unlike most medicine, it is easy take. Music has moved me throughout my life. Every dance class that I could find, I took. However, they always ended in “failure”. I cannot follow choreography. I’d go left when they go right, or burst out into my own moves. That’s why I loved dancing by myself, because at home in the kitchen, you can do your own thing and nobody is there to make you wrong.

Core Connexion Transformational Arts is a movement practise that I have been participating in for almost twenty years. The class provides tools and supports that allow you to express yourself through movement and dance, and there is no wrong way to do it. There is no wrong way to be you. Thirty years ago, I wasn’t myself. I was rigid, controlling and deeply unhappy. I kept many secrets, especially from myself. My body, mind, heart and spirit were each separate entities, isolated at the best of times; at the worst of times, at war with each other.

I no longer feel that way. Peace and collaboration are the norm now. But it didn’t happen quickly. Movement expression is an ongoing daily and

weekly practise that has strengthened my energetic and creative muscles. Movement has taught me that all my thoughts and feelings are ok to express. Dance has taught me how to express them. Your body has wisdom and can teach you what you need to learn. When I move to music, my mind becomes still and I become aware of the authentic self that I want to express. I have learned about a playfulness inside that wants to jump out. I can hear my heart and my soul when I dance. Your body has wisdom and can teach you what you need to learn.

My Soul is a Passionate Dancer. Music

Creativity





Top: Aliveness
Middle: Dance
Above: Feet

The Power of Dance Transforms People!
Dance is our medicine, Movement is our
meditation, The community is our
resource, The practice is our refuge. At the
Core of every Body is the Dance!

Barb Reid has worked as an Occupational
Therapist, a wine educator and helps
people learn how money works. She has
been certified to teach Core Connexion
classes for fifteen years.

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calls me to move and my dance becomes an expression of myself in the present moment. I allow myself to be danced by my soul. Dancing rejuvenates and revitalizes. It gives life. When I dance I am fully alive, expressing myself authentically and often with intense passion. When I let the music inspire me to move, I am open to a new experience of myself.

This is how Movement is a Meditation. When you dance you are fully present and aware of your body as it moves. The freedom to express what you are experiencing as it arises through the movement is powerful and fulfilling. Your mind becomes quiet; it can become still. This is Bliss. For me dance is a moving meditation.

Core Connexion is about feeling that moving meditation. It teaches that Dance is a Refuge, a place where you know you will be accepted just as you are. The dance floor is a sanctuary where it is safe to express yourself, fully and authentically. It is a place where you can count on being able to fully express your feelings, without judgement, commentary, or feedback from others. You can bounce around with joyful exuberance and you can sob your sorrow as you writhe with pain and grief. Dance can be an outlet for your emotions that you can depend upon. Dancing with others and being a witness to each other's expressions creates a sense of connection and community.

Once I started moving like this, expressing myself in this powerful way, I couldn't go back. I craved it. So, I turned it into a weekly practise. I needed the space to move large, fast, freely and without choreography. I needed a place to fully express what I feel inside with movement, instead of with words.

By creating that space, I found a place to be accepted and witnessed with loving kindness by others. This experience has let me know that I am not alone. There is a freedom in knowing that you may express yourself uniquely, but you are also expressing what others can understand and relate to. There is great power in really listening to yourself, even just for a certain time each week, and honoring what you hear without constraint. It is experiment, and it is fun. When I dance, my mind stills and this is Bliss.

When asked how dance has improved his life, one of the regular participants stated:

"Love of dance practice came as a complete surprise to me in mid-life after I took some transformative steps to learn and grow. For me, dancing is free or creative movement with joyous music. It is the one time in my day that I am grounded rather than stuck in my head. It is one of the few activities in my life that is both fun and completely healthy both in mind and spirit. M.B."

POETRY

THE ELDERS

Susan McCaslin



PAULINE MOWAT

Born in England, raised in Northern India
with an alcoholic father, refined and patient mother.

Transplanted to Saanich, B.C. at twelve,
you climb trees, speak with fawn lilies.

Robert Park makes you his war-bride.
Post-war blows beat like shells:

Your daughter's forceps delivery leaves her
quadriplegic, brain-damaged, mute vocalizer,

institutionalized at Woodlands School in New West,
where you do not know abuse rampages.

Your son, quiet, adored, thoughtful like you,
drowns off the coast of Australia after high school.

His death leaves you seeking the beyond,
the other life, glimpses of him in dreams.

You take your daughter to prayer meetings,
hoping for the healing that never comes.

Your husband dies in his eighties on the bathroom floor,
followed by your daughter's death a few years later.

Fed up with living alone,
you check yourself into a nearby care facility

build your hermitage on the third floor,
open to visitors.

Macular degeneration strikes, hearing slides away.
The falls. Wheelchair boogie. Long term-care.

Friends fly off one by one, and now
you are the only one left at 98.

I ask you how you carried yourself
though all that trauma, how you survived.

"What else can a person do? I didn't have a choice.
I just kept walking."

Yet always when I arrive
you say my name.

Last time I came you said:
"We have everything we need inside us."

MARGUERITE ROBERTSON

On a rain-drenched afternoon
while visiting Pauline at Kiwanis Care

she dozes off, so I'm checking my texts.
A clear voice cuts through happy hour with

its sickly-sweet, non-alcoholic margaritas:
"What lovely, thick hair you have."

A peppy elder, probably around 85,
turns to chat. I ask for her story.

"I lived on the west coast of Vancouver Island
in Tofino after the war. My husband was a doctor.

No road from east-island then, so people came by boat.
Mostly Indigenous people lived there,

some Norwegians, some Japanese, and the loggers.
My best friend was a Japanese Canadian

but she got sent to the Interior.
I never saw her again.

Once my husband had to do an appendectomy
right on the dining room table.

We had two children, but the school only went to grade 6,
so we moved to New West where I've lived ever since.

A few years ago I knew I didn't want to live alone anymore,
so I walked here, toured the place, saw a room and took it.

The kids were surprised, but I didn't want to bother them.
They're getting so old. The staff here are kind. I like it alright.

Reading keeps me stimulated. I read three books a week
that I get at the library. Have read all my life."

"How old are you, Marguerite?"
 "I'll be turning 110 in a few weeks."

"That's phenomenal! What year were you born?"
 "1907. Born in Nova Scotia and married a sea captain."

She seems bright enough but must have dementia
 more badly than I thought, I thought.

"What's the secret to your longevity, Marguerite?"
 "Well, I like my food. I'm positive. Don't worry much."

No one in my family has lived this long, so I don't think it's genetic.
 My son is coming to take me for dinner on my birthday

so I told him all I want is a dry martini and a rare steak."
 "Well, I hope you get them, Marguerite."

Googling her at home, I find it's all true. She's been
 interviewed and archived and there'll be a party soon.

That night I tell my husband: "Standing in front of Marguerite
 is like standing in front of an old growth cedar."

