

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

NUMBER 17, F 2015

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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GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE

Okanagan Institute

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Cover image by Geri Thom: Laurie's
Sunrise, photo by Tom Sellek

FROM THE EDITOR

This Fall 2015 issue begins the Journal's 5th year of publication. In our culture, ages 4 and 5 mark transition into pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, loosely translated as a children's garden where play becomes purposeful training for the years ahead. What a beautiful metaphor for where those of us embracing Sage-ing With Creative Spirit are positioned. We are the tillers as our Canadian culture transitions into an increasing awareness that creative aging is about play, but also has meaningful direction and purpose.

In the fall of 2011, I took personally a challenge I had read. It was written by Shelley H. Carson, Ph.D., lecturer in the psychology department at Harvard University. In an article outlining recent research on creativity and the aging brain she enthused:

"I challenge each citizen, whether you are currently a senior citizen or a senior-to-be: first, consider one life lesson that you would like to pass on to future generations. Second, decide upon a creative medium in which you could embed this lesson - perhaps

a novel or a painting or a musical piece. Then make it the work of your post-retirement years to grow proficient in that medium and to produce a work that embeds your message." Carson theorizes that our growing resource of individuals with aging brains can preserve their wisdom in culturally-valued works of art, music, or writing. She suggests our generation can instill a cultural legacy reflective of sagacity, discernment, and insight.

My life experience urged me to create this online Journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. I wanted to honour the transformational power of creativity, encourage collaboration and provide an easel for any form of artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination. Quickly, it was affirmed, 'We never walk alone.' Articles arrived and readership expanded. I am delighted to dedicate this issue to the expanding network of volunteers, artists, writers, performers, educators and service providers who use social media to share great ideas about enhancing the well-being of adults 50+ www.creativeage.ca. I am

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very excited to be delivering the keynote address at the ArtSage Symposium October 1, 2015 at Museum London. The day is co-sponsored by The London Creative Age Network and the London Public Library. The chronology is rich for me because I was a freshette at London's University of Western Ontario 50 years ago this fall. Unfortunately, I was unable to take the visual arts major I wished because the program did not yet

exist. Progress has been made, but our understanding of the human need for creative expression still requires attention. We need to evolve a kindergarten for seniors. The mission of this Journal is vital to keep us connected on the 21st century's journey into improved physical and social wellness for all ages.

Thank you to one of our wise contributors Derryn Yeomans, a retired social worker from Alberta, who sent me this photograph of her personal kindergarten. Derryn suggests "play with purpose ... and that purpose can be to leave a legacy of happy moments....or the purpose may be pure joy. The purpose belongs to each of us ... and at this stage of our lives we are entirely free to set our own creative agenda ... to regenerate our "child mind".

I invite each of you to take up Professor Carson's creative challenge: "consider one life lesson that you would like to pass on to future generations. Second, decide upon a creative medium in which you could embed this lesson"; and third, please share your creative spirit with our readers.

– Karen Close

SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

- Article is to be related to aging and creativity, in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining wisdom and self awareness;
- Article to be attached as a word doc 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 on the equinoxes and solstices.
- Email the article and photographs to karensageing@gmail.com

SHAPING MY LIFE INTO ART

Julie Oakes



Mahmoud Merhaji's portrait of me

My Father was a musician and teacher, my mother a homemaker. Much like a child who has received the call from God and knows that his destiny is the priesthood, I always knew I was an artist. As a baby in school I was the one who drew, painted and made things. I read about artists and the Left Bank gripped my imagination. Even if I was to be starving in a garret, I would be an artist.

A POEM WRITTEN AT 12 YEARS OLD

I'll live the life I will in God to trust
 And help give way through ART
 To an awareness of subtleties
 That mean so much they press upon my soul

Art as life, Life as art takes it to the next step

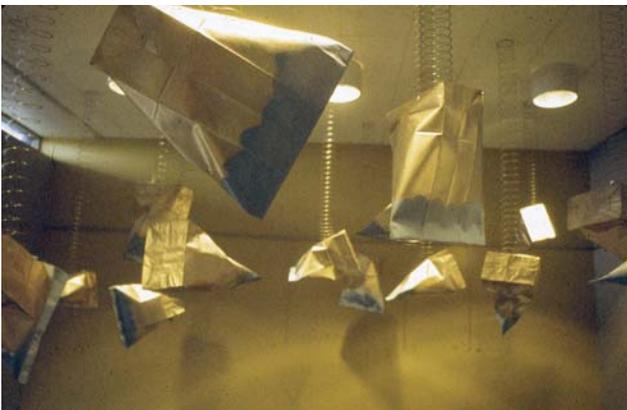
Emma Lake, the art workshop in Northern Saskatchewan had just hosted Clement Greenburg, the famous art critic and American composer, music theorist, writer, and artist John Cage. Ted Godwin was the painting prof. I had just finished grade 12. We lived in cabins, drank at a bar twenty miles away and listened to a Thelonius Monk record played over and over in the big common studio as Godwin lashed out crits that made the girls cry. Ernest Lindner did an egg tempera of his hand "The Old Artist's Hand" and another using mine as the model, "The Young Artist's Hand". The artist's life had begun.

At The University of Manitoba, Ken Lochhead was the head of the BFA program. He ran a progressive program acknowledging the changes as abstract expressionism was nudged over by the emerging Pop artists, the minimalists, the conceptualists or the kinetic artists. During the last year of my BFA, I made a kinetic piece which was included in what would be my first museum exhibition at The Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Then there was performance art. This was an area where the women shone. Judy Chicago was presenting *The Dinner Party*. She seemed to me, at the time, to be the queen of contemporary art with the monumentality of her work. Carolee Schneeman was enacting *Interior Scroll* and *Meat Joy*. She was another one of my favorites.

During my time in Winnipeg, Ron Gabe who later became Private Partz from *General Idea*, was my room-

paper bag piece



Turning your life into art was a part of the time.

mate. We put together a video piece, *The Purse Snatching* which has since that time entered the annals of *GI* history as one of their original productions; it is in line with their practice of expropriating or inventing their personal myth. In reality, *General Idea* didn't exist at the time.

Turning your life into art was a part of the time. Perhaps it was the loosening of the strictures of identity brought about by mind expanding drugs or just the vast expanse of the future that stretches out before a young person fueled by a history of eccentricity built into the world of fine arts. For me, it was more than just a possibility. It was, once again, a calling to shape one's personal life into art.

As a finale on completing my BFA degree at University of Manitoba, I staged the happening *Spectrum Organization*. I was working as a go-go dancer at The St. Charles Hotel and this is where the audience gathered. They were led into a cube van to sit on folding chairs. Above their heads slices of gummy oranges dangled on strings to give them sustenance on the journey. The truck drove them to a site outside of Winnipeg where car lights illuminated various different scenes once the back doors were open for the audience to view. The truck aspect was really horribly insensitive on my part for being shut in the back of a cube van facing backwards turned a stomach or two. But it was exciting, part of the art beat of the day.

That summer I returned to Emma Lake for a workshop where I staged another happening – *Opalescent Transformation*. This time, I rented a flatbed truck on which was built an inclined plane. The audience lay on this surface with their hands connected within big foam rubber mitts. Under cover of the night, the truck pulled them, reclining, to various sites in the woods to view different scenes.

The Subtleties that press

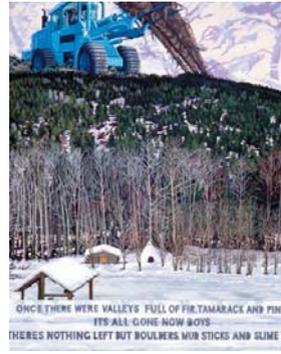
In 1970, the Canada Council travelled across Canada visiting studios. It funded my first foray outwards, to India. Carrying on the idea of life as art, and with a call to the east insistent amongst long-haired peers, I followed the sun. In Turkey, a girl friend and I picked up a ride with two Americans, a

Californian in beaded buckskin and a pea jacketed, flared jeaned hipster from NYC. They were driving a land rover, painted in psychedelic swirls. To India over mountains covered in snow, we went overland, through Persia, and Afghanistan. In the north of Pakistan the American stashed the seats with hash and sent the car back to the states.

I've been all around
I've been to paradise and out the other side
With no one to guide me
Pulled ahead by a fire wheel inside me.

Buddha Composed at the Varley Museum

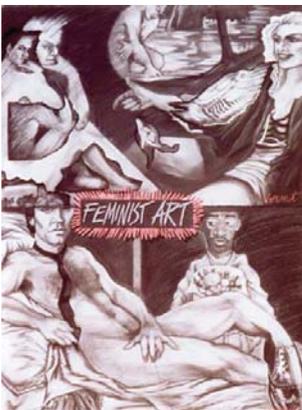


**Above:**

me pregnant
sleeping with child
Earth Deadlines
Not always happy

Below:

Art Venice
Performance piece
Feminist art
A New York drawing



Blind Faith, The Stones and The Beatles occupied our minds.

The Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Scotland brought me back to the making of actual art pieces. Still intent on a designed life I decided that the action within it, the making of art, should be in line with my experience and thus ring authentic. This influence carried on into the series, *The Buddha Composed* which showed at the Penticton Art Gallery, BC, and The Varley Museum in Ontario

I consider my work and the lifestyle created to be a result of the way my life has been processed. I lassoed issues, events, and personal changes into pieces in order to get a handle on them. I have created an everlastingness that can endure past my death to become a part of an overall cultural legacy. Often I used my own physical likeness to reinforce an autobiographical line of research.

Artist as Wife and Mom

Pregnant with my first child, I contemplated the future staring into a mirror passed down to me from my paternal grandmother. I made a large painting.

