

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE
NUMBER 50, FALL 2024

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FROM THE EDITORS

This is the 50th issue of *Sage-ing*, and I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the editor Karen Close and publisher Robert MacDonald for their dedication to the process of creating this quarterly journal over the past 13 years. We begin this issue with TRUSTING THE PROCESS FOR FIFTY ISSUES, Karen's reflections on these 13 years of publication.

– Laura

Creating is an essential life-giving process, a kind of time machine, that manifests enduring connections for self and others. It is from this place that one can allow the magic of creative spirit to indeed create you. Trusting the process and allowing creative spirit to expand one's wisdom invites deep personal scrutiny and challenges one to act from a place of honouring and sharing. In her article FROM THE STRESS OF CHASING LIFE TO THE SERENITY OF ATTRACTING IT Birgit Bennett shares how "plugging in to divine source" has brought trust. In IN LETTING GO GROWTH EMERGES Laura Foster shares her painting experience of plugging into the "force" of a creative act. Following the evolution of her paintings has allowed Geri Thom to see how TRUSTING MY LIFE'S JOURNEY has manifested in realizing "a breath of life with freedom." Rose Sexsmith shares how her love of music and FOLLOWING THE BEAT OF MY HEART have led her to the joy of playing the ukulele and sharing this instrument with others. In GATHERING TO PAINT Janet Stalenhoef explains the transition "from our separateness to our togetherness" with "discoveries and insights about our common humanness." In FROM PSYCHOANALYST, TO BIOENERGY HEALER, TO AUTHOR Ellen Lewinberg reflects on how trusting the process engages her in a rich and rewarding life. By ALIGNING

INTO SPIRIT Roberta Pyx Sutherland reflects that choosing an artist's path ... "We are compelled in some instinctual way to engage and express, possibly the way birds are compelled to migrate." Artist Linda Lovisa shares how STAYING WITH THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY has enriched her personal life and to reap the joy of igniting curiosity in others. On MY CREATIVE PATH Sharon McMullan-Baron offers her strategies to keep the energy going and "float easily along a river of creative flow." Before presenting a selection of his poetry, Robert MacDonald shares words of wisdom collected through the decades that have influenced his path. I would like to thank Laura Foster for her vision in suggesting our movement forward. She concludes this issue with CONTEMPLATING HOW TO TRUST and a recommendation to read *Yes, And... Daily Meditations* where Richard Rohr posits, "*Yes/And* thinking leads to a third way, which is neither fight nor flight, but standing in between..." We plan to conclude future journals with relevant book recommendations and invite you to make your suggestions.

– Karen

As we look towards the next 50, the theme for Issue 51 is somewhat related to this one. We invite you to ponder 'creating as playing.' The following are the words of Stuart M. Brown Jr.:

"Life without play is a grinding, mechanical existence organized around doing the things necessary for survival. Play is the stick that stirs the drink," and "Play isn't the enemy of learning, it's learning's partner. Play is like fertilizer for brain growth. It's crazy not to use it." **We ask, 'how do you take time to play as you create?'**

HOW TO SUBMIT

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

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

Please attach 3-4 photos, separately, including: Your headshot, 2-3 photos related to your article. All photos should be numbered, given a caption, and attached in high resolution jpg. format. Insert the word "photo #" with its caption within the article where you would like each image placed (we'll try to honour this request as layout permits). Please include a brief bio note, written in the third person (one or two short paragraphs of up to 200 words). Your bio will be placed at the end of your article and is intended to give the reader an idea of who you are, your passions and/or what you do and have done with your life that feels relevant to the article. Please include your preferred contact information, including email, website, blog address – whatever you want included in the publication. In your cover email, please share how you found your way to submitting to Sage-ing. Please email your article and photographs to Karen Close at karensageing@gmail.com

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

WHO WE ARE

Karen Close, Editor,

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



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



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

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

Laura D. Foster, Assistant Editor,

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



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

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

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NUMBER 50, FALL 2024
ISSN 1920-5848

A PUBLICATION OF THE
Okanagan Institute

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This publication is available for online viewing and downloading at:

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Cover image: *Bonne Appétit*. Acrylic, 2022 by Linda Lovisa

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TRUSTING THE PROCESS OF FIFTY ISSUES

Karen Close

Preparing to edit this 50th issue of the journal I have felt absorbed in a personal and imaginative reflection of the past 13 years since our first edition in September 2011. I believe voicing one's authentic thoughts is an act of creation in itself. When we convert thought and imagination from the chambers of our minds into concrete forms in the outside world, we begin the process of making art. From the first issues of *The Journal* our highest intention has been to trust the process and remain true to our core belief that, to evolve, our culture needs each of our unique voices, young and old, creatively supporting each other and sharing through storytelling. Sharing our stories, giving form and a voice to our authentic thoughts, is our human tradition.

"Humans need stories as much as food for the soul to survive." – Pat B. Allen, *The Art Of Knowing*

The ancient Greeks believed that all creation, whether artistic or scientific, was motivated by goddesses who served as the literal embodiment of inspiration. These were the Muses — the givers of the creative spark. When one is touched by our muses, we understand viscerally that we are capable of producing our own unique kind of greatness and we lose ourselves in the process. Allen explains, regardless of how one chooses to explore oneself creatively "the process is an opening to the creative source, the central intelligence of the universe." *The Journal* believes we are all creators with the collective challenge to add our unique voices so as to embody and make vivid our common destiny as we transform both ourselves and the world around us. Our contributors come from the Okanagan, throughout British Columbia, across Canada, the U.S., Europe and even Africa yet their stories are remarkably similar. Familiar themes emerge again, and again, as contributions arrive for each issue. I feel we have tapped into a public and common source of knowing that excites me for the future.

In the 1970s Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, renowned professor of creativity and positive thinking, coined "Flow" to describe the optimal, live-giving state of experience that can happen for individuals when their work simply flows out of them without much effort because it is so intrinsic to their being. According to research, the phenomenon is experienced most often and consistently by artists, musicians and athletes, but available to all. When in a flow state, people pay no attention to distractions, and time seems to pass without any notice. When creators turn an idea into a form the whole world can enjoy, those ideas endure and often reinspire new creators.

The Journal believes we are all creators with the collective challenge to add our unique voices so as to embody and make vivid our common destiny as we transform both ourselves and the world around us.

The most ambitious goal available to the human imagination: to blend our individual voice to join in our unique consciousness with the emerging consciousness of the universe.

“If we are to achieve a rich culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.” – Margaret Mead

About 100 years ago, the art movement Constructivism proposed that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. The group believed that when the artist creates a new symbol with his or her brush or other medium, this symbol is not of anything that already exists. It is a symbol created by individuals and their imaginations. It is a step into new territory. The movement advocated in favour of art as a practice for social purposes to evolve cultural thinking. There was a noble goal founded in the idealism of the classical period. Perhaps proponents of Constructivism were just a century too early. This journal embraces their goal as a greater possibility within the context of the World Wide Web. We are trusting the process of “flow” and “the central intelligence of the universe.” I think our journal is enduring because we’re not New Age; we’re old age with deep roots in human resolve. We seek a new renaissance in an understanding of creativity as a route to self-knowing, and an inner liberation of what we each must share with the next generation.

“But the task of a good society is not to enshrine the solutions of the past into permanent institutions; it is rather, to make it possible for creativity to continually reassert itself.” – *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, 2014

Increasingly, as I create, I find Mihály Csíkszentmihályi to be my guru. As a publication *The Journal* urges reflection and compassionate creative inquiry where all voices and all stories matter. We ask our contributors to tell their own stories perhaps in response to a suggested theme. We then see how these responses might “weave a less arbitrary social fabric” and encourage “creativity to continually reassert itself” as thinking evolves within our current times. I am a strong believer that creative spirit is about manifesting energy, not imagery or a predetermined form. Csíkszentmihályi died in the fall of 2021, not from but in the midst of Covid, when individuals were given time, perhaps to discover “flow” and move towards the possibility of a harmony his books envisage for this third millennium: *Finding Flow: The Psychology Of Engagement With Everyday Life and Creativity*, *Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. His books are numerous and finding new release into publication. Even YouTube is talking about ‘Flow.’ <https://search.app/yELdRmG2CZh38AtL6>

In his last book, written in 2014, Csíkszentmihályi points out, “Evolutionary cells will make it possible to experience flow while working for the most ambitious goal available to the human imagination: to blend our individual voice to join in our unique consciousness with the emerging consciousness of the universe, to fold our momentary centre of psychic energy into the current that tends toward increasing complexity and order” (*The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*). Such is my hope for the evolution of *The Journal*.