Article on Marguerite: www.newwestrecord.ca/community/life-is-still-interesting-says-110-year-old-new-westminster-woman-1.19675964

Susan McCaslin has published fourteen volumes of poetry. Her upcoming *Into the Open: New and Selected Poems* (Inanna Publications), will be launched in Toronto on Sept. 27, 2017. Her most recent volume is *Painter, Poet, Mountain: After Cézanne* (Quattro Books, 2016). *Demeter Goes Skydiving* (University of Alberta Press, 2011) was short-listed for the BC Book Prize (Dorothy Livesay Award) and the first-place winner of the Alberta Book Publishing Award in 2012. Susan has also published a memoir, *Into the Mystic: My Years with Olga* (Inanna, 2014). She resides in Fort Langley, British Columbia where she initiated the Han Shan Poetry Project as part of a successful campaign to protect an endangered rainforest along the Fraser River.

THE COMPLIMENT

Joan Dobbie



Dedicated to the unknown comedian who first said, "There are three
 stages of life: Young, middle aged and 'My you're looking good.' "

And so I went swooping into her yard sale
 on my golden Trek bicycle

wearing my old flower spattered
 bathing suit

and a leotard (I'll explain later)

and the lady who was running the show
 leapt up out of her seat in the sunshine

Wow! You look great for your age... um...
 How old are you?

Four Hundred and twenty five I replied

and I think she got it. At least
 she changed the subject

Anyhow, a couple weeks later
 in my very own driveway

(yes I was wearing that bathing suit again)

my newish male neighbor
 — an okay sort of guy who plays drums

far into the night — was at his front gate
 and he called out to me

Hi, I'm Adam! the world's very first man
 You look great for your age!

So I told him my story and he thought
 for a while... *Well,*

you look great he said
 How old did you say you were?

Joan Dobbie is a poet/yoga teacher in Eugene, Oregon. She has a 1988 MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Oregon, and poetry published in mags and online zines as well as a few chapbooks and a full length book, "Woodstock Baby, a Novel in Poetry." Joan co-edited the anthology, 'Before There Is Nowhere to Stand', Lost Horse Press, 2012, and co-created 'The Many Faces of Hatha Yoga,' Kendall Hunt, 2013. In 2017, Joan chaired the Fall and Spring Adult Poetry contests for the Oregon Poetry Association (OPA) and presently co-hosts a monthly reading series, The River Road Reading Series (RRRS) <riverroadreadings.blogspot.com> in Eugene. She will be presenting a writing workshop "Inspired by Carver" at the October 2017 OPA conference in Portland, Oregon.

THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF POETRY

Wyman Sanders



ONLY AS A SENIOR

Only as a Senior
 Can our being reach fruition.
 Starting from the Delivery floor
 To our final destination.
 We now can view our whole life through
 And retain all of its pleasures.
 We see our past, and future too
 And enjoy all of their treasures.
 Our special friends and family
 Have added to this moment.
 All their smiles and riches free
 Are flowing in this instant.
 Even our work and travels too
 Are reflected in this space.
 We are at peace with beauty true
 To be enjoyed, without a race.
 Thank you, God, for letting me find
 The life I've always wanted.
 And allowing me, full peace of mind
 With no ghosts resting, still unhaunted.

DEFECTIVE DETECTIVES

Many people think they see
 What lies ahead for seniors.
 They think they know what life will be
 While they still are, the Juniors.
 But life is truly not that way.
 These detectives are just wrong.

For seniors have many wonderful days,
 Even singing happy songs.
 I now suggest to all of you,
 Give up your negative thoughts.
 And try, taking on a different view;
 One filled with positive thoughts.
 Senior life may be much slower
 And our bodies not as strong.
 But we cut grass with our hand mowers,
 As we now plow through this new throng.

Wyman Sanders received his MD from the University of Rochester. Throughout his career he served as faculty member at UCLA's School of Medicine and was a child psychiatrist at UCLA's Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. Dr. Sanders has always had an interest in holistic care and improving the overall well being of his patients and those around him. Now retired, he enjoys spending his time writing poetry in his home in Santa Monica. Through his writing, he hopes to provide hope for others and change the stigma around aging. Wyman's wish is for others to see that there is life after retirement; senior life can be beautiful.

"Sharing stories about our senior lives brightens the unknown future. Through the medium of poetry we can understand and sail through the various phases of senior life more peacefully. This is our chance to fill in the cracks and replenish life. We have the time and space to become the person we wanted to be: ourself."

PORTRAIT OF A BACK ALLEY 1966-1989

Lori Stewart



We entered the “back alley” in August of 1966, the conduit to our new home and big city living, and it was our link to the outside world for the next twenty-three years. Why the qualifying adjective was used, I have no idea; there were no side alleys or front alley next to our property, but, “back alley” it was.

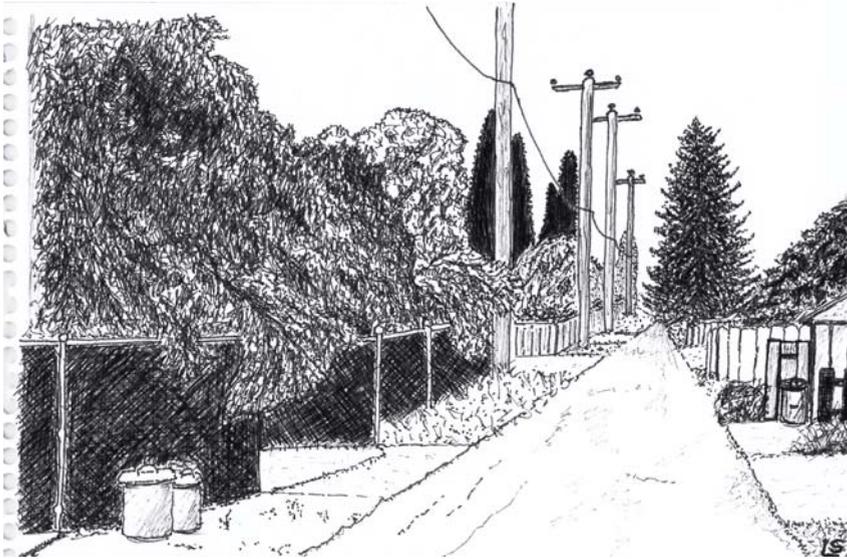
People often come to know their houses from the front, whereas we approached our house from the back. Visitors occasionally arrived along the front street, but the front of the house developed an amnesiac familiarity for me. The front facade of my family home still surprises me: “oh yes, that’s what it looks like,” as I drive by twenty-eight years after it passed into the hands of other owners.

Our house faced the University of Alberta Farm. We had a view of trees, field, and cityscape, including the CN Tower, impressive for its time. We never parked “out front”. Although visitors sometimes did, they more often came down the back alley to park in the large driveway. Parking in front, if you came from the east, was an inconvenience resulting from roadway and subdivision design, so the back alley was our main road. The large driveway extended from the back door to the back alley. A carport kept most of the frost and snow off the cars, so why would you need the expense of a garage which would just close in the space? And you could hang a basketball hoop on a carport just as easily as a garage anyway.