We lived back-to-the-land with a studio in the woods, 40 miles from the nearest town and three miles from the nearest electrical line. Commenting on the impression I formed from this lifestyle, *Earthlines Deadlines Lifelines* resulted in attracting National media.

And dealing with it all, I was not always happy. For this painting, I stopped the argument of the time and asked my interlocutor to photograph me crying.

IWWAP – I am a Woman with a Past – A performance on the small lake on our land told the story of a personal betrayal.

Travel was important

My son was born in the Bahamas

From the first time I travelled to New York, the images got tougher.

In Venice, romantic.

Human Sacrifice is a drawing series of autobiographical libidinous tales taking place in Italy and New York.



Tapestry woven in China from a gouache painting by Julie the tapestry *Day Here Night There* points to the interdependency between cultures.

Yet, as in all of her work, there is great beauty – even in catastrophe and death. Through her carefully staged scenes of anthropomorphic animal subjects within an idealized natural world, Oakes continues to explore themes of spirituality found in nature while addressing ecological concerns about the sustainability of the planet.

If there was a “calling”, so there was a vocation and that has been within the great church of art. Art buoys life. It makes the unpalatable quite tasty and stops the doubt. These words from the *I Ching* have guided me along my path – “it furthers one to have somewhere to go.”

They call it inspired
 It's more like wired
 Sparked, fired
 And never tired.
 When feeling weak
 Or merely meek
 It's time to tweak, speak
 To peak
 They say life is long
 I'd say they're wrong
 It's short and it's strong
 When Art rings the gong.

From September 20, 2015 to January 3, 2016 *Julie Oakes: Awestruck Calendar of Ecology*, Curated by Christian Bernard Singer can be seen at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, 25 Caroline Street North, Waterloo, Ontario.
www.theclayandglass.ca

In this new exhibition of sculptures and installations Julie Oakes suggests a planetary future of cataclysmic storms leaving “a wounding devastation that is both natural and man-made.”

Julie Oakes and her partner Richard Fogarty operate The Headbones Art Gallery 6700 Old Kamloops Road outside Vernon, BC. www.headbonesgallery.com www.julieoakes.com

SAGE-ING INVITES CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND ASSIMILATION



Dr. Toye Oyelese MD

INTRODUCTION

Karen Close

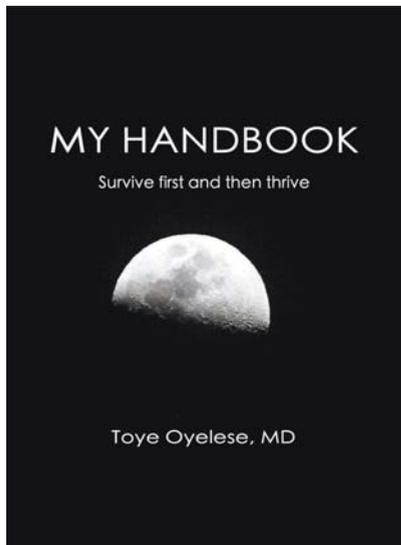
Dr. Toye Oyelese was born in Montreal, Quebec in 1963, but very soon his Nigerian parents made the decision to return their family to Nigeria where Toye would gain understanding and appreciation for his African tribe, the Yoruba people. Toye credits his early development to the fact that his near sightedness was not diagnosed until he was 7 years old. As an intensely curious child focused on minutia, he learned to see deeply into people and situations. For Yorubans a child is said to be born with a name brought from heaven. Toye's name means 'redeemer'. He shares his tribe's belief in fate and destiny, but recognises that although every individual is pre-destined to accomplish certain things or achieve certain things in life what happens is dependent on the choices made by the individual even in response to those things that he has no control over. Toye is intensely proud of the lessons he learned growing up observing his people and strongly aware of the responsibility of his name. He is a man who has taken time to know himself, be himself, love himself and share himself.

Before we met in person he wrote, "I think that there are many of us on the same journey, and we are cosmically from the same place, so I am very excited about meeting other members of the same tribe."

Shortly thereafter an evening of engaging conversation with Toye and his wife, Denise, stimulated me to further research Yoruban culture. I learned the country is very old and was at one time very prosperous, and powerful. Tragically it has allowed itself to be torn and wasted by tribal jealousies and internal dissensions. However, the intriguing part is no significant written historical records exist. The earliest attempts to reduce the language into writing were not begun until the 1940's. Toye proudly explains how his grandmother guided his ethical development with carefully composed oral stories, based in traditional legends, but given her own twist according to her wisdom. Isn't this the essence of creativity? Each adds perspective according to their own perception. Among anthropologists there appears to be agreement all Yorubans are imbued with a deep religious spirit, reverential manners and show deference to superiors and respect to age. I imagine such

a culture as the birthplace of Sage-ing and the tribe of those of us called to age with imagination and creative spirit.

When I read Toyé's book, *My Handbook* and comments he sent to me, I felt a deep connection with his words and philosophy. These are recounted below in a randomly excerpted free flowing narration - Yoruban storytelling style.



You can download the book at www.sageing.ca

My Handbook is a free book so kindly give it to anybody who you think may benefit from it - I consider it my way of giving back to a Universe that has taught me so much and given me so much. Articulating these experiences in a manner that is meaningful and useful to other people is a sizeable challenge. *My Handbook* is an experienced based rendition of the concepts and tactics that facilitated my adaptation to different systems. My creative style follows what I call "the village series" when the elders of the tribes shared ideas and experiences that enhanced learning through stories and analogies without everything having to be factual or scientific. Please share my items with whomever you want. However, *My Handbook* is copyrighted so permission is required to reprint or use publicly.

Storytelling and analogies are useful in gaining or regaining perspective and making good choices especially in difficult situations. My grandmother taught me this.

Any challenge provides an opportunity for growth if I allow myself to perceive it in that manner. When things do not go as planned I have a choice, to perceive the outcome either as a work in progress or a total failure. How I perceive anything is just as important or sometimes more important than what is really happening.

Life is like a journey where nothing is ever easy or hard but relative to how I choose to see (perceive) it. I have learned more from the experiences that I initially perceived as unpleasant than from the ones I perceived as pleasant. Although I do not recommend unpleasant experiences as the main source of learning (I personally prefer mentorship) it is important to make the most of whatever life throws our way and find ways to get the results that we want.

How I choose to see things (my perception) is a remarkable tool that can work for me or against me. I am always influenced by how I see things and this in turn is directly related to how I have defined them in my mind therefore to do it differently, I have to be willing to define it differently in my mind.

I grew up in an African culture that exposed me to the art of storytelling as a form of therapy and the use of proverbs and analogies to illustrate and stimulate the imagination. I have used this as an effective tactic in my medical practice. I was often surprised by how unfamiliar my "North American" patients were with this method, but very gratified by how quickly they responded to it. The feedback from these many patients, friends and strangers with whom I have shared these experiences convinced me that a book like this is worth writing.



My Grandmother

My father was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident before my tenth birthday. The suddenness and finality of the change was devastating, but the process of adapting to this change taught me some of the most important lessons of my life.

When there is a contest between my will and my imagination my imagination always wins. The purpose of my imagination is imagery, to provide me with direction, it allows me to appreciate what I want, to see where I am going and where I want to go. The “will” is the machine that gets me there, it lacks imagery, as this would distract it from its task of making me do the same things over and over again until I achieve the result that I want.

My imagination and my will should always be working as a team, together and not against each other and so it is important for me to be aware of the things that stimulate my imagination. It is almost impossible for me to will myself to imagine anything, as the act of imagining itself is a form of letting go of reality and visualize what I want reality to be. Verbalizing my intended direction is a very important tactic for stimulating my imagination.

Remember that what belongs to the heart can never be taken from you, can never be stolen or bought but is given freely by those you love and who love you and this love is a precious substance from which we all derive our existence. Find time to enjoy the beauty of your existence, to revel in and maximize the opportunities you have, to love and be loved in return. Let your eyes be open so that you can capture forever the images that are dear to you that they may forever remain with you even after they may have left you and like distant stars continue to glimmer in the night of your existence light years after they have gone.

I will be my own best friend

When I do not feel like hearing myself I will find a way to listen

When I do not feel like seeing myself I will find a way to look

When I do not feel I love myself I will find a way to care

When I do not feel I deserve anything I will find a way to give

When I feel that no one is there I will be my own best friend

self love = self awareness + self acceptance

I do write poetry and I am slowly working my way to putting a book together - my poems are deliberately simplistic and philosophical (philosophical poetry - if there is such a thing). They are written for me but I hope others will enjoy them.

SELF LOVE

I need to know myself
 Know how I define me
 The good and the bad
 The ugly and the lovely
 When every bone is counted
 Behind every cupboard door
 Nothing that is recanted
 Would make me hit the floor
 Nothing there to hide
 No more fear to harness
 I can now enjoy the ride
 For I have **self-awareness**
 When all the parts of me
 My body and my soul
 Have found a home to be
 I have achieved my goal
 For all the things I am
 The assets and the "Asses"
 Make me who I am
 So I give no excuses
 My mind is the only place
 To find full repentance
 I can now keep the pace
 Because of **self-acceptance**
 The self that is now aware
 The self that is accepted
 No more harbours fear
Self-love is now created

WHAT (GOD) IS IN ME

You must learn to pray the preacher said
 And always bow your head
 Know the line that you'd never cross
 Remember who is the boss

Everyday I prayed for you to come
 Before I went to bed
 A morning in November I awoke
 To find my Dad was dead

As my sorrow turned to anger
 And my hoping turned to dread
 As I wondered what was up ahead
 You revealed yourself to me.