Cosmic Harmony (photographer unknown)





Taking Action

Allowing creative spirit to expand one's wisdom invites deep personal scrutiny.

The spiral in psychology has come to be associated with soul growth. By allowing one's life to spiral out from its own authenticity, you come over the same point where you have been before, but never really the same because the path is above or below your authentic core, expanding and moving forward. When I saw this image of the spiral and tide I felt deep synchronicity with my own thoughts. I believe that the soul is that chip inside me that is eternal and can live forever in the cosmic flow or tide of energy, if I have been true to myself. The spiral is also a positive symbol that is frequently featured in many Earth-based spiritual traditions, both ancient and modern. It either symbolizes energy flowing out into the universe and dissipating, or energy coming together and taking a new form in your life. That is why it is so important to 'Trust the Process' to allow the soul to manifest in its own truth. In earlier issues of *The Journal* I have been sharing how my personal artworks explore my journey in the spirit of Constructivism. In a similar spirit, the concept of sage-ing has evolved in this 21st century to refer to seniors manifesting their spiritual core and becoming socially responsible. Editing *The Journal* as we gather stories is my embodiment of the sage-ing process and an invitation. I delight in trusting this process and sharing it with our readers.

"To harmonize the whole is the task of art." – Wassily Kandinsky (1910)

In his work, Kandinsky focused on his own dream for freedom of expression in art and the pure power of colour, form and emotion unrelated to representational imagery. Constructivists then further pursued his innovative approach to painting to develop their own ideas, to influence the development of modern art and to seed new ideas, proclaiming that allowing creative spirit to expand one's wisdom invites deep personal scrutiny and challenges one to act from a place of honouring and sharing one's self. It isn't just the experience of making art that brings wisdom but also viewing it. When a viewer truly relaxes into the experience of a work and feeling the artist's intention, that viewer's deeper knowing also expands. Csíkszentmihályi suggests, "to fold our momentary centre of psychic energy into the current that tends toward increasing complexity and order" is to evolve our 'selves' towards Kandinsky's dream: "To harmonize the whole" should be the goal of this third millennium. As I continue to edit our journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace, and Gratitude* I trust in the process that *together with contributors and readers our pages will manifest Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's dream for a "A Fellowship of the Future" as outlined in The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium.*

Our journal operates as an example of the gift economy. We are about sharing the wisdom of original thinking as our life experiences nurture our mutual soul growth for self and others. For this online journal there is no receiving of payment by anyone. Robert MacDonald gives his publishing/layout talents and we editors give our editing skills to those who share their stories with us. Trusting this process, our journal has grown and savours being a molecule of 'soul food' in this century's growing understanding of itself.

FROM THE STRESS OF CHASING LIFE

TO THE SERENITY OF ATTRACTING IT

Birgit Bennett



I have found life's greatest gift to be the knowledge that we are all, whether we know it or not, part of a higher process. Accessing that process, however, is often accompanied by the perennial human struggle between doubt and trust, or fear vs. faith.

Many years ago, I was dumbfounded to find myself at the threshold of the one realm I was categorically certain could not exist. I came from a household that valued the relative safety of the intellect and dismissed any alternative belief as fabrication.

I also found myself alternating between cycles of fascination that encouraged exploration of this new terrain and a healthy skepticism that repelled it. The fascination of course won out, but to *allow* myself to delve further into its mysteries (note the connection between *allow* and *hallow*) I had to learn to take baby steps, according to my comfort level, onto what became a slowly moving sidewalk incrementally carrying me towards that calmer and more fulfilling way to live. I was beginning to experience life's flow.

My initial flood of insights came as if in culmination of the unrelenting greater-life questions and philosophical meanderings occupying my mind. Rather than quelling these questions, though, it seemed the more questions that were seemingly answered, the more arose to replace them. I began writing them down simply as a way of purging them from my overwhelmed mind and soon found myself with the beginnings of a manuscript. Although I never set out to write a book, it felt as though I was being moved by a tide carrying me along in my writing. When I succumbed to it the writing flowed through me. But if I gave in to the doubt influenced by the conservatism of the times, the flow stopped. I began to think of this flow as turning on and off a tap.

My ongoing contemplation also led me to sense that this alternative energy source seemed to echo the very one found at the root of all the wisdom traditions throughout history. My many travels revealed scenes in all cultures that encourage feelings of serenity and harmony.

After coming across etymological evidence to support my new understandings and with a growing confidence nurtured by the 'trust indicators' that I began to identify along the way, I was able to surrender more fully to the process. Soon I found myself enjoying a fresh challenge, that of trying to explain this newfound, age-old esoteric material in a secular way that would speak to others as well. What became a passion project resulted in my recently published *Renewable Energy: An Agnostic Plugs In to the Divine Source*.

Alternating between cycles of fascination that encouraged exploration of this new terrain and a healthy skepticism that repelled it.



Top: Germany
Above: Japan

The more we grow an inner connection to the life force through our core truth, the more its energy amplifies its benefits in our lives.

The project would never have happened had I given in to the ever-present doubt rather than cultivating the also underlying trust that was part and parcel of the process.

The myriad ways of connecting to the higher flow of the universe have become more commonly known today thanks to the proliferation of information available and increasingly online. Inherent in all teachings, the most potent way to connect to this flow is learning to open to it. This requires a measure of trust. My research revealed that the word *heaven* is rooted in the old German *heoffne*, which means *to lift up*. *Heoffne* is also related to the modern German *offen*, which means *open*. So rather than a physical or even mythical place, heaven can be viewed as a state of being, that of aligning with and being open to letting in what is now more commonly referred to as our life force. This state is our most fertile ground, the source of intuition, inspiration and creativity. Armed with this type of accruing etymological evidence my logical mind began to be able to trust and embrace the process.

Partly a reorientation from a restricted and often negative state borne of fear, to the higher, more positive one of faith, the eventual transformation from fear to faith is nurtured through this trust. A note of caution though: We are no longer meant to believe blindly. Any new information should resonate before embracing it. The process is about evolution towards one's own truth, accessed through one's own core – connected with *coeur*, French for *heart* – at one's own pace, not anyone else's; otherwise it can actually lead to personal havoc. We have to take responsibility for our own lives and our own happiness. It can therefore be helpful to turn to a variety of sources to learn what they have in common in order eventually to find what works for oneself. This, too, becomes part of the process.

The more we grow an inner connection to the life force through our core truth, the more its energy amplifies its benefits in our lives. Faith eventually becomes a deep inner knowing that things always work out for one's greatest and highest good, giving rise to the often trite-sounding expressions such as 'where a door closes a window opens' and 'everything happens for a reason'.

Embarking on and staying with this journey into the unknown takes courage. Most of us opt for the devil we know, or the status quo of perceived safety and control but ultimately of limitation. Letting go of control and trusting the process (note the connection between *trust* and *truth*) becomes a gradual acclimation to an entirely new way of being in the world. The mysterious ways of this new way of being can, in the early stages, make it difficult to recognize whether we're on the right path, and allow doubt to take over. This is where we begin to learn to become aware of the trust indicators or signposts along the way. Many of these also have become banal sounding, such as finding pennies in the street, always a parking spot, or paying attention to coincidences. As ludicrous as they sound to the uninitiated, they show us when we are in flow and help bring our minds back to the positive – once again, to trust. In time these signs become less necessary as trust becomes more entrenched and the intuition stronger. Or the signals



Top: Ethiopia
Above: Bhutan

Birgit Bennett's early career centred on her overriding passions at the time – communications in the travel and tourism industries. Over the course of her lifetime, Birgit's thirst for discovery and curiosity for other cultures eventually led her to all corners of the globe, which added to her fascination with human nature and, ultimately, reinforced her understanding of a universal spirituality.

Birgit's book, *Renewable Energy: An Agnostic Plugs In to the Divine Source*, is available on Amazon in both print and Kindle editions, which can be downloaded to any device. She can be contacted at renewable_energy@shaw.ca

become more sophisticated, such as indigenous cultures' awareness of energy alignment with various animals' spiritual qualities. In short, anything positive that happens 'out of the blue' to get our attention helps us return our focus to the positive, and to trust.