There was back alley etiquette: if a vehicle was present anywhere in the alley, one did not drive in, one did not play chicken, one backed up to allow the alleyway vehicle to exit, then one entered the lane. The protocol was intuitively known, unspoken, automatic, ingrained; as set in our consciousness as the pavement of the passage to which it pertained.

My brothers made their way through the back alley to the next avenue south to play street hockey. I used the same route to Cheryl’s house. In winter we tottered down the back alley in our skates to the community league rink. In spring and summer we made our back alley way to the community ball diamond, and I rode my bike down the back alley to Karen’s, to Janice’s, to Fran’s, and to the mall. The back alley was my passageway to school: elementary, junior high, senior high, and university.

It was in this alley that I wrestled with teenage angst as I made my way into society and where I took my refuge on my way home from the world, breathing a sigh of relief as I entered this communal passage that served, for me, almost as a cloister. We could literally and figuratively leave the garbage



Top: I was delighted with the long-forgotten memories that popped to the surface as I sketched

Above: Back alley

Lori Stewart is a writer, Associate Faculty at St. Stephen's College, and spiritual director who lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She has a back alley and a garage, but no basketball hoop. Her favourite back alley activity is carving out drainage channels on sunny days as the snow begins to melt in the spring.

in the back alley (the dry stuff in neatly stapled brown bags and the wet goo in sealed milk cartons, earning my mother the recognition of having the cleanest garbage on the block) while we children walked into the security of our home to the smell of freshly baked cookies and homemade buns.

Down the back alley I left for the airport on my way to Europe: my first trip, alone, as my mother held back her tears, protecting me from her maternal anxiety even as she felt helpless to protect me from all evil. The second trip was a longer rite of passage

in the company of a friend, but no less anxiety producing for my long suffering mother whose children insisted on wandering far from home.

This back alley could tell stories of coming and going from hospital shifts of keeping vigil as my father finally, finally lost his long battle with cancer, and stories of departures to the funerals of parent, uncle, and grandparent. It could tell tales of the end of university term parties when the neighbours stalwartly endured the reverberations of hoops being shot into the wee small hours of a night shortened even more by the daylight saving springing forward of clocks. And then there are the stories of neighbours ferrying casseroles and “the best chocolate cake ever” down the alley to our house as comfort when our parents took their turns in hospital for various surgeries. The painful Christmas Eve after our dad's November death saw us carrying our shattered hearts down the alley to the Hackman's to eat and sing (the grannies valiantly chirping “5 golden rings” as we took our turns on *The Twelve Days of Christmas*) and feel comforted as we reset our reality.

I came and went out the front door on my first few dates with my now husband, but he gained acceptance quickly and was redirected to the favoured back alley route. On my wedding day, I was driven down the back alley on my way to the church. Our daughters were walked up and down the alley when we visited Granny, as were the dogs of our childhood. My dad wandered up the alley to spend afternoons with his friend Fred in his garage as they shared stories along with the occasional beer or scotch. Some of our lawn tools were purchased by my husband at a garage sale “up the alley”. Dealers arrived early to scoop up bargains and our memories at the carport sale my mother held when she sold the house. I walked out of my family home for the last time through the back door and drove away down the back alley, a memory still filled with emotion.

I knew and still know the garages, the driveways, the garbage stands, the fences of that back alley. The alley holds them together as it does the stories of our lives in that house.

CARE FROM THE HEART



Katrina Pavlovsky

As human beings, we have danced since the beginning of civilization to celebrate the rites of passage. Dance has always been a powerful and transformative means of expression.

“Great dancers are not great because of their technique, they are great because of their passion.” - Martha Graham

Martha Graham made dance her rite of passage into her nineties. I am passionate in my desire that those who have lost their physical mobility can still experience the joy of dance when they adjust their technique.

I love teaching Chair Dance and teach inspirationally. My spirit soars in this shared exchange and I believe I am fulfilling my own purpose.

Chair Dance is a form of dance/movement that aims to provide participants with creative expression of the joy of movement, regardless of whatever balance or mobility limitations they may have. Chair Dance supports integration of body and mind. Greater flexibility, coordination and muscle strength are usually developed during the sessions. My Chair Dance class design is informed by ongoing collaboration with dance therapists and researchers in the United Kingdom, Australia, United States and Toronto regarding dance and aging, and dance and dementia.

I have been offering Chair Dance classes to seniors in Victoria for the past four years in various facilities. These include independent living and assisted living facilities, complex care homes, private care homes and recreation centres. Classes in Sidney BC have also been added. Seniors who participated range from healthy adults to those with cognitive impairment and other health issues such as diabetes, stroke, Parkinson’s and arthritis. When I watch my class of participants with Multiple Sclerosis, their drive to work hard each week is magical. It is refreshing and humbling, at the same time, to witness their involvement. The body grows in strength and stamina even though afflicted with illness and some weakness. The upper torso sings with strength.

Through a combination of modern dance, creative dance and yoga, my classes put an emphasis is on breathing, posture and alignment, as well as personal discovery and exploration. For the first class a variety of music is introduced and then future classes follow according to the interests and preferences of the participants. We listen to Abba, Latino and African rhythms, and Bobby Darin. “Dancing Queen” and “Mack the Knife” are very popular. My intention is to make classes progress with respect to the diversity and difficulty of the movements and to customize the class to meet the needs and abilities of everyone.

Best of all, the enthusiasm of the students and their willingness to try



Top: the new line dance
 Middle left the body grows in strength
 Middle right: focus
 Above: supportive community

enhances my teaching. We influence each other. My teaching requires that I improvise, depending on the response of the students. Creative expression is called upon for myself and my students. Classes conclude with a ten minute relaxation sequence involving guided imagery and relaxation into creative spirit. These ‘dancers’ experience stimulation by the end of each class. Dialogue with others, supportive and caring comments to one another are common. There is enthusiasm and vitality with a greater sense of wellbeing. Participants eyes shine brightly and sparkle. At the end of an 8 week session there is a substantial and noticeable difference in flexibility, alignment and stamina. Posture has improved. Backs are straighter due to an increase in muscle strength. Balance, likewise is better.

It is exciting for me to see others become more vibrant. This uplifts me and is validating to the teaching of Chair Dance itself. No two groups are alike. Each is unique. Those with cognitive impairment are more engaged and joyful. I have observed that memory is active for those with dementia. Sequences are learned, repeated and executed week after week. Greater confidence is evident in the dance moves. The seniors may not remember attending a class on a weekly basis, but the body remembers through muscle memory. Muscle memory (defined as motor function achieved with repetition) becomes active for all participants after the fourth class. Concentration is greater at this stage. There is a flow to the class. Stress is reduced through physical activity, but also because of the imagination stimulated through the guided imagery and relaxation sequence.

Care from the heart is how I provide senior care. It has the potential to reach those who are often vulnerable and isolated. It is very rewarding to see the transformation occur from fatigue to vitality, from weakness to strength, from isolation to inclusivity and to greater wholeness.