I knelt beside the Angel sent
 Where the heavens meet the earth
 The ground beneath begins to shake
 And the ocean streams into the sea

I look above to the darkened cloud
 And the lightening strikes the tree
 I tremble at the sight of thee
 Was that lightning strike for me

No one told me you were a woman
 I wondered should I get up and flee
 They always said you were a man
 It never made sense to me

I look again you are now a child
 Reminding me of me
 Is this the truth they've tried to hide
 Or have you simply forsaken me

I have run until I stand still
 I have reached the speed of light
 I have caught up with reality
 And found what (that God) is in me

In August 2009 **Toye Oyelese** moved to Kelowna, British Columbia. He has a family practice at the Westside Medical Associates in West Kelowna. He has a fellowship in family medicine and volunteered as a coordinator at the Canadian College of Family Medicine (CCFP) qualifying examination for many years. He was a clinical instructor at the southern medical program – University of British Columbia Okanagan and worked at the Health and Wellness Students' clinic at the UBCO campus in Kelowna. drtoye@shaw.ca

THE ME I NEVER DARED TO BE



Gerri Thom

At 62 years old I am finally the painter I always wished I could be and never dared to be. Painting has been my secret dream for most of my life and I am so grateful for this God given gift and the paths that have led me here.

When I was in grade 6 our class was given the task of writing a report about Canada's aboriginal culture. I decided to include a drawing of their traditional home and an aboriginal man. I spent hours studying the muscle structure of the human body in encyclopedias and comic books. They were my only resources. I was so proud of my results and excitedly handed in my report. My teacher accused me of tracing this figure and although I angrily and hurtfully denied it he refused to believe me and gave me a failing grade. I never drew after this experience until my 30's where I made two attempts that I didn't pursue further. It took me nearly 50 years to recapture that part of myself I had allowed him to squash.

The last few years of my life have been the most challenging. Though these times have often been deeply painful and disappointing, painting has become my escape and a fresh spring breeze. It feels like rebirth and I feel such amazement. Every time I finish a painting I say to myself, "I did this."

My first finished and framed painting was a watercolor of a farm house in Saskatchewan.

It was a birthday gift for my husband's Aunt Blanche. She had raised him from the time he was 15 years old and they maintained a very close relationship until her death at ninety-eight. Our lives revolved around Blanche. We made no plans that did not consider or include Blanche. We

were a nucleus of three not two. She was an amazing woman and always a force to be reckoned with, very independent, articulate and astute. While attending gatherings in our home she delightedly discussed world politics and economics with our guests and always left them in awe. The farm house I painted was one she lived in as a young girl and often reminisced about. I had never painted anything other than a piece of fruit and never larger than eight by ten inches. This landscape was to be sixteen by twenty four inches - a very daunting project

Blanche's House





Sooke, BC, done from one of my photographs
Laurie's Sunrise, photo by Tom Sellek

to say the least. I had never taken an art class, but was determined to do this painting for Blanche. It took several weeks and a lot of breath holding to complete and once again, like when I was in grade 6, I was amazed at what I had accomplished. Blanche loved it and said "Thank you for honouring me with your first painting." Those words were her greatest gift to me. I don't feel it is a very good painting, but I shall always treasure it along with those words. Perhaps I still allow my inner critic too strong a voice. It was a very personal moment between us and a huge step towards me pursuing my lifelong dream.

So much of what we accomplish in life, no matter how noble, evaporates when we die. My paintings are tangible and will live on after me. They say I was here and they tell my story. I feel this more acutely with not having had children. Once gone I will leave no footprint of myself. The stuff we buy is passed down to the next generation, but paintings reflect an artist's soul and what can be more personal than that.

I have heard it said that we do not grow during our happiest times. We grow during our darkest days. For me that is very true. Blanche's death and the resulting dismantling of all she was, and held dear, left a deep wound that only time and God can heal. It was during this time I found myself searching even deeper

for sanctuary through painting.

I am grateful to a friend who dragged me to a table to paint even though I insisted I could not paint and even more grateful to her for taking me to an oil painting class presented by Gene Prokop. That was three and a half years ago and I faithfully attend his monthly classes and have grown in strides since then, learning composition, color harmony, small medium and large shapes, and light medium and dark values. In the beginning these were only words, but subtly I now see all of these things in the world around me. I have learned and evolved into a painter in spite of my self doubts.

Women of the past and my generation have traditionally put aside themselves to nurture and care for others. It seems only in later years that we finally can pursue our secret dreams, and wonder what could have been had we started earlier. I am one of those women and do wonder what could have been, but perhaps I was not ready to grasp this honour until now. Everything in its time.

This Tuscan landscape was faithfully worked on only in class and it took 9 months to complete. I gave birth to a painting complete with labour pains. Along those many months my cousin Laurie would ask for a photo of my latest progress on this painting and tell me how much she loved it. Unfortu-



I'm still working on this portrait of Laurie which I'm doing from a photo taken by Tim Swanky

nately, it was completed during Laurie's final chosen journey past her pain of advanced MS. As I painted I could feel her floating away from all of us who loved her. She moved into peace and freedom from her debilitating pain and constantly eroding dignity. She never saw the finished painting, but I have named it 'Laurie's Sunrise' and treasure my final journey with her.

Painting has become the mirror to my soul for others yes, but more especially for myself. I see my path back to faith in God. I can't explain why God, rather than any number of belief options in the world.

I do know I feel peace, trust, joy and thankfulness. God feels right for me, and I have finally been introduced to me. I feel a greater sense of completeness, and the world around me has become softer. As I do with life, I struggle with impatience, doubts and setbacks in painting too, but anything worthwhile comes with challenges. That's how we grow and learn to value our gifts.

I am finally the me I never dared to be.

Painting has become the mirror to my soul for others yes, but more especially for myself.

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 Kelowna Flightcraft. She retired about five 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 Airedale, and family history 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.

WIELDING THE BRUSH AND DRINKING TEA



Elizabeth Elstner

It took me a long time to learn to breathe, to slow down my mind and consequently my hand, and to enjoy the moment with the brush. It is in those present moments as I follow the brush into me when the joy happens and that something in me releases.

Elizabeth Elstner and Steven Kenney

Calligraphy has long been considered one of the highest forms of visual arts in Eastern Asia... {it} is seen as revealing the inner character of the person wielding the brush, expressing not only the meaning of the text but also the personality of the calligrapher.
Stephen Addiss on 'The Calligraphy of Noriko Maeda'

Many years ago I reluctantly, since I didn't play golf, entered a charity golf tournament. The only good thing that happened that day was that I met Noriko Maeda who suggested that I join her Japanese calligraphy classes given in her home here in Waterloo, Ontario. I think she could see it was obvious that golf wasn't my thing. Since I was in the process of retiring from the practice of law, I thought I would give it a try. It is now 8 years later.

Noriko is very personable and entertaining. She is outgoing and shares amusing stories from her travel and experiences. She serves green tea and treats. My fellow classmates add to the enjoyment. Several of them are professional artists who want to learn a different way of making marks in art and to learn about the purity, or simplicity, of a line in calligraphy. Others have recently moved here from Japan and have limited English, but enjoy the contact and are very good at calligraphy.

Several men in the classes are from the tech community. We are a varied group.

I have learned some principles of art like white space and balance so forms can be seen as black on white or white coming out from black. Interesting to consider, but more importantly, the process of doing calligraphy has captivated me. It took me a long time to learn to breathe, to slow down my mind and consequently my hand, and to enjoy the moment with the brush. It is in those present moments as I follow the brush into me when the joy happens and that something in me releases.

Each week we work on a Japanese symbol or symbols chosen by Noriko in either cursive, or block, or primitive styles. Noriko explains the meaning of the word or words, and sometimes the historical origin of the shapes. She demonstrates, and then leaves us to come up with our, sometimes loose, representations working from her example. I began to discover my best work was created on those days when I had given up trying for perfection and thought I was just putting in the time. Something relaxed and expressive would sometimes appear on the page. Thinking it didn't conform exactly to her example, I would be about to throw it away when Noriko would rescue the sheet.



Top: enjoying

Middle: my silver medal work

Above: Noriko begins class



Steven Kenney

Two of those rescued pieces have won silver and bronze medals in the Canadian calligraphy competitions sponsored annually by the Japanese Cultural Centre in Toronto. They won because the judges said that although my character formation was “juvenile”, the works showed personality. I’m pleased to see those glimpses into me.

Indirectly through our casual talk we learn about Japanese culture and its reverence for things made by the human hand. We also learn about the philosophical and historical underpinnings of the symbols we work on and that can be very interesting. I am often amazed by the complexity and history of how these symbol for the Japanese represent a word or thought or feeling. For example, my silver winning piece from a few years ago says “nothingness” or “emptiness”. To me that was a pretty negative, undesirable symbol to work on for the competition. However, I discovered that In Japanese culture this concept has a very opposite meaning to our Western understanding. Emptiness is a desired state where one’s mind is in a calm, serene, balanced state without distraction. Noriko meditates at midnight before working on one of her large private commissions in order to get to such a mental state.

Another year I did a series of symbols known as “small man bottle”. These symbols represent a parable which loosely translates that a poor person can live in a seemingly undesirable, small space (a dirty bottle) and be happier than a rich man living in a mansion. The symbols were in primitive style which looks to me like something to be found on a cave wall. I didn’t win a medal, but I gained insight into a culture that respects the deep and meaningful subtleties expressed within marks made by the hand. It suits me better than golf.

I am looking forward to our class starting again in September. If you are interested in expressive, large format Japanese calligraphy check out www.norikomaeda.com. Noriko Maeda currently teaches weekly in Waterloo, Hamilton, Toronto and monthly in Tokyo.

Early in my career, it became very evident that stress was a major component of my working life. The practice of law is ranked as one of the professions that accounts for a high occurrence of addictive/substance abuse behavior. As a trial lawyer in medical negligence and personal injury, I encounter people who have been significantly injured. One tries to remain objective. However, advocating for individuals and families, who have and continue to suffer from various traumas, has always had a significant impact on me physically and emotionally.