Of course, sometimes negative things happen as well, but all the wisdom traditions tell us that these, too, are part of the greater design to teach us to become *conscious* again of where we might be off our path and what we need to learn and adjust within ourselves to get back on.

For myself, I found that the more I stayed aligned with the universal positive flow, the more it began to move me through life rather than my having to force things to happen. Previously motivated by the never-ending lists, I found myself moving, almost with a grace, from one task to the next and from one experience to the next, guided largely by circumstances. If something came together easily, it was meant to be. If something was put in my path I learned to discern whether it was for my higher learning or whether to let it go in the knowledge that the right thing would happen, which it always did. Often I found myself doing something completely different in my day than what I had planned, and usually better than I could have imagined myself. My previous frantic pace and accompanying stress began to lessen, and life began to take on the feel of a dance. I began to be amused and entertained by the many manifestations of flow in my daily life.

Whatever I needed at any given time seemed to come to me. If I worried about being late for a commitment there was usually a delay at the other end that still made me on time. If I needed an appointment or a reservation when travelling, a cancellation would magically arise making it available. The recent heatwave, while forcing me indoors, also coincided nicely with the timing for this writing. I've learned never to take any of these outcomes for granted but, rather, to appreciate them with wonder and gratitude as small miracles emanating from that universal flow. Largely an exercise of getting out of my own way, I now *allow* my life to be guided in this way and have learned to trust its process, knowing that it emanates from my higher self as long as I keep that connection alive.

Everyone can learn to harness this higher energy to enhance life because it is already latent within us, an inherent but sadly misplaced part of human nature. It's never too late to tap into it nor, once we do, are we ever done. The goal is harmony, not perfection. When one discovers the potency of the life force for oneself it holds the same wonder and miraculous-seeming qualities we've always heard about. The proof that it's working is in our increasing sense of well-being as well as often our 'luck', or the better things we notice happening in our lives. It becomes that unfolding chain of events that ultimately leads to a *created* life.

IN LETTING GO GROWTH EMERGES

Laura Foster

“Whether in painting, poetry, performance, music, dance, or life, there is an intelligence working in every situation... This force is the primary carrier of creation ... If we trust it and follow its natural movement, it will astound us.”

This quote, from *Trust the Process: An artist’s guide to letting go*, resonates. Author Shaun McNiff explains that while it’s important to provide a framework, letting go to allow room to improvise is key to full creative expression. Easier said than done, yet in art therapy and in my own art I have found it is key to finding joy in the art-making process and the satisfaction in the completion of the piece.

When I think of letting go and improvisation I am reminded of the many years I have enjoyed attending the Edmonton Folk Music Festival. While there were always great headliners on the main stage that attracted people to the festival, it was experiencing the side stages with various artists performing together that is most memorable to me. On these stages the famed jam sessions with performers from a range of genres created one-of-a-kind performances. The improvisation was always magical, infused with rhythm that got me on my feet, moving and participating in the impromptu performance.

Since our last *Sage-ing* issue I have been enjoying re-reading *Trust the Process*, one of my go-to resources on art making. My plan was to use it intentionally as a guide as I created two paintings and journalized about my experience. I was curious to see what would happen, and it turned out to be a valuable exploration.

Not having any idea where to start was tough, but finally I just got going, first with putting gesso and moulding paste on the 20” x 24” panels. Then as I continued it was as though the process showed me the way. The art seemed to take on an energy of its own, a vibrancy, a celebration. It was as if it was saying go for it, enjoy and do as you desire, instead of doing what I think I should do. This was motivating.

It took discipline to avoid rushing, to keep the practice structured and to slow down. Yet it soon became essential to me, to enjoy the moments and not let them pass by. It became my self-care time, being present with my art, mindfully capturing the moments that can otherwise be fleeting. I took time to play favourite instrumental music, and to hum along and dance, and I noticed as I did I allowed room for improvisation, and my creative and intuitive muse emerged.

As I continued with the process through these layers sometimes it

Below: Getting started
Bottom: Detail of one of the first layers





Top: The green layer

Above: A detail of the florals

Right: The completed artwork, *Growth Emerging*



became difficult again: Where was this going? Journalizing was integral to the process with the reflections on what I was doing. As I continued to add layers to the painting, what emerged in my notes was the desire for authenticity and being true to myself. I didn't know when I began painting that I would go to florals. Then in reflection I realised they express the anticipation of spring and early summer. After the grey winter season it was refreshing to see the new growth and colour, and be rejuvenated. The resilience I sometimes take for granted as I pass by nature in the changing seasons I see now as nothing short of miraculous, and I think of the resilience that I've experienced and seen in others, particularly after the fires here in Kelowna last summer. I found myself enjoying simple things, like watching the birds in the backyard in and around the birdbath, the bird house and among the trees and flowers, and spending time with my toddler grandson in the backyard, seeing his joy watching the birds. I realised that it is presence in these moments with him and others that mean everything.

When I completed the process I was surprised at how satisfied I was with it, and with the image itself. I noted that I watched the painting reveal itself the same way that I watch the growth in my garden. I enjoyed seeing the subtleties in nature that I otherwise may have missed had I not taken the time. I enjoyed observing the art as I went along, seeing the subtleties in response and the loose and free gestural elements of each layer. I marvelled at the interconnections of each layer to the next, from the not knowing in the beginning to the floral composition in the end. I had been taking in the unfolding of spring in my surroundings, being inspired by its colours and its improvisational ever-changing nature, and this showed up in my art.

It was freeing to get away from careful detail or striving for accurate portrayal of subject matter. Working this way allows for creative expression to simmer, percolate and gradually emerge. I have learned that, by leaning into making the art, focusing on the process and allowing for improvisation, the image takes care of itself. As I managed to let go and trust the process I was astounded with the result.

I watched the painting reveal itself the same way that I watch the growth in my garden.

TRUSTING MY LIFE'S JOURNEY

Geri Thom



Painting is my joy, my sense of stability and a reflection of my life's journey. It is where I have sought sanctuary during the past five years of dramatic and traumatic life shifts. During those years I held fast to the familiarity of the town I called home for 45 years, to my routines, to my art community and friends. I was fighting for a semblance of control through a clenched jaw. As I moved through those years my painting suffered. I lost inspiration and joy. Painting became a chore. I had lost sight of my newly acquired freedom to choose my path and slipped into basic survival. My painting of an elephant emerging from a forest is a reflection of that struggle. An elephant's lifespan is roughly the same as ours. After being attracted to a photo of an elephant I learned that one in three of this species is captured at their childhood age of four. Many are then mercilessly beaten until their spirits are broken and they become compliant. Nearly half die during this process. They then live their lives captive at the end of a chain or rope not realizing they have the physical strength to break free. My painting *Following the Light* depicts a weary old elephant now free of chains and ropes emerging from a dark forest into a shaft of light on a path into the open.

During my difficult years, my family encouraged me to move back to my hometown where I had many cherished memories and family. I struggled with a feeling of suffocation and a fear of going backwards in time, of sacrificing all I had established with my painting, including renting my paintings to the burgeoning movie production industry, much loved painting classes, art shows and supportive friends.

Slowly I came to view the move home as perhaps an opportunity for a new life, home and adventure rather than a struggle to survive in an increasingly unaffordable and now very urban city. I moved into trusting this path to be a breath of life with freedom, and with this realization came a burst

Following the Light



of colour and energy in my painting. My dreams of a home with a garden, art studio, family and sanctuary from a frantic urban pace came into focus. Many of the treasured memories that formed me came flooding back and were reflected in my painting. A vibrant painting of sunflowers danced onto my canvas and filled me with joy. I call it *Sun Dancers* and felt their energy beckoning me.

I am back home now, and am spiralling back into my secret soul. One of my first evenings here brought a vision of the evening sun reflecting a breathtaking shimmer of gold onto the trees across the lake. I snapped a photo of this sight as



Left: *Sun Dancers*
 Middle: *Returning*. Photograph
 Right: *My brother*



I recalled a treasured memory from my three-year-old heart. I remembered an evening when I was walking hand in hand with my mother along the Salmon River and the tree tops across the river suddenly turned brilliant gold. I held my breath in awe and have never forgotten that magical image or the feel of my hand resting in my mother's hand. This photo will become a painting.