Albert Einstein stated “Dancers are the athletes of God.” The dancer is both the creator and the created. They become a vehicle for spirit, for the love that lives within us all.

Shall we dance?

Katrina Pavlovsky moved to Victoria, B.C. from Toronto in 2007. Her career includes Dance/Movement education with children from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6. Katrina pioneered and taught a Creative Dance/Movement program in thirteen schools. In 2012 Katrina combined her careers as a Care Provider and Dance/Movement Educator to offer classes in Chair Dance (DanSit) to seniors in facilities throughout Victoria and Sidney. These include assisted living, independent living, complex care and private care homes. Her passion for dance/movement speaks through her teaching style.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-GpiNVBjWU&feature=em-share_video_user
 Dance/Movement Educator | www.caredance.org | (250)598-1846

TAKING TIME FOR ART IN THE OKANAGAN

Suzanne Chavarie



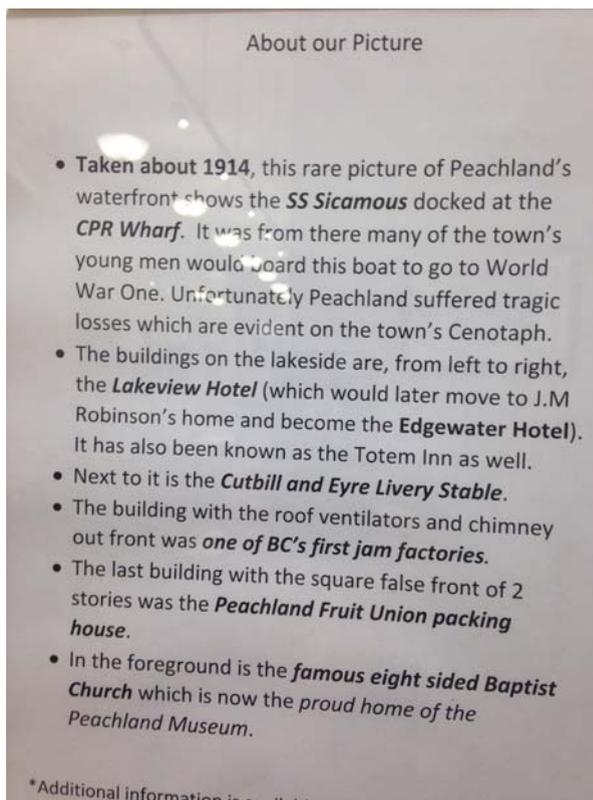
Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary. – Steve Jobs

Through connection comes expansion and expansion reaches into the unknown world, a future suspended by time. - Suzanne Chavarie

I had a fun experience while visiting the Peachland Art Gallery and became part of history - and you can too. In celebration of our country's 150th Birthday the Peachland Community Arts Council will be attempting to break a Guinness World Record. They are gathering the largest number of participants to create a 'paint by number' at one venue. Their goal is to have all 6,048 squares painted and documented by December 23, 2017 and all of the painting is to be done in the Peachland Art Gallery.

Be a part of history. Become a square. I did. I chose to celebrate creatively the joy of becoming a great aunt along side my sister-in-law who became a 'Bubbe' for the second time. Together we created a piece titled 'Connect - Expand'. It was our wish to express and share our enthusiasm together on

Left: Be a square
Right: about the picture





Left: 'CONNECT EXPAND'
Right: the bundle of joy



canvas. We chose the layers carefully allowing drying time in between the layers while at the same time sharing in the process. We took time to cherish the moment. Isn't that how humanity evolves?

I also had a special connection opportunity to mark the end of the school year end with a group of students and their families. Together we released a few dozen butterflies. In the classroom during the spring term, students had awaited the metamorphosis of these butterflies. "This is very creative - we helped design their colours like in painting," one child commented.

Perhaps it could have been one of our butterflies which flew into the studio while I was with my painting friends at heART Fit. When I shared my story of the butterfly release, my painting friends and I created a sharing moment of butterfly thoughts.

Stages of the butterfly development is like life stages. - Heather Karabelas

Metamorphosis is a blessing in life. Butterflies remind us that change can bring beauty into our lives. There needs to be a struggle, for the butterfly to spread its wings before they dry-and we can use struggles in our lives to inspire our own growth - Karen Holland

Someone once told me that butterflies represent the soul of our ancestors. - Rita Jesser

All in a week - Celebrating a birth, Celebrating Canada's 150 Birthday and marking a Milestone with the releasing of butterflies and sharing from the heart.



Left: butterfly release

Right: At the Awards - Dee MacGibbon (nominator), Suzanne Chavarie, Karen Close



Catch my smile.

P.S. Friend and mentor Karen Close, founder of Heart Fit and editor of this journal received the Honour In the Arts award for her contribution to the City of Kelowna at the 42nd Annual Civic And Community Awards' night.

Karen has shared endless hours volunteering in the community to enrich the arts by taking a leadership role, encouraging, educating and inspiring many citizens in the community. She initiated Heart Fit at The Rotary Centre for The Arts on February 14, 2008. For almost a decade, she has been connecting citizens young and old to come together for a weekly three hour painting session and to share in the unity of creative exchange.

As the founder and editor of this Journal, *SAGE-ING with Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*, Karen has provided many of us the experience of submitting articles and connecting to a global online audience. We are connecting and expanding in a social, cultural movement that is stirring imaginations and igniting creative expression and wisdom. That's time well spent.

All photos are by **Suzanne Chavarie**. Paying attention, savouring all she encounters and sharing her special finds with others is Suzanne's specialty. Filling with enthusiasm for everyday and the art filled encounters she anticipates is her creative expression.

PRIMAL JOY

PAINTING WITH FLOWERS AND DIRT

Lisa Lipsett



We are an addicted culture. We consume alcohol, drugs, porn, too much food, we gamble, play video games, sit on our smartphones or use shopping therapy. What are we trying to do? Physician and addiction specialist Gabor Maté says the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it is connection. Johann Hari in his Ted Talk on addiction agrees saying it is human nature to bond. If we cannot make a meaningful connection elsewhere we will bond with addictive substances and behaviours <http://upliftconnect.com/opposite-addiction-connection/>. Further, If we cannot bear to be present in our lives we will do what we can to numb out. Therefore to release the hooks of an addiction we need to find ways to connect with ourselves, our community and the natural world. I believe that making art can create just such deep connections. To up the ante, the more hands-on we are with our art-making the better. For example, painting with our fingertips using colours from plants and dirt found right in our own backyard or neighbourhood is a great way to start.