Justice is often slow. Advocating is an unending activity that requires intense focus 24-7. One cannot complain too loudly because I have had a very successful career full of personal and financial satisfaction; and, the opportunity to meet many wonderful individuals. However, stress has a way of eating at your heart and soul. During law school, one professor highly recommended that each of us find a hobby or activity outside of law- in order



The class

What I came to realize was - creativity exists in each of us. It isn't always the same form, type or intensity- but it is there. However, creativity is stifled by stress and it is necessary to accept that perfection is not synonymous with creativity.

to maintain sanity. I didn't, and for many years I let my practice control me.

About 10 years ago, a good friend of mine (also a lawyer) mentioned Japanese Calligraphy - how she enjoyed learning Japanese characters, finishing a project at the end of a lesson, socializing with "tea"; and, simply taking a break from law. Liz's enthusiasm, youthful non-stressed attitude resulted in my joining the class and being taught by Sensei Noriko Maeda.

Before my first class, I researched Japanese Calligraphy on the internet. The characters appeared simple, serene and "easy to draw". I expected a period of time to adjust, however, after several lessons, I noticed that my skill set had not progressed as fast as I had expected. I didn't have the artistic background that my calligraphy mates had. Each one was focused, yet at ease. Sensei Noriko would give me encouragement, tell me to listen to my brush, relax the shoulders, and enjoy the moment. I tried, but knew I was forcing the moment. I almost quit calligraphy. Instead, during my classes, I spent time watching my creative mates. I tried to find the secret to their creative and non-stressed success.

Three of my mates were over 80 years old, and the majority were over 65 and retired- surely they would have some piece of creative wisdom to pass onto me. I listened intently as each would be self-critical of his or her work. But the self-criticism was never bitter or negative. What I came to realize was - creativity exists in each of us. It isn't always the same form, type or intensity- but it is there. However, creativity is stifled by stress and it is necessary to accept that perfection is not synonymous with creativity. Every day, we use creativity to help us- pick clothes, prepare meals, keep children amused, solve problems, arrange furniture, tell stories and so much more.

My father-in-law continued to drive, play bridge, do crossword puzzles, cook a meal and help others at the great age of 92. His philosophy was- keep active, use your brain and body to the very best that you can. He accepted his fumbling with grace, his stumbling with a song and his mumbling with laughter. On each occasion his creativity shone through.

I continue with my calligraphy, more or less stress free. I have a long journey yet, still in the early spring of life. My form of creative Japanese calligraphy is not perfect, but it speaks to me. I refuse to think of aging or "retiring" in the traditional sense. I appreciate that my body is aging, and has been since I was born. However for my mind, body and spirit I prefer to follow Bob Dylan's great song "Forever Young".

From Japanese Calligraphy I have learned it isn't the type of activity one does it is simply doing a creative activity. Think outside of the box, the mind and spirit are creative tools that keep the youth in aging. Think young and remain young no matter what age.

EVERYDAY'S A JOURNEY INTO FULFILMENT AND PLEASURE



Madelyn Hamilton

A few days ago I entered my Studio and closed the door behind me. I was enveloped within that quiet space, one that allows emotional removal from the everyday world of distraction. I began to remember again my saved elementary school report cards. They are many, many decades old. I recalled my early images of horses - always. I thought they were amazing, exciting, and beautiful animals, and I had a passion for drawing and colouring them. I then recalled the teen years, when I moved on to the topic of landscape, often copied - no individuality as yet. My Dad built me a special box to hold my newly acquired oil paints. I painted in my bedroom, or I painted down in a chilly small basement. It didn't matter; I just wanted to paint - or draw, most of the time from what I knew and remembered. Another isolated and creative urge was given to a few days spent 'redesigning' the chicken coop, which I transformed into a charming, we thought, playhouse for my little sister. Creativity, which I believe is inside of every person, has no boundaries or limits.

As I stood there in my studio enveloped in memory, the course of time came slowly back to me. I remembered the eventual necessity required to leave the painting and drawing of my younger years and move into the 'paid' workforce. Next, and predictably of the times, I married at a relatively early age, and soon thereafter my children were born. Due to my husband's profession, we moved every two years. I stayed home with my little boys - no daycare. I was busy beyond imagination with family and time restraints. Somehow though, because the compelling urge to 'make things' was strongly inside of me, I wedged into my life a few short courses.

There was an upholstery class at which I learned how to cover a functional object of my own design. As I recalled, that was a hamper for soiled clothes. Yay! I've moved forward. Soon after, I took an Interior Decorating course, which in years past would have helped me to beautify and enhance the chicken coop for my sister. Then there was art by correspondence. Restrictive, I remembered, but an outlet nevertheless. Always within me was the need to create. Great pleasure came from the results, knowing they had derived from a sum total of my own ideas, my inner thoughts, feelings, needs, and of course, the use of my own two hands.

Eventually, my children left home, and my husband and I settled into one



Left: Ironing

Right: Coffee Series #1



town. There was a new awareness of the passage of time. I needed a serious and dedicated plan, one that would enable me to advance my skills over the years yet to come. With a Diploma in Fine Arts long behind me, I took a fearful leap into the world of university and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. I was older. Still, during those four years of intensive study and learning I discovered what I thought I knew, I didn't.

The most dreaded words from the profs were, "I've seen that before, start over." So I needed to reach deep inside of myself, to places never considered. New ideas began to take the place of old. I began to see my world as never before. There was new meaning to the word 'see'.

Allow me to explain here, the definition of that word 'see' as I now understand it. In my new world of vision, the word 'see' means: intense observation for a period of time, enough time, that is, to enable the absorption of whatever has intrigued my interest. That way of

'seeing' is in contrast to 'the quick glance', where the eye quickly scans and detailed information has not been observed. Seeing became meaningful to both my personal knowledge, and very importantly, to the art I create? There are no limitations. I see the oily patterns in my cooking pan, vague and intriguing images through fog, the beautiful colours, textures and shapes in my compost heap. On our ravine edge, I watch in awe the strength and endurance of trees as they thrash and flail against strong winds that are seemingly attempting to uproot them. When transparent, water allows me to look below; I see organic shapes, wondrous colours and echoed reflections. I watch the water as it foams, splashes, leaps and rushes or slowly, slowly meanders along. I allowed myself to look at the faces of the homeless, with their expressions of hopelessness and despair. My mind's eye has roamed into consideration of the plight of women, both in domestic roles, and of those on 'the street'.

My garden, this small piece of land that surrounds our house, on the ravine edge, has been a source of creativity for many, many years as it has experienced varied transitions. I ponder it through my windows during the confining winter months, planning my spring time moves which often involve pickaxe and shovel; I am grateful to be very physically strong. The



Above: Windy Rhythms
Below: The Sentinel

continuous liberty of changing my yard designs staves off landscaping boredom. I'm not content with leaving things as they are; I am always happy to create new spaces, add new plants and trees, realign rocks. A stream can be dug out, a bridge designed by myself and built by my supportive husband, or a new mound of earth can add dimension to the landscape. The immersion in garden designing is carried into my studio. It will possibly affect the next painting, or the one in process.

I have come to guard my freedom of expression whether it be through painting, gardening, or other desires. Over time it became clear to me, and via personal experience such as commission work, that creating solely for the market place would inhibit my true freedom of expression. The attempt to please others would create an inner conflict. It could, and it does, mentally and emotionally block the expression of my own marks, my colours, my freedom of brush stroke and texture, and the ideas and concerns that are uniquely mine .

Learning is always taking place. Over a long period of time, I have learned to not be afraid, to not worry about 'making a mistake'. I now further understand that some ideas are more difficult to express, and some will conclude not as I had initially envisioned. I will continue to explore visually and internally my surrounds, to trial new methods and to depict the nature I have a passion for as long as good health will allow. I am ever grateful to have an inborn and insatiable curiosity and for the eternal need to learn. These are options for anyone.

Regardless of age, as I have found, if a person feels driven to create something, the pleasure experienced from that creation will offer to everyday life feelings of fulfilment and pleasure. A studio is not essential if one has the urge to upholster a clothes hamper, to beautify a chicken coop, or dig a new hole in the garden.

I market my own work. I show in Public Galleries, at Art Fairs, and in juried shows.

Madelyn Hamilton is a longtime resident of West Kelowna, B.C. During that time and over a lifetime the force of creativity has grown in strength and meaning. She has a long history of meeting the challenges of art. This would include the Diploma in Fine Arts, and much later in life completion of the BFA from U.B.C. Okanagan.

Madelyn's work has a focus on highly textured and tactile surfaces, such as those seen in the natural world. The focus of her ideas are nature based, although over time many other ideas have been expressed such as women's issues. Often, regardless of the subject matter, random found objects are adhered to the matrix, symbolizing the idea of nature and humanity as sharing the same surface. Her conclusive intent is to offer the viewer a more acute awareness of the surrounding environment and its occupants.

Madelyn markets her work through Public Art Galleries, juried shows and her home studio. Her work over the years has been purchased both regionally and abroad.

www.madelynhamilton.com

THE ART IN A DEPARTURE

TAKING TIME TO PACK THE VALUABLES

**Carolina Sanchez de Bustamante
and Maxwell Sterry**

Introduction: Karen Close

During the opening for the installation of *The Artist's Garden Project: Pieces of What* at the Kelowna Art Gallery Maxwell Sterry was asked what he had learned from creating a sculptural piece with his artist mother. Quietly confident, he deadpanned, "That my mother is always right." Laughter was loud and his mother's smile broad. I also thought, 'Many a true word is said in jest.'