My newest painting, still in its beginning stages, has emerged from the depths of my heart. It is of my beloved brother, whom we lost to cancer eight years ago. Lovingly feeling this portrait emerge onto canvas has brought all the echoes of childhood laughter and memories bubbling onto the surface of a giant golden life circle, a peaceful certainty that I am returning to this place where I feel a deep sense of belonging. I left this home when I was 26. I am 71 now and have experienced the roller coaster of life. Though I never would have anticipated being home again, I am at peace, trusting in the process of my life's journey.

Although I have always enjoyed creative expression it wasn't until 13 years ago that I started to paint. Immediately I loved the process of developing my skills, true to my long background in aircraft modification design with all its parameters. As my painting skill developed and the drama in my life took the forefront I felt a deep desire to express freedom for my true self through painting. I began to add vibrant colours to my canvases and felt pure delight and laughter in my soul. My heart began to sing, and I found a balance of structure and freedom of expression in my painting. I realised I needed to find the same balance in my life. As I have settled into the peace of returning home and reflecting, I am filled with joy and inspiration that my path led me to begin painting all that I love. I am filled with anticipation for the next years of my life's journey, and I feel confident that I am able to capture this joy in my paintings. I welcome the future.

This morning I watched the sunrise over the lake and marvelled at its vibrant beauty. The light is where I am.

Geri Thom, born and raised in Prince George, B.C., enjoyed a lifelong career in mechanical drafting and design. It began with logging and pulp mill equipment in Prince George, then trucks with Western Star and finally aircraft modification with KF Aerospace in Kelowna. She also volunteered for many years in the fields of suicide intervention and education. Following her retirement in 2010, she carved a new life path into painting. She has been a dedicated student with Gene Prokop from Pro's Art school of Edmonton through his satellite classes in Kelowna for the past 13 years and has come to love the process of painting with oils. After living in Kelowna for the past 45 years she recently returned to her hometown of Prince George to travel new paths on her journey with painting and life. She has sold her works privately and through commissions. During the last three years several of her works were used by the film industry in movies filmed in Kelowna.

FOLLOWING THE BEAT OF MY HEART

Rose Sexsmith



Quite a few years ago I was dating a fellow who bought me a Ukulele.

I had never played anything other than a karaoke machine but I wanted to learn. The then-date and I attended a couple of Ukulele Meet-Ups where I only sang along because I didn't know a single chord. My ukulele sat untouched on a shelf for many years after our relationship ended, and then one day the thought went through my head that the city's recreation program probably had ukulele lessons, and they did. After the first lesson, I got it. Plus I was addicted. There are tons of websites of ukulele songs and chords, and I printed out and tried every song I could think of.

My joy was contagious, and I turned many friends on to the friendly, happy ukulele. My friends felt as I did and they turned others on to the mighty ukulele too. A few of us started meeting every week and after a while named ourselves 'The Ukeladies'. Every time we get together though, not only do we sing and strum; we share, we laugh, we cry and we rejoice. Music brings people together. We are now a group of 10 fairly committed women whose ages span from 41 to 76 years, proving that age truly is only a number. We all look forward to our weekly get-together, which sometimes feels like therapy because music is good for the soul.

Amazingly enough, we have played in public as a group a number of times. Our last gig was at a beautiful gal's hundredth birthday party. She requested us after seeing us at another gig. Mind you, her niece and great-niece are part of The Ukeladies, so she may be a little biased.

After years of waiting at jam nights for my turn to sing, I can play or try to play any song I can find chords for. My ukulele is my friend and companion, and I love all my ukuleles. A friend told me once that the ukulele is the gateway instrument, and I think she's right. I now own an electric mandolin, an electric ukulele, an electric manobird (mandolin/ukulele), guitelele (guitar/ukulele), an acoustic/electric tenor ukulele, one acoustic concert ukulele and two acoustic tenor ukuleles. Now I'm learning to play a baritone ukulele, which has four of the same strings as a guitar, which I also hope to learn one day.

I don't have a 'bucket list,' but I have a list I call 'Icing on my Cake.' These are events or experiences in my life that I could never have thought to put on a list of things I want to do, but being a part of The Ukeladies is now definitely on my list. Oh I love this group.

One day I was at the Mamas for Mamas Farm and was talking

Rose and friends





Top: Ukeladies

Above: At Provision Resources

to another woman who I happened to know. She mentioned that she had lost her singing voice and needed to find someone to replace her for what I thought she said was a retirement home gig. I offered my ukulele and me. She called the retirement home, and they invited me to give it a try. Oh my gosh, this definitely has been added to my Icing on my Cake list. I get to spend an hour with the awesomely wonderful people at Provision Resources every week. This hour fills my heart with Joy and Gratitude.

I don't just sit there and play for them. They have shakers, tambourines and drums, and I added a ukulele to their music box. They have added so much joy to my life, I get overwhelmed at times. They request songs, and if I don't have the chords and lyrics, I find them for the following week. They sing; some dance even if they're not verbal. I feel totally and completely Gratefully Blessed and Highly Favoured. Life brings these surprises into my life and I will stay open to receive these gifts.

Rose Sexsmith loves to say that she is "gratefully blessed and highly favoured." She just celebrated her 73rd birthday and is grateful as so many people haven't had the privilege. She loves her life and has always loved music. She was in the food and beverage industry for most of her adult life; she close to six years ago after selling beloved Rose's Waterfront Pub, which opened in 1993.

She has three sons, five grandsons and one granddaughter and she loves them all more than life itself. She has loved living in Kelowna since 1978 and is beyond grateful to be here, particularly before all the city's growth. Every day she walks her dog Molly, whom she loves so much. She feels fortunate that she's able to do yoga and that there's a yoga studio six minutes away from home. When people ask her what she does now that she's retired, she answers "whatever I want."

GATHERING TO PAINT

CREATING A SENSE OF SAFETY AND WONDER

Janet Stalenhoef



The Colours of Fall (collage with mixed media). These colours cry to be savoured as they take my breath away and then are taken in the wind. Beauty and suffering are held in its cycle and infinite line.



My focus in the art studio has for some time transitioned from painting a product, an image, and judging the critical merits of that to creating a space in which others have entered, and jointly we have explored the creative art-making process. This shared art making coupled with our exploration of current life situations and our thoughts and feelings on these has resulted in discoveries and insights about our common humanness. We have shared in numerous art-fueled phenomenological experiences where we became aware that, by looking deeper into our unique situations and challenges in life, we were also highlighting our common universal connection to this lived experience. *The World Arts Organization* describes expressive arts therapy as phenomenological, body based, arts-based psychotherapy. This therapeutic approach uses the creative process as practised in all forms of art making to help promote wellness and bring about greater personal awareness and possibly transformation.

I gathered a group of women who were curious about the therapeutic benefits of making art together. We witnessed the arrival of metaphors and images that surprised us and provided emotional release. They taught us much about ourselves and others, presented gifts of synchronicity and universal connection and left us pondering whether coincidence or something other had occurred. Most of our two-hour online gatherings happened from June 2021 to February 2024. My role morphed from that of therapist to volunteering my time and negotiating with the group a new construct around which we could use the creative process and art making for therapeutic benefit without it being therapy. The intention was to fuel creativity and have a safe non-judging outlet where the focus would be on the creative process, not a final product.

This virtual space we created was a shared holding space and also contained a therapeutic atmosphere. One example of its therapeutic value was an increased awareness of our own physical sensations that happened in response to a shift in psychological state, and we learned to attune better to these. For instance, awareness of our body's felt sense indicated that we had entered a relaxed state, some relief of emotional tension, and at the same time we enjoyed the adrenalin and the anticipation felt in our bodies when we started to create something new. We embraced our computer screens and transitioned from our separateness to our togetherness in an environment that was poised to hold and nurture.



Top: *Calm and Tension*. The perpetual place to be free, where she can drop a shoulder slightly, preparing to release and swing, a pitch, an effort of sort. Girl winding up to deliver. (The invitation was to explore free play and even close one's eyes while using art materials and then to look for shapes or images in the resulting image.)

Above: *Grief Catcher* (collage with natural materials and connecting red wool)

Some of the gatherings I facilitated began with an art technique, and sometimes I shared a metaphor that surrounded an idea or theme that came to me somewhat intuitively just before we gathered or presented itself to me during our check in. Then I invited a particular use of art materials, with a specific art-making approach. These invitations were optional springboards offered to help stimulate the creative imagination and help us transition from shyness and self-criticism to allowing the art materials to lead and dance with us; thus ultimately the hope was that we would enter a shared liminal space. This transitional or transformative inner space we enter when we deeply surrender to the creative process. It is sometimes identified by some as a psychological or spiritual state, and often while in this state we don't resonate with the concept of time. I believe this is a grounding state where we can find meaning and insight into our questions, self-expression and self-realization, and as a result we can nurture greater insight and also hopefully wellness. I share a quote by James Baldwin, brought to our sessions by one participant for us to explore: "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers" (*Your Brain on Art*, Magsamen and Ross, 2023). Art is a method of inquiring about life more broadly.