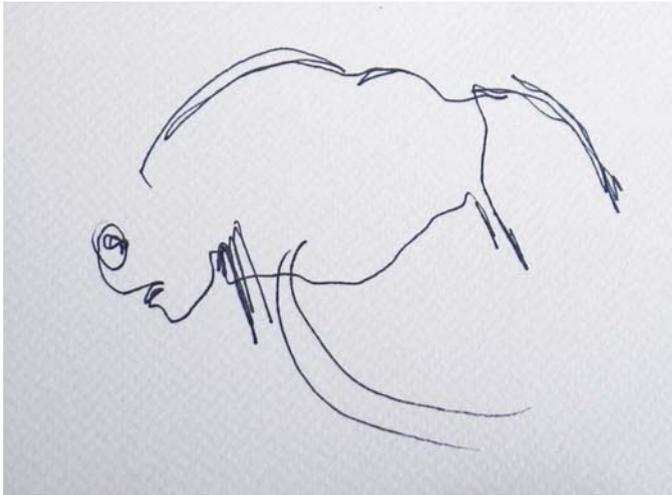
I have always had a love of natural pigments but two years ago on a trip to two cave art sites in Europe, things peaked. After all, everything created and preserved in these caves was done using local readily available materials. I had the honour of visiting the cave art area of Dordogne France the home of Lascaux- the Sistine Chapel of caves and its lesser cousin Font du Gaume- the only remaining open site of polychromatic cave paintings in France. Font du Gaume is a treat because it is still possible to walk in the caves and stand mere inches from 30,000 year old drawings. Unfortunately, Lascaux is now

locked away due to the damaging moulds that develop when thousands of people exhale carbon dioxide in such a small enclosed space.

Neither taking photos nor making drawings were allowed during my visit so I placed a folded piece of watercolour paper in my pocket and drew on it as I walked around. Drawing helped me to see more deeply and to feel in sync. As my eyes wandered like ants over the contours, lines and textures of ibex, mammoth, bison and horses, my pen kept track on the page. Thousands of years later it is astounding that we can still be entranced and held in awe of the patterns on the walls created by

Hand prints





Top: bison

Above: painting from Lascaux



the golden glow of torch light on bumpy surfaces in such beautiful spaces.

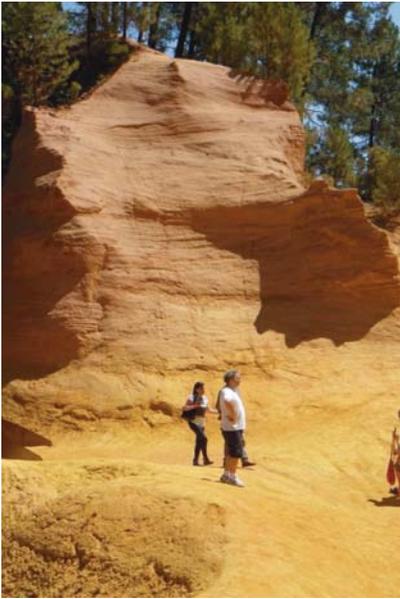
The spiritual yearning of humans to talk to the gods is evident on these ancient cave walls. According to ancient rock art expert David Lewis-William in his book *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origin of Art*, the evolution of the human mind started with Cro-Magnon man who possessed advanced neurological capacity to experience shamanic trance and vivid mental imagery. The theory goes that he needed to fix his visions and images to cave walls because caves were perceived as a threshold membrane between the daily world and the spirit world through which visions were born. Placing their coloured hands on these walls, blowing colour onto them and using charcoal and manganese to create outlines put them in direct contact with the spirits and nature. It is also possible that the drawings helped to re-mind them and now us over and over about our relationship with the spirit world deeply woven into the day to day.

After visiting these magical caves I went to Roussillion, France one of the original sources of the beautiful coloured ochres used in cave paintings, ancient village walls and pots. There are literally mountains of pigment here that can be walked around and explored. On my walk through the ochre mining area, my shoes and sweaty summer skin quickly became

coated with rusty red and yellow pigment. I stopped in the shade for a bit to paint with these pigments. What a blast it was to simply reach down, place my hands in the colour and directly smear the page.

This reminds me of a truly inspiring installation by Dutch artist Hermann de Vries that filled the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015. He is an earth collector and has been systematically gathering earth samples from the four continents grinding them down, adding water and placing swathes of colour by hand on the page. He currently has over 8000 in his collection. The earth installation at the show in Venice was titled "from earth: everywhere". It was a wall sized tableau comprising 84 hand applied earth rubbings on paper. de Vries has collected soil samples on his many travels, forming a sort of personal earth museum. While earth is a traditional and natural pigment that has the potential to visually characterize the quality of the land, de Vries believes that it is also symbolically telling us something about the spirit and society of a civilization.

"samples of soil from all over the world are turned into areas of colour, to show how many different colours the soil over which normally one walks without thinking, can



have: mustard yellow, red, white or green... I wish to transmit an increased awareness of what nature presents and what is our primary reality.” herman de Vries

He also made the most incredibly beautiful disk of tender Rose buds on the floor of the pavilion that made me cry. www.hermandevries.org



Edward Michell edwardmichell.com is a contemporary Canadian artist who uses plant pigments, dirt, crude oil, and berries in his paintings. He says he paints with the “guts of the land”. So using the natural materials readily at hand can be dynamic and exciting. It is

also our historical birthright. We have been doing this a very very long time. Here is a wonderful compilation of pigments throughout history www.paintmaking.com/historic_pigments.htm



My most recent search for garden paint started with a need to invent some new nature art activities for elementary school children on Salt Spring Island. I wondered what I could offer that would be exciting yet simple and easily do-able. I love drawing and painting with earth pigments that can be purchased in powder form but these are generally too expensive for the purpose of working with large groups of children. I have a set of plant based Watercolour paints that a German friend brought to Canada for me and I get great pleasure from knowing I am painting with Red cabbage or Chamomile. So I reasoned that if plant pigment can become a viable paint through drying and compacting maybe fresh picked plant flowers and stems could yield similar results. Turns out this is the case.

An Activity to Try: Go and get some colours!!

Did you know that by simply rubbing a flower onto watercolour paper beautiful colours appear? Not all flowers yield colour in this way but certainly many from my garden proved to be exciting. I know what works in the spring garden: Periwinkle, Azalea, Dandelion, Columbine, Rose Hip have all proved their merit. I recently discovered a whole new palette from the summer garden.

Wander through your yard, along a side street, in a park or forest. Gather flower heads in a ziplock bag for samples of colour possibilities. What do you think might work? Can you find a full palette of red, blue, green, yellow, brown, purple? Try out your palette on a separate page. Maybe label the colours and/or take a photo with the flower beside the marks on the page. That way you can find the colour again. The addition of Gouache and water

Top: mountain of ochre

Right top: raw pigment painting

Right bottom: wall display of earth art.

Above: rose buds far away and close up.



Top: plant painting here
Above: plant colour page.

and later sharpie markers helps to create a vibrant image. Here is a site with super simple easy to follow directions for making your own watercolour paint with garden plants.

www.learnplayimagine.com/2013/08/homemade-paint-natural-watercolors.html

What does your painting tell you about the environment in which it was created?

Using garden paint is not just about having fun looking for raw materials, there is also the joy of finding a colour you love and knowing it will only be available for a limited time. This makes me feel so much gratitude for simply having the chance to create with a colour now. There is also a new way of experiencing the landscape as we sensuously rub in pigment. It gets under our skin and rubs into us as well.