Carolina Sanchez de Bustamante is a loving and wise woman. Her smile radiates the pride and dreams for her only son about to travel across the country to study architecture at McGill University in Montreal. Like all mothers Carolina prays she's done her job and that Maxwell has what he needs to embark on independence. She understands synthesizing wisdom from life experience and sharing it in easily chewed, palatable morsels, tasty for a nineteen year old, is not easy. She has been patient. Maxwell was devastated a year ago when his 95% academic average failed to gain him a place in architecture. He became ready to ask for advice from his mother, an Argentinian who studied architectural design. Plans for the educating of Maxwell were begun.

Maxwell has never been to Argentina to experience first hand the rich culture that nourished his mother's creative spirit, but he has grown up in a home that has been his mother's small gallery and studio. Since the early 90's Carolina has been making architectural ceramics in the Okanagan creating original and innovative designs in clay for customer's living environments. She believes in architectural art. She describes it as when purity of artistic design fuses with the integrity of function. Carolina's philosophy is based in the belief that a passion for art should be at the heart of living spaces. Knowing your passion enables one to make their home a personal statement. A good architect needs discernment and a strong sense of aesthetic values to please clients. How better to plant these seeds than for mother and son to experience the act of creating *Pieces of What* together?

The sculpture, erected this past spring, is a year long installation exploring an environmental theme and features translucent columns strung with spherical objects made from clean trash. During this past winter both mother and son collected the bits. Their choices reflect what each finds of interest and worthy of inclusion in the clear plastic strings hung to render columns. The columns feel joyful, and the strings remind one of popcorn garlands on an old



Carolina and Max

Although our mother/son relation has been positive before, I felt it has deepened in understanding more about each other, sharing tolerance and laughter.



Top: creating together
Above: no picking yet

fashion Christmas tree. They are the focal point in the centre of the gallery space. Along the sides of the space, in self-watering bins, vegetables and herbs grow. The produce will be harvested this fall by gallery visitors.

Harvesting is a theme and whether the columns are references to past civilizations or those of the future is up to one's personal interpretation. The metamorphosis of the elements of this carefully considered work will have to wait until spring and Maxwell's return from his first year at university. Metaphor allows the communication of valuable insight and wisdom.

From Carolina:

When the opportunity to have a solo exhibition at the KAG was presented, immediately I thought about inviting Maxwell to participate.

I expressed to Max my wishes and what was expected from us, as artists, without giving him any ideas of the concept of the piece.

We talked about how an art proposal in general develops, then I suggested that he should put together the art concept according to the space available, the design specifications behind it and the logistics to set the installation

in site. A few days later we talked about his approach and the conversation started to move forward with the creation of the piece.

We joked that Max would be the brain behind it, I would just lend him my artistic CV... ha, ha, ha.

My hope was that this project would give Max the sense of what an art proposal is all about, which carries certain similarities with an architectural proposal. I wanted him to be able to use his understanding of the proposal and the installation result as part of his Undergraduate Portfolio. As well I thought he would acquire experience for future university projects.

At the end, after going through the 'know it all' and emotional aspect of it, it was really positive. Not only did we achieve the "clean trash" art installation on time, but it looks stunning and was well received by the KAG and the public in general.

Personally, I sincerely appreciate the trust that Liz Wylie, the Curator of the KAG had in me, after listening on our first meeting to this crazy proposal from a mother and her 18 years old son.

Although our mother/son relation has been positive before, I felt it has deepened in understanding more about each other, sharing tolerance and laughter. I am confident that Max with his creativity, optimism and kindness will achieve big things in his life.



From Maxwell:

Looking back, there is one memory that stands out to me. The first being the day we assembled our first column, the plastic based yellow one. When I joined the two acrylic tubes that formed the trunk, I'll admit that twelve feet looked taller than I had imagined, however I had confidence in the system; I just had to secure it. As we attached the top and began tying off the fishing line to the base, my mother grew closer and closer to hysterics and spent time frantically trying to tie off the wavering tower of plastic. Eventually I sent her to the studio

so I could finish tying the lines, and when she returned all the knots had been tensioned and the column was surprisingly sturdy. I believe this memory resonates with me because of the pride I felt having done something that a number of people far more qualified than myself said wouldn't work.

I joked during the opening for the show that I did most of the project, and my mother's name was only on the paperwork because no art gallery would give an eighteen year old with no artistic past a solo exhibition. While my remark was a slight exaggeration, I do believe that my mother suggested that I make a lot of the decisions on the direction of the project in order to try and teach me the process of creating. Coming up with a concept, refining the concept into a proposal and finding solutions to problems such as "how do we make fishing line stand up straight?" were some of the decisions that were left up to me - with occasional input and advice from my mother keeping me on the right track.

This isn't to say that I did everything; the vast majority of the spherical elements dangling from the lines were my mom's work, as well as many of the other tasks that took large amounts of time, but it often felt as if I was leading the project, and my mother was merely there as another set of hands.

After installing the third column in the courtyard at the Kelowna Art Gallery, I remember looking at the three columns, the three towering side by side for the first time, and thinking to myself, "There is a very real chance that these three glorified garbage heaps are what got you into university."... thanks Mum.

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ARTE
funktional



Top: "how do we make fishing line stand up straight?"

Above: we did it together

THE WISDOM OF SPIRIT EAGLE

CREATING A TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION



JoAnn Restoule

As you drive onto “Bear Spirit Place” you immediately get the sense that something very different and very unique happens here. Your car leaves the highway and the road transforms into a gravel road. You can feel a shift in your energy, and as you gaze out the back window of your car, a large billow of smoke like dust announces your arrival. The trees seem to bend over the road creating a canopy of beauty and comfort. Driving up the narrow driveway more trees caress your vehicle as if to “brush” you of the static that has been carried from our busy lives.

The ravens can be heard calling out that a visitor has arrived. You emerge out into an open space, as if birthed into a new dimension of time and energy. Your eyes are drawn to the open space, and you can see an array of uniquely styled buildings, each with its purpose. A large open garden area, cascades downward, like a series of platforms, each filled with treasures from the earth.

You can see a very large piling of rocks, all of various shapes and sizes, and you remember that you were told this spiritual and natural oasis was once a gravel pit. You can see a young forest to your left and there cradled in her arms, is a sweat lodge.

Its presence is strong and it looks as though it has stood through the test of time. Her name is Anungoqwan- Star Lodge.

David Somerville, or “Spirit Eagle”, as he is known in our community is the caretaker of “Bear Spirit Place”.

It is easy to see and appreciate his flow of energy that has tenderly caressed every rock, tree and plant. “Spirit Eagle” has crafted a unique natural

wonder where the vast garden produces organically grown food. It is a place where sacred ceremonies and gatherings for traditional teaching are held.

David was born into the Six Nation- Iroquoian Confederacy, his people or his birth tribe have long been known as “Mohawk”. Their traditional name is however, Kanienkehaka, “The People of the Flint”. The name “Mohawk” was given to them by the neighbouring tribe of the Algonquian. The name translates as “Man Eaters” indicating the nature and ferocity of the postcolonial relationships that were taking place. The Kanienkehaka were known in the territories to be proud, powerful and fierce people,

The young forest..in the distance is the sweat lodge





Top: A view of the garden

Above: Turtle Council House A traditional style building made to complement the style of tipi, hogan, and big house of First Nations People of Turtle Island-North America. In this building many people of all ages com to receive teachings and or take part in sacred ceremonies.



protecting their way of life and their territories.

David was raised in a traditional manner by his Grandmother, until the age of 8. For many reasons he was placed into foster care, and for a period of two years he was rotated through a series of foster homes. It was at this time in his life that he became aware of the underlying darkness and nature of humanity. The lessons that had been planted into his heart and soul by his Grandmother: love, compassion, respect, integrity, truth and kindness kept him going through these trying times. In 1946 David was put on to a train and sent to live with his birth Father, Paul Somerville whose lineage was from the Kanienkehaka and his wife Daphne coming from the Pottawatomi people.

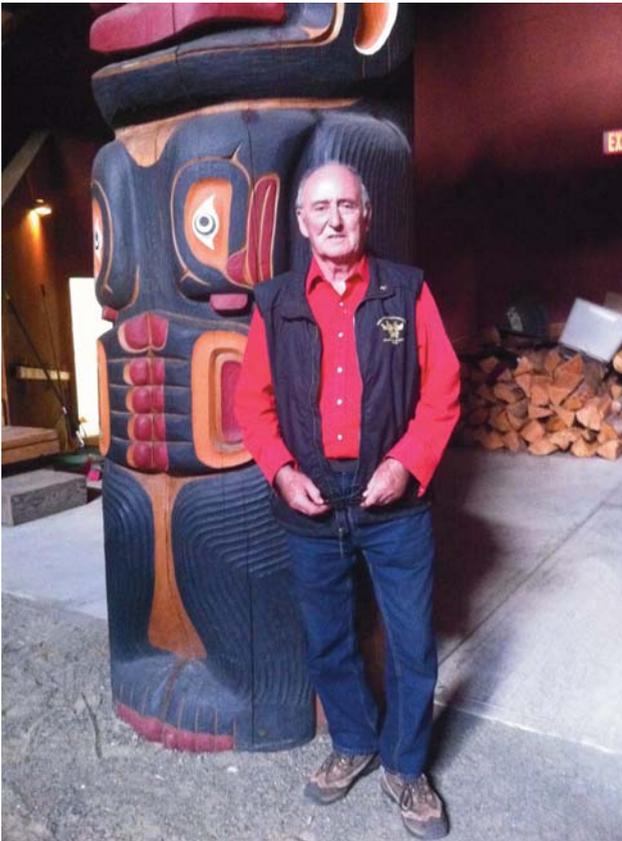
All of these influences, and life experiences took David from foster homes to being a logger, then into the military, then a cab driver; for the three years before going to University he worked as a Psych. Aide at a mental hospital. After graduating from university David began working on reserve, in provincial and federal political first nations organizations, and as a Minister's adviso. In February, 1984, there came a culmination. David made a decision to leave what he refers to as his "Political" period, to return to BC's Comox valley, and devote the rest of his life to being on the healing path.