The art materials we used were sparse, and we focused on working with what we had. Each participant drew from their own particular resources, mostly watercolours and various mark makers. At the beginning some had crayons and office pens, or materials found in old boxes of children or grandchildren's stuff. As in life generally we have to make use of what we have when we find our circumstances are short on resources, which calls upon a good deal of creative problem solving. We did collage with various art and natural materials, such as tissue paper, recycling items and treasures found in our homes. Some of us did purchase more materials along the way, especially so we could expand our multi-media exploration.

In late winter and early spring of 2024 the natural environment was shifting between melting and freezing, so change was evident. Six of us signed on and for the next two hours set our personal and private intentions. This written intention helps target our focus and may include exploring a specific technique, releasing the art critic by simply declaring the time as engagement in free play, expressing specific emotions, or simply taking time for personal quiet engagement in art making. Working with watercolour and mark makers at hand, I remember I reviewed simple watercolour painting techniques and then everyone began art making. Everyone's audio remained on, and we shared the music of paper moving, brushes and objects scratching surfaces, spraying, shuffling and so on. I often would stop and just take in the sounds that identified our simultaneous being in the moment.

After we cleaned up and wrote, interacting reflectively with the images or shapes that arrived in the art, we were given the opportunity to share our choice of resulting product, the written words and the insight gained during the creating process. This was optional, and I have borrowed from the work of Pat B. Allen, a well-known expressive arts therapist and teacher, the



Courage, Caressing my Lines (blind contour drawing)

I am currently grateful for the new skills and perspective I have gained as the result of my shift in focus: to the art-making process versus the creation of an art product.

practice of silent witnessing, namely saying nothing but listening carefully while others are taking their turn for sharing.

That day we were struck by the phenomenological experience when we became aware that we all spoke to deeply moving images around the metaphor of water. The images and physically felt sensations brought us to the depths of grief and also to the sensation of exultation of joy and gratitude for life. We shared works that described places of rapid and powerful currents alongside quiet stillness in the natural environment. I felt the sensation of being in the flow, being both carried and tossed about by forces out of my control, and the falling and rising in and out of the deep. Tears flowed in the described images alongside the unspoken descriptions of our individual and shared journeys. I remember feelings of gratitude for these women, whose empathy so palpable and powerful was always given without hesitation. Rather than becoming impenetrable or insensitive, which could have resulted from their life experiences which also included extreme hardships as well as bountiful times, their sensitivity was immediate. At the end of our session one of the members spoke. We were aware she had lost a daughter a few years ago, but not that this day was the anniversary of her passing. She expressed how she wasn't initially going to mention it or talk about her private feelings, but safety in the group made it possible for her to let us witness her deep pain.

I don't know why my paint brushes have sat in my studio and my other art-making materials have been repurposed to use towards a "high sensitivity low skill approach" (expressive arts therapies). This transformation began when I started to study art therapy and the expressive arts seriously. However, as I resolve to return to the painting easel and focus on painting as I once committed so much time and effort to it, I am currently grateful for the new skills and perspective I have gained as the result of my shift in focus: to the art-making process versus the creation of an art product. I am so grateful I have evolved in my approach to art making and have appreciated and shared in the immense joy and power of the creative process. Creativity I believe to be an innate and natural ability in everyone.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

FROM PSYCHOANALYST, TO BIOENERGY HEALER, TO AUTHOR

Ellen Lewinberg



I always thought I hated writing. At school in South Africa and through several careers, I could never think of anything to write about. This changed when I became a bioenergy healer, and I have now written one book and am working on a second.

I grew up in South Africa and left because I did not wish to live under the Apartheid regime. Before making Canada my home, I lived in Paris, London and Boston and, even though I do not like the cold, I feel that Canada has been very good to me and is a wonderful place to live.

I started my career as a social worker and then trained to become both a child psychoanalyst and an adult psychoanalyst. I worked for thirty years as an analyst and was urged by my mentor to write articles about the work I was doing. I managed (though it was like pulling teeth) to write three articles and present them at different psychoanalytic conferences. However, I found this so stressful that I decided I would not write any more. After working in the psychoanalytic field happily for so many years, I felt burned out and decided to work as a psychoanalyst part time and open a flower store with a friend. I had always loved plants and gardening but found the floral business very stressful as well (It was not like gardening at all).

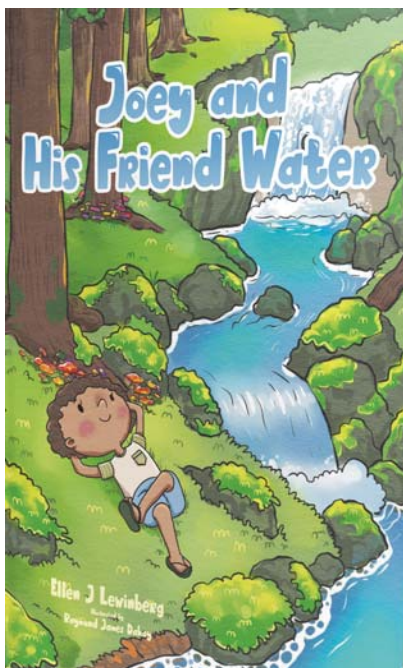
A short time later, I became ill and decided to work with a shaman. I had been exposed to sangomas, as shamans are called in South Africa, when I was young and was intrigued by their work. It was a more holistic way of working. As it happened, I had, long ago, read a book comparing the training of a sangoma with a Jungian psychoanalytic training. This book demonstrated how similar the trainings are, and I found this very interesting.

I found the shaman's way of working helpful. At one of her Sunday morning (drumming) sessions, I met someone who introduced me to energy work. I felt as though I had come home and started reading voraciously about bioenergy and shamanic healing. I was completely fascinated. The more I read the more convinced I became that I had finally found what I was meant to be when I "grew up."

I started learning more about shamanism and went back to South Africa to work with a sangoma there. Through the work I was able to meet some very old San healers and learn from them. Their method is to have all the women and children in the village gather in a circle where they sing, clap and dance. The men dance

Flower shop





Top: Ellen (left) with Mbali (medicine woman) and two San Hearts of the Spears healers (for scale, I am 5 ft. tall)

Middle: *Healing*

Bottom: Cover of *Joey and His Friend Water*

around the circle in single file. Eventually one or two of the medicine women are so full of energy (n'um) that they fall into trance and are able to heal whoever needs healing. They heal both physical and mental issues. They also heal using herbs, but I did not participate in that part of their work.

In addition, over a period of years, I took a number of training sessions in energy work: Reiki, the Bengston method, the Domancic method, pendulum work with Raymon Grace, and several other types. I gave up my psychoanalytic practice after offering all my patients energy treatments and finding that they felt so good after the energy work that they no longer wanted psychoanalysis. I have been practising energy work since that time and my reading in the field continues.

Once you start thinking about energy, it takes you everywhere. Everything is energy – you, me, the chair you are sitting on, nature and on and on. My reading led me into all sorts of places that I had never thought of before.

I came across Emoto Masaru, a Japanese scientist who worked with water, and found his work really intriguing. He would take water from a very pure stream in Japan and label it with words such as good, bad, love, hate, etc. He would then freeze it and when he put it under a microscope after freezing, he found that the water with the positive words froze into the shape of a beautiful snowflake and the negative words just created a blob. He went on from there to play music to water. It would respond to classical music with a beautiful snowflake and to hard rock with a blob. He wrote a few books about this and its application to our lives. I began thinking about Emoto's work and about the fact that we are about 60% water. I thought about this in relation to children and bullying, and finally I had found something to write about. It seemed to be a good way to combine my interest in health, nature and children. I felt that there had been so many scientific discoveries relating to water, plants and energy that children (and adults) were not yet learning about. This led me to write "*Joey and his Friend Water.*"

After publishing the book, I found that people who read it to their kids or grandkids contacted me and said they had learned so much. I am in the midst of writing a second book – "*Joey and His Friend Betty*" – because there is so much more to share. In the book *Joey and His Friend Water*, Joey is befriended by a stream that runs behind his house. Through this friendship he discovers Masaru Emoto's work, and the idea that, if you say nasty things to people, the water in their bodies is affected and vice versa. I bring in the work of Diane Beresford Kroeger – *To Speak for the Trees* – and other writers whose work I admire and feel that children need to know more about.