Good Books I recommend:

David Lewis-William, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origin of Art*. Thames and Hudson. 2002.

www.bradshawfoundation.com/books/the_mind_in_the_cave.php

The Brilliant History of Color in Art- Victoria Finlay 2014 J Paul Getty Museum

Color: A Natural History of the Palette- Victoria Finlay 2004 Random House

Lisa Lipsett is a Salt Spring, BC artist and founder of Creative by Nature Art, Quiet Mind Art with Earth & Heart. Her world burst open the day she painted the way a tulip feels instead of the way it looks. Lisa offers creative mentoring, creative nature connection programs in schools and personal transformation through art. Her passion is to free people from art anxiety so they may strengthen their creative nature for joy, connection and self-change. To learn more about Lisa visit www.creativebynature.org/about/ Quiet Mind Art with Earth & Heart www.creativebynature.org

FINDING THE DEPARTURE POINTS

Robert MacDonald

While some elders become more conservative as they climb up into the nearer-my-god-to-thee in years, aging can make others more liberal, freer, lenient, tolerant, radical, and creative. They embrace progressive ideas and causes that they were often loathe to do in their middle years. Above all, rigorous pursuit of the thrill of discovery is essential in achieving creative elderhood. Picasso observed, “It is enthusiasm of which we have the most need, we (the old) and the young.”

Creative elders tend to be more self assertive and independent, and frequently resist limitations and authority than their less creative peers. Creators have a tolerance for ambiguity. Being creative means taking risks, even inviting periodic failure, which is experienced as a normal part of the process, and results in a person who is more resilient.

Being an elder implies that we have had more and varied experiences than at earlier stages of life. One expects sensitive and reflective elders to have developed an eye for the ambiguity or tragedy inherent in life’s important themes. Love and hate, life and death, fortune and misfortune, pleasure and pain, freedom and bondage: each of these pairs of terms no longer has one clear and simple meaning. We become more nuanced in our approach to ideas and values.

As we grow into elderhood there is a softening of our old dogmatism, coupled with a “live and let live” attitude about things we were once passionate about, as well as a forgiving approach to the foibles of ourselves and others. Elders are, in a special sense, survivors, and we have developed for ourselves a sense of what works and what does not; what we can realistically hope for and what are pipe dreams; what is essential and what is trivial.

Creativity is an asset that is both appreciated and utilized at any age, but is especially cherished by elders. Some artists, like Picasso, demonstrate a brightening of spirit and a renewed outburst of invention as they grow into elderhood, which should be celebrated. The differences between those of us who start artistic activity late in life, as therapy or self-expression, and those whose professional work degenerates into formulas, cookie-cutters and self-imitations, and the exceptional aging artist, are found in creativity, cognitive skills, experience, and self confidence.

As we ponder our creative elderhood, there are a number of themes that occur that provide insight into how we can maintain our child-like sense of wonder, sharpen our creative tools, while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of vanity and self-delusion. Here, with the benefit of years, are some thoughts to consider.

1. Getting a Grip on Curiosity

More than 100 years ago, the American scholar John Dewey articulated his concept of how we think in a book by the same name, *How We Think*. Any student of Dewey

**“If you want to build a boat, do not instruct the men to saw wood, stitch the sails, prepare the tools and organize the work, but make them long for setting sail and travel to distant lands.”
– Antoine De Saint-Exupéry**

“Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality. Those who have the gift of creative expression in unusually large measure disclose the meaning of the individuality of others to those others. In participating in the work of art, they become artists in their activity. They learn to know and honor individuality in whatever form it appears. The fountains of creative activity are discovered and released. The free individuality which is the source of art is also the final source of creative development in time.”

–John Dewey

knows that an encounter with his prose can be work. Distilled from his writing, four criteria characterize his concept of the idea of “reflection” and the purposes he felt it served:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

According to Dewey, we stock our “store of experiences and facts” via one of the greatest human faculties - our inherent curiosity, a “desire for the fullness of experience”:

“The most vital and significant factor in supplying the primary material whence suggestion may issue is, without doubt, curiosity. The curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, as a vigorous and healthy body is on the *qui vive* for nutriment. Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contacts, is found where wonder is found. Such curiosity is the only sure guarantee of the acquisition of the primary facts upon which inference must base itself.”

Dewey explores curiosity at its most natural and uncontaminated - in the child’s mind. Children not only offer a model for fruitful risk-taking and overcoming the fear of failure, but their boundless curiosity, he argues, is precisely what we need to reawaken in ourselves in seeking to cultivate fertile thought, no matter our age:

“In its first manifestations, curiosity is a vital overflow, an expression of an abundant organic energy. A physiological uneasiness leads a child to be “into everything” — to be reaching, poking, pounding, prying... The most casual notice of the activities of a young child reveals a ceaseless display of exploring and testing activity. Objects are sucked, fingered, and thumped; drawn and pushed, handled and thrown; in short, experimented with, till they cease to yield new qualities. Such activities are hardly intellectual, and yet without them intellectual activity would be feeble and intermittent through lack of stuff for its operations.”

From this springs the next developmental stage, the *what/why* phase that often exasperates parents and teachers but provides the foundation for critical thinking:

“A higher stage of curiosity develops under the influence of social stimuli. When the child learns that he can appeal to others to eke out his store of experiences, so that, if objects fail to respond interestingly to his experiments, he may call upon persons to provide interesting material, a new epoch sets in. “What is that?” “Why?” become the unfailing signs of a child’s presence. Yet there is more than a desire to accumulate just information or heap up disconnected items, although sometimes the interrogating habit threatens to degenerate into a mere disease of language. In the feeling, however dim, that the facts which directly meet the senses are not the whole story, that there is more behind them and more to come from them, lies the germ of *intellectual* curiosity.

Leisure is a form of that stillness that is necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear. Such stillness is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness; it means, rather, that the soul's power, as real, of responding to the real - a co-responsence, eternally established in nature - has not yet descended into words. Leisure is the disposition of perceptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion - in the real. - Josef Pieper

“Curiosity rises above the organic and the social planes and becomes intellectual in the degree in which it is transformed into interest in *problems* provoked by the observation of things and the accumulation of material. When the question is not discharged by being asked of another, when the child continues to entertain it in his own mind and to be alert for whatever will help answer it, curiosity has become a positive intellectual force. To the open mind, nature and social experience are full of varied and subtle challenges to look further.”

Once again, Dewey reminds us that this unique human gift is predicated on our fragile willingness to befriend uncertainty and welcome the unknown - something most of us, for no good reason, relinquish by mid-life. Lamenting the ease with which “the open-minded and flexible wonder of childhood” is lost, Dewey writes:

“If germinating powers are not used and cultivated at the right moment, they tend to be transitory, to die out, or to wane in intensity. This general law is peculiarly true of sensitiveness to what is uncertain and questionable; in a few people, intellectual curiosity is so insatiable that nothing will discourage it, but in most its edge is easily dulled and blunted.”