Since that decision David has become well known for his insight wisdom and spiritual practice. He has

worked with people from all walks of life and is held in high regard as one of the "wise ones".

His gift of being a healer has transformed the lives of many people young and old. Over the past 5 years David has been involved with the Truth and Reconciliation process, that has been taking place all over Canada. As a healer he has stood by, witnessed, and supported the many people who have come before the commission to testify and tell their life stories.

David feels that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an added dimension to the awakening that has been taking place in our country for some time. With the truth being held before us, we have that "rare second chance to seize the opportunity at reconciliation "and create a right and just relationship amongst ourselves. In order for true healing to take place we must all join together and walk side by side and in some cases hand in hand along the sacred path.



David Sommerville in the traditional ceremonial BigHouse of the Campbell River First Nation

DAVID REFLECTS

At a meeting in Ottawa at AFN headquarters, I was introduced to the office staff working there at that time and JoAnn was one of those staff. It was one of those brief meetings where one person is introduced to a number of people and seldom remembers them all. We next met here in the Comox Valley around 1989. She was married to a Kwakiutl Hereditary Chief who I was getting to know quite well. In fact, we became so close that I have been an adopted member of his family since 1992. The plot thickens. JoAnn has Odjig lineage and by European way of doing family we are distant relatives. By Tribal custom - she is my niece. This marriage dissolved in 1999 but we have as a family worked through the turmoil and all have been on good terms for a long season now.

I have been a member of the Cultural Support Team for Residential School Survivors on Vancouver Island since it was formed in the fall of 2007 by Tsow Tun Le Lum healing centre on the Snaw Naw Was reserve just north of Nanaimo. We have provided healing and cultural support for survivors in their adjudicator hearings; as well during the years of the Truth and Reconciliation unfolding we provided healing and cultural support at Regional and National Truth and Reconciliation gatherings.

In February of this year we provided healing and cultural support for the Ceremonies in Alert Bay preparing for the demolition of the residential school there. I am a member of three Elder's Advisory Councils and find myself in wonderment that I am the oldest on all three as well as on the Cultural Support Team. One of these Advisory Councils is for Aboriginal Mental Health in the Comox Valley and Campbell River. One of the activities I am involved with in this Council is the presenting of the experiential teaching circle - "Building Bridges through The Village". Among the people we have done this teaching circle for are health care workers including physicians and hospital administrators, social workers, teachers, education administrators and many more. These are usually [but not exclusively] held in either the Comox Bighouse or the Campbell River Bighouse and for most of the participants it is the first time they have been in a Kwakiutl Bighouse.

"Building Bridges through The Village" is a powerful experience of learning and reconciliation for most participants and has changed the attitudes and perceptions of these people. What I consider to be a powerful example of this change occurred last winter when an Elder Kwakiutl woman and I were requested to conduct a healing and transformation Ceremony for the Psych. ward and staff at the local hospital following a patient committing suicide. That would never have happened before the hospital staff and administrators experienced "The Village" at Bear Spirit Place. Another



Top: David seated in the circle in the traditional Big House of the Campbell River First Nation. Preparing to assist in a cultural awareness -The Village Workshop, an experimental session designed to facilitate a better understanding of the impact of residential schools and the Indian Act on First Nations.

Above: David in Turtle Council House- working with youth- young men from the schools

aspect of this land I care take of is Turtle Council House which is located in the Ceremony Area of the place, near the Sweat Lodge. Turtle Council House is an eight sided [circular] structure with a central fire pit. It is about twenty feet in diameter and from the ground to the smoke hole is eighteen feet. Various Ceremonies are conducted here and as well there are fairly regular healing and teaching circles. On the 25th of June I conducted a Sweat Lodge Ceremony followed by a Traditional Teaching Circle in Turtle Council House for Kwakiutl District Council Mental Health and Addictions staff. Since I began my personal healing journey in the fall of 1963 - I have been blessed by having numerous Culture Keeper mentors from a number of different Tribes without which I do not know where I might be today. In those early days Cultural knowledge was being kept alive in secret so I have been privileged to see and be involved in major transformations and healing which include the TRC but are not exclusive to the TRC.

POSTSCRIPT

During the dark time in David's growing up years his new stepmother was Daphne Odjig. Her heritage is a combination of Odawa, Potawatomi and English roots. Her mother was a war bride who moved to Canada.

David says Daphne became his true mother. Her early story, much like that of many of her generation, was one of oppression, discrimination and racism. Yet despite all of these obstacles, she is now known as one of Canada's most famous First Nations Artists. Her many awards include the Order of Canada and the Governor General's Award. She was the driving force behind the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation, better known as the Indian Group of Seven.

JoAnn Restoule is a Youth Family Support Worker at Mark R. Isfeld. She can be contacted at JoAnn.Restoule@sd71.bc.ca

I NEVER INTEND TO FEEL OLD

Pauline Duncan-Thrasher



Taken in March 2015.

Though I was only a little girl at the time I remember my mother's disappointment when she heard the words "too old to be a model." She was only 28! Her teen years of modeling were past. It was an era when many women did feel "old" at a much younger age. Personally I intend to never feel "old."

In the book I wrote dedicated to my mother, who died in a psychiatric ward at age 54, I have a chapter called "Awesome Aging". This is an excerpt from that chapter:

"Awesome aging is living fully this minute with the delight of a child and the wisdom of an adult who knows that life offers no guarantees. Awesome aging is a positive, spirited response to life that illuminates everyone you meet. Ageless women have visible, tangible vitality. Happiness becomes a daily way of thinking: joyful for being alive mixed with realistic coping skills for life's daily challenge

Now, seven years later, I am 73, having lived longer than my mother, father, and a favorite aunt and uncle, I am enjoying fresh opportunities to engage in writing, acting, storytelling and even art!

Brushing aside, pun intended, the need to create spectacular art and just enjoy the experience came only a few weeks ago with a four hour course spread over two nights. My Art was certainly not ready for a gallery, but it was fun! Singing and acting with way fewer inhibitions than I felt in my twenties is an adventure made possible with programs designed to promote creativity in our community.

As we rejoice in our own skins and learn to be happy for others, we can teach just by the way we choose to live. That comes with encouraging others to develop their talents. Many awesome agers are wonderful mentors and "nice people" to be around.

That is the kind of person I want to be.

Why?

January 30,

Me 73

My goodness shining forth

Or is it maybe just an acceptance of me and them?

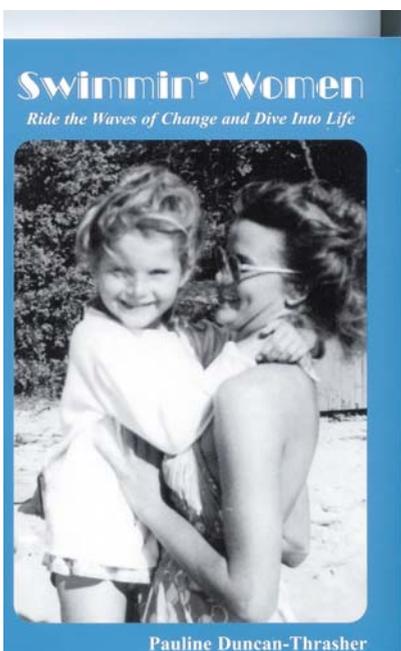
Why this sudden surge of feeling beautiful?

Why not then, when my twenties yearned to feel special

Craving with a parched thirsty, bitterness of outsidersness

By men I thought were attractive.

My mother and me on the cover of my book *Swimmin' Women*



Was it perchance my cool, put on act of disdain
 Desperately wanting to be noticed
 Outwardly, eyes cast aside, never making contact
 Except with those who seemed no threat.
 What's that?
 threat?
 ah so you were indeed feeling
 A little afraid.
 Never imagining that they too may have felt wanting
 I too self inverted to look outside
 Today no such qualms obsess my mind
 - is it marriage or is it age
 That brings wisdom of realizing others too have feelings, want
 Just as you used to want?
 Able finally to look openly with appreciation at everyone I meet
 Calming their discomfort
 When once it was only about my own youthful raw need. ~ Pauline

From Getting Real

Every age needs to relax, breathe, stretch, be still
 Pains and pleasures we get and beget
 Not less just different as we age
 Perspective allows us to gauge
 How and when to release nit-picky stuff
 Trivial goofs that used to make us huff.

Calmly, with an inner self satisfied smile
 We release silly worries, foolish friends, guile.

Get back to what's real and accept what we do.
 Learn to believe in ourselves like a comfy aged shoe
 Worn but shiny from loving good care
 Tailored to suit us. ~ Pauline

Pauline Duncan-Thrasher beamazinglyyou@gmail.com

IF THESE ARE MISTS

AN OCTOGENARIAN'S JOURNEY "THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS"

Alberto Azzis



Although ignorant of their real essence, I was stirred to curiosity by the delicate clarity of these mists, by their endlessly shifting shapes, their brilliance and consistency.

There was still about an hour to go until dawn. The sky was slowly exchanging its dark mantle of night for the clear gown of day. This wild and isolated place was suffused with anticipatory shimmering, subtle and arcane reverberations and beguilements. Listening intently to the silence, I made my way along a steep glade glimmering with mist: creeping tendrils of fog curled around my feet and lapped at my legs. Surprised, disconcerted, I wondered whether these bizarre vapours were not in fact silent occult beings. Or sly, mocking elves. Or worse still, vagrant souls in affliction. Wafted by the morning breeze, these ethereal agglomerations drifted aimlessly in wayward clusters. Maybe on their way to some secret and exclusive tryst. Although ignorant of their real essence, I was stirred to curiosity by the delicate clarity of these mists, by their endlessly shifting shapes, their brilliance and consistency. And naturally I felt cheered, inclined to benign and genial thoughts. So I proceeded on my way softly, almost on tiptoes, not wishing to ruffle or upset these delicate aggregations, nor to disturb the peace of this unspoilt glade with clumping feet.