Soon after my book was published, I came across the work of Veda Austin. She has taken Masaru Emoto's work to a whole other level. She started by putting a petri dish of water over or under a photograph, freezing it and then taking a photograph of it. She found that the frozen water replicated the picture she had placed it near. Her work has become well known and she is now able to connect with water in different ways and get answers to questions she poses.



Ellen's first ice image

Ellen Lewinberg was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and is a graduate in Social Work from Witwatersrand University. She also has a master's degree in Social Work from the London School of Economics. Ellen has trained as both a child and adult psychoanalyst and worked in the field for over thirty years. She is currently practising as a bioenergy healer in Toronto.

Ellen has a keen interest in nature and the world around us and an interest in sharing it with young people and their families.

Her websites are
www.healingtransformation.ca and
www.ellenlewinbergauthor.ca

There are a number of other people who are inspiring me at the moment. One is Kenny Ansubel who gave a talk on the recent research into plants and animals. He is the head of the organization Bioneers. Here is what he had to say in part of a talk he gave which I found on YouTube: "Over the past two decades there has been a revolution in vegetal biology. Science now shows that plants appear to be sentient beings. They perceive light, smell, touch and many more variables than we do. They learn, remember and communicate. They exhibit the traits that we associate with personhood." I recall a book written in 1973, *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, in which they discovered that plants responded with what we might call fear even when someone only talked about injuring them.

I read voraciously and watch documentaries and whenever I come across some type of awe-inspiring information, I write it down in a notebook and begin to think of how to pass it on to children and their parents. My process seems to be to mull over the information for a long while, talk about it to whoever will listen, and try to find out more and more about it. Then I find it suddenly comes together and I am almost compelled to write about it. The first book I wrote, *Joey and his Friend Water*, I wrote in an afternoon. The second one, "Joey and his friend Betty," seems to be taking longer. I am struggling with how to talk about nature to children in a factual, but also spiritual way. There is so much to share. I want children to respect and be in awe of nature. I want to talk about the idea that we are all bodies of water, we take water in and we give water out, as do plants and animals. This is something else that connects us all.

Other ideas that I wish to incorporate are those of Brian Swimme, the cosmologist. I find his way of talking about cosmology fascinating and want children to look at the stars and open their minds to the idea that we are not only part of the earth, but part of the universe. At present I am in the phase where I am finding that ideas are swirling around in my mind and I feel I will never be able to bring them together in a coherent way. Author Penn Kemp has been my mentor and, as we talk, I feel the ideas beginning to gel. Here is a short paragraph from the beginning of my new work, "Joey and His Friend Betty":

"Betty insisted that she had to talk to the plants, to greet them. Sometimes she seemed to be listening to them. Her mother would say, "Plants don't talk!" But Betty knew that she could communicate with the plants, not exactly by talking. It was a feeling she got, and then she knew what they were saying. It was hard to explain, but she just knew. She felt that plants were living beings and so she always greeted them."

I am hoping that I will soon finish "Joey and His Friend Betty." If you wish to see the result of my process, you may read a copy of "Joey and His Friend Betty," when it is available on Amazon.

ALIGNING INTO SPIRIT

Roberta Pyx Sutherland



The Awakening

Not yet my 11th birthday
 my neck warm with braids
 In a park alone
 before me twice my height
 an easel
 yellow paint soft paper
 stray rivulets trickling
 never mind full attention
 on an undulating effortless
 fresh stroke from my brush

This golden line
 suddenly gave life
 volume to a sunlit branch
 an arbutus arc
 just above me.
 My eyes blinked tears,
 here was magic
 my brush, my tree,
 my sunlight.

No
 it wasn't mine
 only wet rivulets
 clear wet yellow.

Wooden brush in hand
 moss underfoot,
 a soft dappled space
 with enormous roots.
 I stand there still.

I easily recall these early experiences of remarkable natural beauty surrounding me. The rainbow prisms in layers of coloured mist at Niagara Falls on my third birthday or being transfixed by extraordinarily exquisite floral frost-patterns on our bathroom window. I was deeply puzzled that these fantastic displays were not crucial to others. Why? This was clearly the best of what life offered. There seemed no other option, I must share them.

Most of us who choose an artist's path don't have a choice. We are compelled in some instinctive way to engage and express, possibly the way birds are compelled to migrate. I can't recall a time this sense of mission wasn't with me. Any attempt to override this almost primal call felt like complete betrayal and would result in miserable depression. It remained clear the artist's path was a non-negotiable *fait accompli*.

Observing the patterns of nature continues to guide my process. On my first flight to India, the great Ganges stretched for miles below me, while the beautiful veins on the hands of the elderly passenger beside me repeated its distinctive flowing pattern. I soon realized the way cookies crumble, sidewalks break and mountain sides collapse is the same way the edges of continental plates separate. Patterns began to teach me how all things are completely connected, all within fascinating complexity. This realization remains the thrill of my life and the source of endless inspiration. These understandings particularly permeated the *Terre Mémoire* series 1995-2012, when fragments of canvas I had buried and composted created textures resembling land mass seen from space.

Another formative influence was the exotic world of Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1940s. I yearned for and saved weeks of my allowance to purchase small hand-painted treasures, porcelain figures, tiny dolls, paper fans and parasols. Even the calligraphic price tags on the vegetables were beautiful to me. The skilled spontaneous line I found in the vegetables remains as something I strive to emulate.

I craved wildness where the patterns of nature dominated. Where even small inspiring encounters would be rapturous, often experienced as orgasms in the soles of my feet. Yet, over time this intensity began to feel very lonely, and in the 1970s and 80s my early puzzlement deepened into isolation and frustration. I didn't have the confidence to believe my work would be valued. It became obvious I could never create art that in any way compared with the gorgeous complexity I found in the natural world. Despite my commitment I was not up to the task. Somehow Zen practice allowed this to soften. Though I couldn't paint the beauty of the moon, perhaps it was a



Top left: *Climate for Change*, from *Terre Mémoire*, 2004, found canvas with acrylic and gold leaf, 60 x 36 inches

Above: *Roadside Attractions IX*, 18 x 22 inches. Pastel with charcoal and gouache

Top right: *Studio installation: Mount Burnham*, series. Charcoal, watercolour and gouache



worthy endeavour to be a finger faithfully pointing to the moon.

In part my lack of confidence was a result of the sexism experienced during my art training, told on several occasions I was “wasting everyone’s time,” I “didn’t belong,” or I “should be at home with my children.” Unfortunately, I wasn’t mature enough to realize these incidents were not as personal as they seemed. Gender discrimination towards female artists is now an acknowledged part of the art world.

In response I wanted to return to the root of art. I moved to Europe, travelling to research prehistoric art, visiting the cave paintings of France and Spain from the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods (many now closed to the public). Again, it was the repetitive mark-making that intrigued me. The *Patterned Women* and *Fragile Existence* series were a result of these trips, initiating a passion for travelling to work and a delight in attending residencies.

On a recent trip to the hot springs near Nakusp in the Kootenay region of British Columbia, I encountered Mount Burnham. I had to stay and paint this mountain. The longer I looked the more fascinating it became. Within a few days I painted it over and over...again and again. I was reminded of Hiroshige’s *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* and Cezanne’s *Thirty-six Views of Mont Sainte Victoire* (now there are another 23 views of Mount Burnham to complete).

John Cage said, “if you’re bored doing something for five minutes do it for ten, if you are bored doing it for ten, do it for twenty minutes, and after twenty you won’t be bored anymore.” I wasn’t bored when I began painting Mount Burnham, but my fascination only became more intense as I continued, proving Cage’s point.

Becoming immersed in the details of a subject usually indicates the beginning of a series and is an ongoing and welcome aspect of my practice. I do my best work in these periods of immersion.

Drawing, sculpture, installation, painting, printmaking or photography,



An Oracle's Message, from Dreamers and Dancers

Roberta Pyx Sutherland is based in Victoria, B.C. From her first solo exhibition at the Victoria Art Gallery in the 1980's her work has focused on the relationships of cosmic patterning, divine intelligence, and the inter-connection of all life forms. Sutherland uses a wide range of media including hand dug pigments, natural inks, photography, and handmade papers. She also creates site-specific installations, the most well-known, an Andy Warhol tribute for the Hornby Island Arts Council, one of the world's largest Tomato Soup Cans.