But Dewey’s most prescient point has to do with how information overload - a malady undoubtedly far worse today than it was in 1910, yet one each era bemoans by its own terms - muddles the clarity of our view, hindering our ability to think critically and reflectively.

2. Learning to Pause and Consider

Is it possible to make sense of something as elusive as creativity? Psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire’s 2016 book *Wired to Create: Unraveling The Mysteries of the Creative Mind* offer a glimpse inside the “messy minds” of highly creative people. Revealing the latest findings in neuroscience and psychology, along with engaging examples of artists and innovators throughout history, the book shines a light on the practices and habits of mind that promote creative thinking, and untangle a series of paradoxes - like mindfulness and daydreaming, seriousness and play, openness and sensitivity, and solitude and collaboration - to show that it is by embracing our own contradictions that we are able to tap into our deepest creativity. Any of us could become more creative in our own chosen activities with just a few simple habit changes and shifts in attitude.

The key to creativity is openness. According to one well-known test administered by psychologists in the 1960s, writers tend to score really high on tests measuring psychopathology. However, those same writers also scored unusually high on tests measuring mental health. This paradoxical finding may be at least partially explained by one facet of personality that is highly correlated with creativity: openness. “Being open to and curious about the full spectrum of life - both the good and the bad, the dark and the light — may be what leads writers to score high on some characteristics that our society tends to associate with mental illness,” write Kaufman and Gregoire, “at the same time that it leads them to become more grounded and self-aware.”

People who say they’re only motivated by deadlines are probably not very creative. Research has shown that people who strongly agree with statements like “I work most creatively when I have deadlines” also tend to score higher in stress and lower in “creative potential”; they also, perhaps unsurprisingly, score lower in intrinsic motivation and higher in extrinsic motivation. That means they have a hard

“Transformative art must express something beyond where you are, it demands that you grow beyond your current self. This is where an artist’s angst and the pain of transformation coincide. You reach toward the true, the good and the beautiful and become a better person through the struggle.”
– Alex Grey

time forcing themselves to get something done, and are more likely to get to work when being nudged along by someone or something else like a deadline.

In contrast, people who “derive enjoyment from the act of creating and feel in control of their creative process tend to show greater creativity than those who are focused exclusively on the outcome of their work.” Creative work is best approached with a focus on the process itself, and the joy of making something, rather than a laser focus on the results.

It’s better to think of our creative work as something we are, not something we do. Most people probably already know that “follow your passion” is not very helpful advice. But there may be a way to think about that cliché that turns it into something more useful. Kaufman and Gregoire summarize some fascinating research on the idea of “harmonious passion,” which is the idea that we’ve folded some creative pursuit - dancing, drawing, writing, whatever - into our identity. It’s become a part of who we understand ourselves to be.

“Obsessive passion,” on the other hand, is marked by anxiety and self-consciousness; it means you derive your self-worth from your ability to best a rival on some creative task, for example. It goes back to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, in other words. Are you doing this for you, or to impress those around you?

Despite all the stress and tears those with obsessive passion pour into their work, it seems that those who are harmoniously passionate about their creative work are more likely to achieve the high goals they’ve set for themselves. You do it because you love it, and the accomplishments come along almost as a by-product of your love for the work. Even more important, research has also shown that “when we feel our work is both emotionally interesting and personally meaningful, accomplishing a task is significantly less mentally taxing.” If we can just lighten up, in other words, and we’ll be rewarded by both getting more work done and enjoying the work we’re doing.

3. Avoiding the Scourge of Narcissism

A 2010 study in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* found that the percentage of North American college students exhibiting narcissistic personality traits, based on their scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a widely used diagnostic test, has increased by more than half since the early 1980s, to 30 percent. In their 2009 book *Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, the psychology professors Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell show that narcissism has increased as quickly as obesity has since the 1980s. Even our egos are getting fat. This too could prove to be a costly problem. While full-blown narcissists often report high levels of personal satisfaction, they create havoc and misery around them. There is overwhelming evidence linking narcissism with lower honesty and raised aggression. Narcissists struggle to stay committed to romantic partners, in no small part because they consider themselves superior. Smugness, self-satisfaction, willful blindness to consequences, and moral decay are only a few of the byproducts of the condition. As the authors state: “Narcissism causes almost all of the things that we hoped high self-esteem would prevent, including aggression, materialism, lack of caring for others, and shallow values. In trying to build a society that celebrates high self-esteem, self-expression, and loving yourself, we have inadvertently created more narcissists - and a culture that brings out the narcissistic behavior in all of us, a culture which has journeyed from self-admiration, which seemed so good, to the corrosive narcissism that threatens to infect us all.”

Amour de soi (French for “love of self”) is a concept of 18th-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that refers to the kind of self-love that humans share with brute animals and predates the appearance of society. Acts out of *amour de soi* tend to be for individual well-being. They are naturally good and not malicious because it does not involve pursuing one’s self-interest at the expense of others. The sentiment does not compare oneself with others, but is concerned solely with oneself as an absolute and valuable existence. It is related to an awareness of one’s future and can restrain present impulse.

Rousseau contrasts it with *amour-propre*, that kind of self-love, found in Thomas Hobbes’ philosophy, in which one’s opinion of oneself is dependent on what other people think and which arises only with society. Rousseau considered it unnatural and unhealthy, and believed that arbitrary social comparison led to people wasting their lives trying to look and sound attractive to others.

This would seem to describe the current epidemic. Indeed, in the Greek myth, Narcissus falls in love not with himself, but with his reflection. In the modern version, Narcissus would fall in love with his own Instagram or Facebook feed, and starve himself to death while compulsively counting his followers.

If our egos are obese with *amour-propre*, social media can indeed serve up the empty emotional carbs we crave. Facebook and the like doesn’t create a narcissist, but studies suggest it acts as an accelerant - a near ideal platform to facilitate what psychologists call “grandiose exhibitionism.” Posting a flattering selfie - and then checking back 20 times for “likes” is self-seeking behaviour, and a bottomless pit that can only lead to despair, or worse, emptiness.

A healthy self-love that leads to true happiness - Rousseau’s *amour de soi* - builds up one’s intrinsic well-being, as opposed to feeding shallow cravings to be admired. Cultivating *amour de soi* requires being fully alive in the moment, as opposed to being virtually alive while wondering what others think. The soulful connection with another person, the communal enjoyment of a common activity or purpose, an afternoon pursuit of artistic exploration or expression, the pleasure of languid hike alone (not shared on Facebook), or a prayer of thanks over a sleeping child (absent a #blessed tweet), could all be considered expressions of *amour de soi*.