I had already crossed a wide stretch of the steep clearing: it was almost dawn. And yet everything was still immersed in total silence; in an oblivion that would long outlast the gradual fading of the stars. Nonetheless – I was certain – this solitary place throbbed with life; it quivered with secret vigour, abounding in wild creatures which, although awake, chose to linger on lazily, sluggishly, in their snug dens and warm shelters.

Meanwhile, the fog had grown thicker, more leaden and stagnant: it was now a soft carpet, a vaporous blanket, above which I emerged, suffused in a magical morning light, as in certain naive images of saints. I felt as if I had entered upon some unreal world. An enchanting corner of paradise. I yielded to the pleasurable curiosity of this evanescent whiteness. And I gazed with rapture at the sky, whose peerless delights I seemed already to be enjoying: a single pale star held out against the assault of the day. The others – distant winking lights, which had been doused, one by one, by invisible candle-snuffers – had already performed their nightly task of explicit testimony. Of devout and fervent glorification.

I had now left that wide glade and was clambering up a steep, impervious escarpment, swathed in unbroken vapours: soft Opaline mists, with strange crested appendages, with tufts, plumes and coils: complex adjuncts, startling residues that gradually frayed and faded just above my head.



Out of The Mists, a vision painting by Alberto

“An eye-catching phenomenon,” I thought, “but a natural and perfectly comprehensible one. A phenomenon that is entirely consistent with thermodynamic physics. And thus with the principles of thermal conductivity and vaporisation...” However, just a moment later, in blatant contrast with the natural order of things, I was confronted with something sudden and disconcerting: minuscule misty formations, which had broken off and roamed free from the polymorphous mass, hovered and settled around my shoulders. They conformed, in perfect synchrony, to my slow pace. They followed me in orderly fashion, calm and silent.

“A bizarre phenomenon,” I said to myself, gazing in wonderment at these silvery tufts, these amiable cloudlets, that so strangely clustered around me, presumably caused by slight breezes, air-streams that have adapted themselves to my measured pace. Or perhaps miniature vortexes created by my movements.

But just a moment later I felt perplexed. I was assailed by doubts. Serious and well-founded suspicions. And inevitably I found myself thinking inexplicable facts. Strange presences. Evanescent entities. I recalled those mysterious, elusive elves that haunt the great silences, the austere solitudes, the wild and deserted places.

However, the phenomenon was a short-lived one - no more than a minute. Just enough time to walk a hundred paces, more or less. And then, quite suddenly, those gentle and discreet companions broke their stern ranks. They slowly shrivelled, languished, becoming faint and diaphanous. Finally, tranquil and austere, they vanished into space. And I, alas, felt sad and hurt - as if I had lost firm allies and supporters. The invisible candle-snuffers had meanwhile extinguished the last star and the sky, in anticipation of dawn, was taking on festive hints of yellow, of pink and blue. The mists were assuming luminous transparent hues. I felt a sudden sense of well-being: a strange delicious freshness. Instinctively I passed my hand through my hair; it was damp. As were my face and neck, my clothes and my rucksack.

“Dew,” I said to myself, “morning dew, fresh, restorative, and bracing.” And I took a deep breath. I gazed at the great massifs that stood out sharply above the vaporous expanse. And then I was newly assailed by perplexity, by nagging doubts.

“Strange! Is it possible,” I asked myself, “that these silvery drops of dew - nothing more than liquefied water vapour - should instill such a sense of well-being, such invigorating freshness?” And instinctively I meditated on the strange, disturbing enigma. I trudged along in puzzled reflection until I



I See Her In My Dreams, by Alberto.

reached a high narrow pass. And there, in that bare, impervious place, I decided to halt. I deposited my heavy bag, took some refreshment and finally lay down on the dewy ground. At once gentle, multiform vapours wrapped themselves around me with assiduous care: a soft white blanket; a vaporous shelter; a reassuring nest. Yes, wrapped in those soft mists, I felt cocooned and sheltered. And this cheered and heartened me. And then, maybe thanks to this relaxing sensation of sweetness, I dozed off. I dreamed of golden mists. Celestial mists that bedecked me in sumptuous draperies. Like the golden aureoles that array the bodies of saints. And the glittering halos that crown gods of all ages and all religions.

But just a short while later I awoke; the sun's triumphal chariot was already ablaze in the sky. I got to my feet anxiously; everything was clear, sharp, splendid - the forest, the stream and the hulking shapes of the mountains. Yes, the world looked brand-new, gleaming, varnished, newly created. And yet I was not pleased. On the contrary I felt vexed. I grieved.

"Alas," I said to myself, "the vast seductive blanket has melted away. So swiftly, as if by magic." Sadly I shook my head. And I gazed incredulously at the place where, scarcely a moment ago, the friendly vapours had made their slow austere way towards

some mysterious, exclusive tryst. Then I summoned all my shreds of common sense. And sound judgement.

"Why be surprised? Why wonder?" I thought at last. "The sudden fading of that immaculate protean mantle was inevitable. No, it wasn't fog. Not passive inert fog, but dawn – spirit – conscious living energy."

Alberto Azzis came to Canada from Italy after retirement at age 66. He and his wife settled into Kelowna 10 years ago. He was in grade eleven when he started to take drawing, but was discouraged by his teacher who felt he used his imagination too much. Later his mother bought him paints and he has painted ever since staying up until 2 or 3 in the morning to paint even during his busy career years. "It was my relaxation. I learned to paint from my grandmother, the mother of my mother. She was a great painter and I still have the work she gave me. My grandfather, the father of my father, painted too. I am not a professional. I am a dilettante, but I love to paint. In my profession I was a dentist." The voice inside his head and journeying with his imagination has brought Alberto great pleasure over the last two decades.

BROWN SWAMP PAINTING

LEARNING TO LOVE MUDDY ART



Lisa Lipsett

The transformative potential of the creative process is realized when we plunge through the world of second-hand news and personally place our finger on the pulse of the live, wild universe. -Peter London, Drawing closer to nature

When I started natural painting almost 20 years ago, I used only clear bright watercolours that energized in a cheery uplifting way. Just as I tried in daily life to keep smiling no matter how I felt, I did the same with my art. Many times I heard myself and now hear my students worry about a painting going to mud brown or getting messy and swampy as if this is a sign of ultimate failure. But I now know that by embracing the mud we are offered one of the biggest gifts of painting- the potential for transformation when commitment time and patience work their magic. We are taught the universal wild cycle of self-change as it is catalyzed and mirrored in paint. Both the clear bright and messy brown swamp are necessary stages in this cycle.

Earth, its dark, full of body, not the sunny pale surface of a watercolour.
—Joanna Field, On not being able to paint

Mud painting is where humans began. More than thirty thousand years ago, first peoples used earth pigments to express themselves on bodies, rock and pottery. The original ochers of brown, golden yellow, red iron oxide, orange, black and white were ground from river rocks and carved out of hillsides. Early humans used materials that were very brown, primal and so close to the earth, as were the artists themselves.

Once, I surveyed a group of colleagues, friends and family about their associations with brown. I was surprised to learn about their consistently negative reaction. Brown is associated with dull, boring, low energy, and reminds them of excrement, being dirty, hippies, wimps, death, mud, worms, swamps and rot. One friend offered that a businessman in a brown suit is a loser. It seems that for many, brown is a drab dirty colour lacking life and vitality. It takes more than it gives. It's the colour of naiveté, a rural farmer's colour.

Surprisingly the tone and demeanour of interviewees changed considerably when I inquired about earth tones. They offered that earth is brown combined with speckled colours, rich, and full of life, like humus. Happy childhood memories of making mud pies, creating, scooping, and piling up dirt were retold.

Messy Brown Swamp





Top: Ochres

Above: Earth dancers

The markedly different feeling responses to the words brown and earth intrigued me because it seems both colours really look the same.

Swamps seem to hold the negative connotation of brown. In nature, swamps are the home for thick brown soupiness whose essence is like blood—viscous, nourishing, rich in nutrients, a brown stew of potential.

Neither land nor water, a swamp ties both together in space and time. Water moves in, rests, and exits just as quietly again. It is a place filled with stillness, a wetland, filled with moisture and possibility, a still place that is full of life.

There can be a heavy negative connotation to being mired in a swamp. When my Mom used to tell me my room looked like a swamp it was not meant as an encouraging endearment. There was no telling what kind of mold I was growing under my bed. You couldn't see anything for all the chaos and clutter. It was a dangerous act of rebellion to not meticulously fold my clothes and shelve my belongings. Things might recombine, form new monstrous life and take over the house and my psyche if they were not kept in closets and drawers. The same goes for painting; I feel the need to sometimes keep colours and shapes organized and separate.

Being swamped with work connotes a sinking feeling, a sense that there was no seeing to the end. It is a murky place, filled with furtive gasps for air and continual treading. Being swamped has a disheveled look to it, for there

is no luxury of time for smoothing out wrinkles or preparing a nourishing meal. Things have a wild pace all their own, a life all their own and the swampee is charged with staying afloat despite this. A swamp is also a water filter of sorts that purifies, removes the toxins, bubbles up new combinations and new lives. It is a marginal place of beginning and ending.