She received her BFA (hon) from the University of Victoria and trained in printmaking at the University of Sheffield, UK. Sutherland is a qualified Shambhala Art instructor. She has studied Ikebana with the Ohara School, Zen calligraphy in Japan and Vajrayana mandala painting in Nepal. While in Nepal she helped initiate 'Tara Abbey Nunnery.'

Sutherland's work continues to reflect 'The Northwest School'. Her mentors were Jack Shadbolt, Don Jarvis and Jack Wise. She has taught at the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts and mentored their artist in residence program.

Sutherland exhibits in Canada, Mexico, and Europe. Her work is represented in public collections including the Canada Council for the Arts, Burnaby Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Toronto Public Library, University of British Columbia, Concordia University Library, and Bibliothèque de Genève.

For many years she has been represented by Editart Gallery in Geneva. Gallery 8 on Salt Spring Island also exhibits her work.

the medium is not what matters. I don't need to decide what kind of artist I am, though I started by saying, Why am I doing this? Finally, that voice is silent, finally I know why. Expressing and sharing creative joy is what my life is for. Now, after maintaining my practice for decades there is only gratitude for the years of studio time. And the voice in my head that asks, Does the world really need another painting? has also grown silent.

Jack Shadbolt gave me a wonderful and supportive metaphor: "When you begin painting you find a tap and turn on your inspiration, you're not sure about the strength or duration of the flow. During the middle years, it's like a garden hose, much more reliable. Finally, if you have carried on with diligence, it's like picking up a fire hose, inspiration will gush powerful, and pure. Watch out and hold on!"

A great privilege of aging is a grateful understanding that intensity of seeing is the bedrock of my creative practice. Years of tuning into landscape, fascinated by emerging light and fading horizons, being continually distracted by the fine detail and pattern of exquisite nature, creates a wonder world worth sharing. This commitment to the natural world with a deep appreciation for Asian aesthetics and spiritual values also determines the principles of the Northwest School. This group of painters, including Mark Tobey, Morris Graves and my mentor Jack Wise are the artists with whom I closely identify.

The alignment between aesthetics and spiritual values supports my sense that information gained from painting can come from a refined source just beyond my grasp. I feel myself part of something much larger than can be explained if I explore it, and beauty keeps me close to that something.

The wisdom of age honours a need to prioritize while limitations create a demand for focus. Yet, as physical abilities diminish, my perceptions increase, reminding me of a line from the I Ching: "By narrowing the field of our endeavour, we achieve constant devotion."

I am distilling my life by 'stilling' my life – to allow an environment of grace within my physical limits.

"I would like to paint the way birds sing." Claude Monet

STAYING WITH THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY



Linda Lovisa

How did I get to where I am today? I trusted those along the way who originally guided me towards the process. It began when I was a child. In fact, I cannot remember a time when I was not drawing something. It was my world. I sketched animals and then mailed them to my grandparents and a pen-pal in Africa!

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” my grandfather asked. “An artist!” I replied. His response, “What kind of artist? There are many types of art forms.” I responded quickly: “I want to explore everything.” As a 10-year-old, “I want to explore everything” was the first thing that came to mind, but the answer should have been, “I’m not sure.” After some thought, I looked at my grandfather and said, “I want to paint.” He was the first person in my life to initiate the process by buying my very first oil paints – red, yellow, blue, white and black. They came with a note saying, “If you want to be a real artist, you need to practise a lot and to learn how to mix colours.”

So began my endless passion for colour that has stayed with me for my entire artistic career. I painted on everything and soon realized that oils don’t work very well on paper. Instead, I used pieces of wood and even rocks. All were very much a part of my learning process. It was a continuous exploration. It became apparent to my grandfather that I was on a journey when I started sending things painted on different surfaces. I received a parcel with canvas boards. I was so excited. Later, in my teens, my first actual canvas was one that I stretched onto a piece of plywood! I didn’t know about stretcher bars at that time.

I read many books at the school library about famous artists. I read about their techniques and of course I tried them. I was not happy with my first attempts but I didn’t give up. I trusted that the process would get me there one day. I wondered, How will I know when I’m *there*? My mentors were my grandfather, who was always encouraging me, my high school art teacher, an artist who lived nearby, friends, and of course my family. It is a long journey. Are you ever really ‘there’? How does one know? I have since learned that it is not about getting anywhere specific, as I once thought. I learned that ‘getting there’ *was* actually the process. It is never-ending. What a great revelation that was for me. It was a relief; it became more about trusting the process than reaching an undefined destination. Take one step; repeat, always exploring.

Part of the process is being aware of doors opening and in being

Linda Lovisa, née Frechette, 1967





Top left. *Parliament Hill*, inspired by a postcard my grandfather sent me. Painted with leftover paint-by-number oils, 1968

Top right. *Bonne Appétit*. Acrylic, 2022

Middle. *Black tree*. Oil, 1976

Above. *Sunset at Big White Ski Resort*.

Acrylic, 2022



sufficiently open-minded, and sometimes brave, to step through them; to make a decision when you come to a crossroads and to choose a direction you may not have chosen before. It can be scary. There are unexpected obstacles that arise, and you are the only one who can decide the next step. It is part of the creative process that molds you into where you are at any particular moment. Who you will be in 10 years is unknown as you continue to explore.

As I continue on my artistic journey with what I have learned and continue to learn, I now share with other artists as their teacher or as their mentor. This is the next step of my process – encouraging others as they travel their own artistic journey. It is a journey. For some it is short and for others it's an entire lifetime. As I reviewed my works to include in this article, I found it difficult to choose because there are so many things that I have explored.

Years ago when I developed an allergy to oil paints, I explored watercolour and pastels. As much as I enjoy working in many different mediums, I missed my first love, oils. As a result, I tried to paint with acrylics many times, became frustrated and struggled. Eventually I found a way to paint with acrylics in a manner similar to oils. I stayed with the process of discovery. This brings me back to when I was 10 years old. My response was "I want to explore everything." It may have been a hasty response at the age of 10, but as I reflect on my artistic career I am glad that I have explored so much and continue to do so.

In 2009, I was asked if I could submit an article for *Sage-ing with Creative Spirit*, Issue 5. My title was "Art For Change." I was honoured to be asked. The thought that they felt I had something to contribute was very special for me. This opportunity opened new doors for me personally, especially at that time, as I had just opened an art gallery. More than just another business, I had a vision of how I could contribute to my community. This inspirational magazine helped influence my personal growth in many ways. It reinforces my belief that, no matter what stage you are in in your life, continuing to be creative has many benefits. This also furthered my gallery vision as something that had importance on a broader scale. Owning the gallery and studio was far from an easy part of the process. Many thought that it would fail. But I stayed with my vision and created opportunities for others to explore their own processes, whether they participated in classes or attended themed events and fundraisers. I wanted people to come and see what the artists in the area had to offer and to educate the public on the artists' own personal processes. This was very important to me because without knowing an artist's process, it is just another nice painting, piece of pottery, stone sculpture, beaded necklace, etc.



Top left. *Grape Jelly*. Acrylic, 2023
 Top right. *Tree Climber's View*, 2023. First Place award, Federation of Canadian Artists
 Above. *Springer Creek*. Acrylic, 2023



How do you measure success? For me it was not so much about the dollar figure as I struggled to keep the gallery doors open, more that I would not give in easily – and many would have given up long before I did. I had the help of many wonderful friends along the way; I owe them endless gratitude for their assistance. My strong belief of how important the arts are in the community was so strong that it kept me going through thick and thin. I believed that I needed the gallery to stay open for the sake of the community, and that included the many artists whose works were displayed there. When I think back to those years in business, the benefits to the people in my community far outweigh the monthly bottom line. To this day my creative circle continues to grow in ways I had not dreamed possible. Even though the gallery ultimately closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that door is still wide open in my heart for those who continue to connect with my create spirit.

No matter the path, yours is a personal journey that can be shared through your art. Create for yourself and enjoy the process along the way. There are many mountains to climb in your artistic career. It happens one step at a time. Take your time, have faith. You *will* get 'there'.