4. Making a Creative Covenant

In 1630, John Winthrop, soon to become the first governor of Massachusetts, spoke to a soggy, stalwart band of fellow Puritans, sailing with high and pious hopes aboard the *Arabella* toward a new life in New England:

“Now the only way to avoid shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

It was an extraordinary declaration of interdependence. Despite their stone-cold reputation, their caricatured intolerance, these were people who promised to bear each other’s burdens as their own, to subvert their separate, private interests, their

“superfluities,” for the public good of all. Humbly, gently, patiently, they would serve a vision larger than any single eye could see; they would hold a larger hope. Those who heard John Winthrop speak would surely have grasped the metaphor of danger: they would have been afraid not only of foundering, literally, on New England’s rocky shore, but of failing in their errand to establish this commonwealth, their “city on a hill.” The only way to avoid shipwreck, spiritual or otherwise, was to “keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” – to make and keep a sacred covenant together.

The covenant to walk together across disagreements, dissent, and difficult discernments, cherishing the way we walk as dearly as any outcome is no easy aspiration. Ethicist and theologian Margaret Farley makes this observation in her 1990 book *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing*:

“Civilization’s history tends to be written in terms of human discoveries and inventions, wars, artistic creations, laws, forms of government, customs, the cultivation of the land. At the heart of this history, however, lies a sometimes hidden narrative of promises, pledges, oaths, compacts, committed beliefs, and projected visions. At the heart of any individual’s story, too, lies the tale of her or his commitments.”

What covenants order our personal lives? Farley wonders about our daily human-scale commitments, about what our promises imply:

“What did Sheila *do* when she married Joshua? What will actually *happen* in the moment when Karen vows to live a celibate and simple life within a community dedicated to God? What does Ruth *effect* when she signs a business contract? What *takes place* when Dan speaks the Hippocratic Oath as he begins his career as a doctor? What *happens* when heads of state sign an international agreement regarding the law of the seas? What *happens* when Jill and Sharon pledge their love and friendship for their whole lives long?”

To act in these ways is to give our word. We send it out and it carries our integrity, our fidelity, our trustworthiness, our truth. Our word is still ours, but it calls back to us from the heart of another person, or a circle of people, within which it now dwells. Such a commitment does not predict the future or set it in stone. It makes a certain kind of future possible.

A covenant is not a contract. It is not made and signed and sealed once and for all, sent to the attorneys for safekeeping or guarded under glass in a museum. A covenant is not a static artifact and it is not a sworn oath: Whereas, whereas, whereas. Therefore, I will do this, or I’ll die, so help me God. A covenant is a living, breathing aspiration, made new every day. It can’t be enforced by consequences but it may be reinforced by forgiveness and by grace, when we stumble, when we forget, when we mess up.

A covenant is a promise we make with and to ourselves, about the kind of person we want to be, the kind of life we mean to have, together with other people, and with all other living things. It is the life-sustaining fluency of covenant, from *covenir*, to travel together. We will walk together with each other toward the lives we mean to lead, toward the world we mean to have a hand in shaping, the world of compassion, equity, freedom, joy, and gratitude. Covenant is the work of intimate justice.

**“The sound of the sea,
the curve of a horizon,
wind in leaves, the cry
of a bird leave
manifold impression in
us. And suddenly,
without our wishing it
at all, one of these
memories spills from us
and finds expression in
musical language. I
want to sing my
interior landscape with
the simple artlessness
of a child.”**
– Claude Debussy

5. Finding Beauty in the Darkness

If history is any guide, every time we have found new ways to observe the universe, our understanding of ourselves and our place in that universe has been forever

**“Creativity represents a miraculous coming together of the uninhibited energy of the child with its apparent opposite and enemy, the sense of order imposed on the disciplined adult intelligence.”
– Norman Podhoretz**

altered. When Galileo turned his telescope toward Jupiter in 1609, he observed moons orbiting the giant planet, a discovery that destroyed the Aristotelian notion that everything in heaven orbited the Earth. When in 1964 Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson detected radio waves emitted by celestial objects, they discovered that the universe began in a fiery Big Bang.

Too often people ask, what’s the use of science like this, if it doesn’t produce faster cars or better toasters. But people rarely ask the same question about a Picasso painting or a Mozart symphony. Such pinnacles of human creativity change our perspective of our place in the universe. Science, like art, music and literature, has the capacity to amaze and excite, dazzle and bewilder. It is that aspect of science - its cultural contribution, its humanity - that is perhaps its most important feature. Theoretical physicist Lawrence M. Krauss in his 2015 book *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing* asks:

“What more can we learn about the universe from a stupefying experimental feat observing a stupefying wonder of nature? The answer is anyone’s guess. Gravitational-wave observatories of the future will be able to explore the exotic features of black holes. This may shed light on the evolution of galaxies, stars and gravity. Eventually, we may be able to observe gravitational waves from the Big Bang, which will push the limits of our current understanding of physics.

“Gravitational waves emerge from near the ‘event horizon’ of black holes, the so-called exit door from the universe through which anything that passes can never return. Near such regions, for example, time slows down by a huge amount. Ultimately, by exploring processes near the event horizon, or by observing gravitational waves from the early universe, we may learn more about the beginning of the universe itself, or even the possible existence of other universes.”

The psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote about what he called “self-actualizers” who are creative people who appreciate the world around them with a sense of awe and wonder. In his 1971 book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow has a chapter on creativity. In it he writes, “The creative attitude requires both courage and strength ... popularity becomes a minor consideration. Fear and weakness cast out creativeness or at least make it less likely.” To be creative, Maslow adds, we need “less fear of ridicule, of humiliation and of failure”; we need to become more “Taoistic in the sense of humility, non-interference, receptivity.” Linking humility with a sense of awe, Maslow writes:

“In any case, I have found in the most creative scientists I have talked with that the more they know, the more apt they are to go into an ecstasy in which humility, a sense of ignorance, a feeling of smallness, awe before the tremendousness of the universe, or the stunningness of a hummingbird, or the mystery of a baby are all a part. Hence the humility and self-confessed ‘ignorance’ and yet also the happiness of the great transcender-scientist.”

Every child has wondered at some time where we came from and how we got here. That we can try and answer such questions by first imagining and then building devices to peer out into the almost invisible cosmos looking for something beyond us and our petty self-indulgences, and beyond our wildest dreams, stands as a testament to the persistent curiosity and ingenuity of humankind - the qualities that we should most celebrate about being human.

SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

5. **COMING HOME**
Jim Laing
7. **GOING BACK TO ROLL FORWARD**
Karen Olsen
10. **FINALLY, THE ME I DIDN'T
ENVISION**
Geri Thom
13. **PLEASE MEET MY BUDDIES**
Keith Routley
17. **IN REFLECTION**
Antoinette Voûte Roeder,
21. **CORE CONNEXION**
Transformational arts
Barb Reid
23. **POETRY**
Dobbie, McCaslin, Wyman
26. **PORTRAIT OF A BACK ALLEY:
1966-1989**
Lori Stewart
28. **CARE FROM THE HEART**
Katrina Pavlovsky
30. **TAKING TIME FOR ART IN THE
OKANAGAN**
Suzanne Chavarie
33. **PRIMAL JOY: PAINTING WITH
FLOWERS AND DIRT**
Lisa Lipsett
37. **FINDING THE DEPARTURE POINTS**
Robert MacDonald

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

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

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