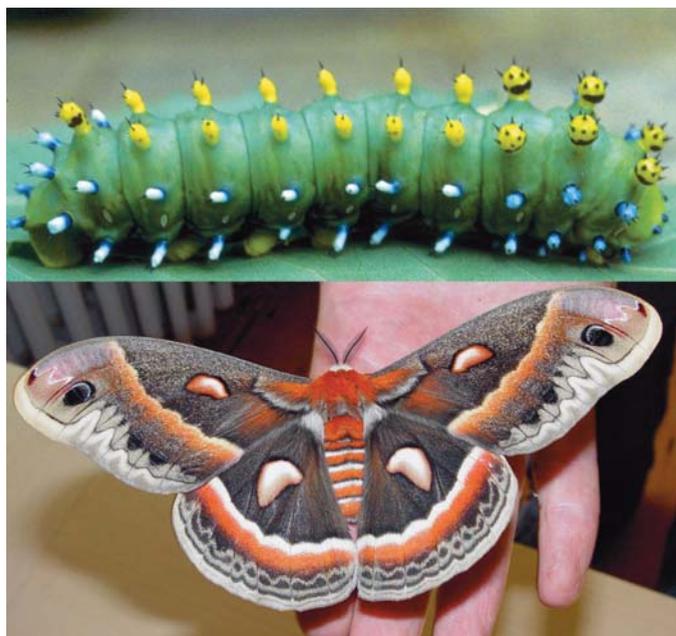
Like a swamp of primordial ooze, a messy painting is like a container, a wet fecund place from which new life emerges. We are welcomed into metamorphosis of which brown melting down to liquid is a necessary step.

...all in tears, she melted,
dissolving, queen no longer of
those waters, her limbs were
seen to soften, and her bones
became more flexible, and

the nails' hardness was gone:
the slenderest parts went
first, the hair, the fingers, legs
and feet....

—G. Karl Galinsky, *Metamorphoses*

In the insect world, butterflies and moths are the embodiment of metamorphosis. We can learn a great deal about our own creative cycles by paying



Caterpillar and moth

If you are willing to commit to the expression of the soul of an image trying to be born through your hands, new beauty will emerge.

attention to how their swamp stage is necessary for new life. Deliquescence is the name given to the melting down of the caterpillar in preparation for the creation of the butterfly/moth. It involves the dissolution of old structures and the subsequent nourishing of the dormant life lying in wait. All this happens in synchrony with the resonant spin of the planet, the pattern of night and day, and the dance of coldness and warmth. Yet outwardly there is cocoon-like silence and stillness. By regular looking it is really hard to tell if there is anything actually happening.

Painting allows us to play with what happens when we dive wholeheartedly into the messy brown muck. Messy muddy painting helps us to stir and stew, allowing new life to bubble up on the canvas and in ourselves. When things go muddy, the end result of an individual painting matters little. If you are willing

to commit to the expression of the soul of an image trying to be born through your hands, new beauty will emerge. This takes commitment to patiently let the art lead each time we paint. We learn to trust natural cycles of clear and muddy over the course of years. As a new painter this can be challenging. Think of your relationship to painting like the one between a dreamer and their dreams. In a dream we let ourselves be led by forces deeper than our planning mind.

We miss that opportunity on the page and in life when we steer away from the mud, try and drive it into lighter directions or push away from it all together. Even though the stakes may feel high in the moment in reality we are safe and contained yet totally free to explore and experience with abandon.

At heart, I am now a swamp dweller. It took many months of painting before I found myself using brown. It gave so little energy unlike the bright clarity of the primary colours I loved. Brown is now a source of fascination for me. It asks more of me than the instantly energizing brilliance of other colours. Brown allows me to rest my gaze and calm myself. Brown swamp painting makes me happy because I know that welcoming the swamp is a part of transformation, an alchemical melting down done with beautiful recombination. I know it won't last forever and I am curious to see where it will take me.

There is balance in bright and muted. The caterpillars of most tawny silk moths are the brightest primary greens, red, blues and yellows. Where they are in their cycle of caterpillar or moth, determines their coloured nature. Same with us.

Sometimes we will be bright, at other times earthy. As a painter we enrich our experience if we accept and work in harmony with whatever is trying to emerge. We must provide space for the new to come clear. We must

Swamp painting

As a painter we enrich our experience if we accept and work in harmony with whatever is trying to emerge.



continually do this with both our images and with our creative flow. Paradoxically we need to go to mud to get clear again.

To bring back the creative life, the waters have to be clear and clean again. We have to wade into the sludge, purify the contaminants, reopen the apertures, protect the flow from future harm.

– Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women who run with the wolves*

Activity to try.

What is your relationship to swampy brown?

Paint with a really wet page using fluid acrylics or well-diluted watercolours. Lose yourself in the liquidy world they create.

How would it feel to intentionally create a mess while you paint? Observe what you hear yourself saying in your head as you make a mess. Go to the brown.

Finally an exploration of brown swampiness would not be complete without actually painting beside a swamp or with muddy swamp water. I encourage you to give this a try!

Artist **Lisa Lipsett's** work focuses on the transformative potential of hands-on art with Earth in mind. Visit www.creativebynature.org to see Lisa's courses, books, blog and fine art to inspire drawing and painting with Earth and heart.



PROFILE

ART AND COMMUNITY

Aj Jaeger

Metal, what a wonderful material ... Strong and yet malleable, symbolically just like humans. When we are young, we are physically strong and most likely tough to bend, with approaching age, we become weaker, physically, yet softer and wiser in our action. Despite certain restrictions that are supposed to slow us down, we can stay young and active while staying interested and involved.

I have always had an affinity for different metals, mostly the aged and used ones, and I am not so interested in the new and shiny. Rusty steel, aged copper, scratch aluminum, all of these have their own personality and had their place in life.

'A Glimpse of our Tomorrow' was created for a 3 month period (June-September 2015) of an outside display at the Lake Country Art Gallery, a charming small public gallery, with a very active group of artists and art patrons. I have been intrigued by the new ideas that have come out of this 'art think tank' and jumped on the possibility of creating a large 8x8 feet mural made of metal mounted on plywood. The gathering of the materials has been fun, I got to go back to my friends at Action Metal in Kelowna, these tough guys have a soft spot for artists. I always enjoy going for an exploratory walk on their grounds. As well I found other sources for used metal.

The idea for 'A Glimpse of our Tomorrow' was born by watching what is happening in our valley where urban sprawl encroaching into our serene landscape. It's nothing we can stop, we might not even want to...yet it is nice to see how some communities are careful in the planning of their future. Lake Country seems to have found the right balance of growth to attract people by adding cultural facilities like the LCAG and the Lake Country Coffee House, in repurposed buildings like the old slaughterhouse. These entities are providing a local attraction of comfort and education at the same time.

While taking on the challenge to work with the medium of metal and the size of the mural, I am grateful to being able to work and create at and with my friend and mentor Doug Alcock, a well-known blacksmith and artist from the North Okanagan.

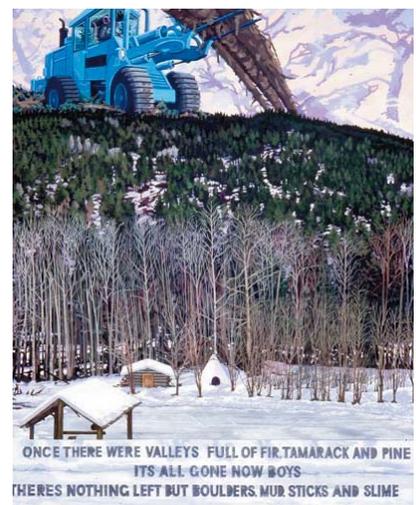
Doug has always been the quiet voice that brings forward new ideas on how to approach my challenging ventures. He is the 'go to person' who instills the trust, that I have the capability to do what the challenge is asking for. I am grateful that I am still physically able to do this kind of work, and to see and hear the response from the community and my fellow artists convinces me, that life still has a lot to offer for me, to try out and to learn. My hope is that for many years to come I will be able to take on new



Top: Lake Country Gallery

Above: Community worked together (Doug is standing)

Right: Painting by area artist Julie Oakes





PROFILE

RON JORGENSEN

Jenny Sato, volunteer coordinator of *Playing With Paints*

Two years ago Ron moved to a residential facility. After coping with Parkinson's disease for several years, he needed more assistance with daily living, including meals. He had previously enjoyed cooking and entertaining but gradually became unable to use utensils safely. His hobby, tying fishing flies, also became too difficult as his tremors increased.

Last fall, he joined a painting group at the facility. It took a few times before he warmed up to the idea of painting and gradually, it has become the creative outlet that was once provided by cooking. The group's emphasis was on the process of creation, not necessarily the outcome so Ron was able to proceed at his own pace and experiment with colour and texture. Most often, he uses gloved hands to apply acrylic to canvas, although he has been known to apply paint to glass tiles, foam visors and cardboard, all to satisfy his curiosity.

In an interview with Kate Dusik, the local marketing manager for Baptist Housing, Ron said, "I like learning how to shade and use colours to make custom colours." He accesses the internet to learn about techniques and to find inspiration.

Ron tells me he shows everyone his work because "I'm proud of it." Initially, he was skeptical of compliments but gradually, he decided, "Maybe I am doing a good job. I like the feel of paint on my fingers. It feels good to see what I've done."

Ron's paintings evoke a sense of motion and exploration of colour. A few of his earlier works have been reproduced as postcards, for sale in the facility's 'General Store' and recently, plans are being made to hang some of his paintings in the local office of a research organization.

As a column in the Baptist Housing newsletter noted, "The urge to create is fundamental to some people, but when your outlet of choice is no longer feasible it is heartening to know that there are other avenues (some that we haven't even considered) to explore." Ron agrees – he hopes that by telling his story, it will encourage others to be open to the educational process and to try something new.



Left top to bottom:
Experimenting with colour
and texture
Mixing colours
Sometimes I can laugh at
myself
Right: It feels good to see
what I've done



SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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

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

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

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