Linda Lovisa paints Alla Prima (direct approach). This type of painting keeps the colours fresh and vibrant while she mixes directly on the canvas. Her techniques include Impressionism, symbolism and abstraction. Linda's paintings have appeared in exhibits across Canada and the United States and can be found in private and public collections nationally and internationally.

"I love the outdoors. My paintings are a visual journal of my adventures. They reflect the places I have been and the beauty I have seen. I am drawn by the light, colour and movement in the subjects and scenes I choose. I have been creating for as long as I can remember. My hope is that my art will inspire others to want to create too." Please visit www.lindalovisaartcanada.ca lindalovisaartcanada@gmail.com 250 859 0918

MY CREATIVE PATH



Sharon McMullan-Baron

Creative processes are unique. Mine flourishes in a nurturing, playful, curious environment, but my creativity may be stilled by a variety of obstacles. I know what works for me and what enemies work against me.

Here's what I do. I strive to afford my art and creativity the time and space it needs—in my heart and in my day planner. One of my resource books is *The War of Art – Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles* by Stephen Prescott. He says, “Do It. Stop resisting. Use your gifts.” I carve a two-hour writing block into my week. My productivity blooms and I know my artistic muscle memory is stronger.

I lay out my preferred blue-ink pens and paper or paints or textiles. I close the door to keep out the dog, household distractions and nasty inner critical voices. Simply closing the door helps me quiet the negativity. I settle my breath, relax and open myself to the world of possibilities. Then, I grant myself permission to explore, to play, to rage, to inform. I jump right in. Making art is an act of ‘Hope’.

Structure is key, but spontaneity happens too. I am ready for that moment. When something catches my eye or ear and intrigues me in a most unexpected way, I snatch it. I tuck that inspirational tidbit into a notebook for further exploration.

One day I drove pothole-ridden Baseline Road, and the first line of a haiku juddered into my head. At the next red light, I jotted it down onto the back of a dry-cleaning receipt. Now I keep notepads everywhere: in my purse, backpack and kitchen. A clipboard sleeps under my bed to capture the morning's liminal wonderings and wanderings. I admit using the nuggets gleaned from my habit of eavesdropping at the grocery store check-out, music festivals and coffeeshops.

I notice when I'm moving in a rhythmic way – walking or vacuuming – my attention is at half mast; the inspiration spontaneously arrives. Five days a week, I hike the wooded Deermound dog park trails with my dog. The steady walking in nature relaxes me and, out of the wide blue Alberta sky, ideas and insights jump into my head. Back at the car, I sit in the parking lot and fill pages in the notebook waiting on the passenger seat. Many people have a eureka moment in the shower, when the white noise of water and the bathroom fan drown other engaging sounds. I have. And yes, I have a notebook in the bathroom too.

I don't always float easily along a river of creative flow. Sometimes I'm stuck. Up the creek, without a paddle or capsized, or I'm headed towards the rocks or spinning in an eddy going nowhere. Stuck happens and for many

When something catches my eye or ear and intrigues me in a most unexpected way, I snatch it.



Left: Always at the Ready
Right: Always at the Ready 2



library is vast. I must be mindful as the research rabbit hole can lure me far and away.

It is key for me to have a handle on these types of limitations as I strive to build good habits. I think about a wheelbarrow trundling over a field. The second time the wheel follows the first path. The wheel rides more easily within the initial groove. Over and over within the same path. The habit becomes well entrenched and the work is eased. Hooray!

Two types of obstacles interfere with my creative work and can be corrected. Emotionally triggered limitations are worse for me. Imposter Syndrome slithers in when negative voices crawl into my ear, clench my heart and freeze my hand. It is one thing to receive feedback with the intention of strengthening my art – I want to get better; it is another matter altogether when the remarks are indifferent, jealousy-laden or cruel. I am taxed with the burden of erecting and upholding barriers to protect myself and nurture my flame of creativity. It requires energy to silence the voices and their limiting beliefs. It is an effort to ignore them. It takes more work to banish those people who are not genuine assets.

A Thousand Angels



Some days, weeks or seasons, life is tough and I do not have the emotional bandwidth to create. Fallow times are important too. I am comfortable resting and restoring 'Me'. I'm also comfortable incubating ideas. They are born when the time is right. Patience is part of the creative path too. Patience is the twin sister of persistence. I strive to ensure my productivity is not sidelined by perfectionism. Writers know a first draft sparkles with potential and needs multiple revisions. Stopping to revise is not being stuck. Editing is a phase of writing.

What about good limitations? I like the ones that force my creativity in a new direction. Deadlines glue me to my writing desk. Painting with a restricted palette challenges me to play in a new way. These learnings bring me back to



Serenity

It takes a village to practise solitary endeavours.

the joy I find in my creative expressions. I like the process and the results.

What is the final element of my creative process? Connection. Steadfast support keeps my heart full and uplifts me on the days when my 'stuck' happens. I know who to call. And I give that same loving energy to friends who flag or falter. It takes a village to practise solitary endeavours. I know the creative path is not linear. It can be solitary or collaborative and may feel as though it is an uphill slog knee deep in snow! My curiosity and imagination are a huge part of my heart and soul.

So, my dear creative friends, sharpen your tools, settle your breath and busy brain and see what you will find. The Muse will land on your shoulder butterfly-soft and quiet. Have fun exploring.

Sharon McMullan-Baron loves the arts – visual, textile, literary, music and ballet. She's an avid reader and participated in a book club years before Oprah. Sharon is a buyer of books, a user and advocate for public libraries. She taught public school and served on numerous community and provincial boards for literacy, libraries, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and CKUA Radio. She's a wife, Mum to three, Nana to four, and has a betta fish named Hal. Sharon is the proud parent to a successful visual artist. You can find her short fiction in seven anthologies, *Sharp Magazine* and the March 2024 issue of *Sage-ing*. She performed her poetry at the Edmonton 2022 Poetry Festival and was commissioned for a piece by Edmonton's the University of Alberta Women's Club.

Reach her at smcb@telusplanet.net

A DARK FOREST

Robert MacDonald

*“Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.”*
– Dante Alighieri, Inferno, Canto I

“The universe is a dark forest. Every civilization is an armed hunter stalking through the trees like a ghost, gently pushing aside branches that block the path and trying to tread without sound. Even breathing is done with care. The hunter has to be careful, because everywhere in the forest are stealthy hunters like him. If he finds other life – another hunter, an angel or a demon, a delicate infant or a tottering old man, a fairy or a demigod – there’s only one thing he can do: open fire and eliminate them.”
– Liu Cixin

“This is what I believe: That I am I. That my soul is a dark forest. That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest. That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back. That I must have the courage to let them come and go. That I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women. There is my creed.”
– D. H. Lawrence

My writings arise from a dark forest. They are gatherings, probes and proofs that I have been creating almost daily over multiple decades. They are the unrelenting product of my imagination. In their beginnings, they found inspiration somewhere near here:

“At the point of the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the generations became divided in a very crucial way.

The people who had passed puberty at the time of the bomb found they were incapable of conceiving of life without a future. Their patterns of habit had formed, the steady job, the pension, the mortgage, the insurance policy, personal savings, support and respect for the protection of the law, all the paraphernalia of constructive, secure family life. They had learned their game and it was the only game they knew. To acknowledge the truth of their predicament would be to abandon the whole pattern of their lives.

The people who had not yet reached puberty at the time of the bomb were incapable of conceiving of life with a future.”
– Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture, 1970

My known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest.

Help is Not On the Way

Inveterate sailors drift into
hard draft, bad winds, hardly upright
to undertake a pretence that
they have everything invested
into anything worth
favour, beyond their far frigid
floundering.

Empathetic pastors demand
supplicants embrace contradictions,
easy answers, flimsy virtues,
pray and pay down meekly, sink
or swim, while they
swindle, flaunt and fly away to
mansions.

Conflicted bureaucrats pretend to
know what's best, invent endless
prevarications, every shuck
that should have jived,
empty expectations, cruel
roadblocks to any possible
utopia.

Pretentious writers reveal that words
are their best chance to confess,
to find faint hope of redemption,
to invent dreams, to be fertile
in fecund gardens that
implant despair, that grift
wholeness.

Stalwart farmers dig to find deep
hope, force their way down below
forests to join the furtive,
to find their long lost last
ancestors in the peace
place hiding below, beyond
dreamtime.

My writings, just as bread rises from the fecundity of yeast, arise from the unrelenting complexity of human life, and the often harsh, tragic, unforgiving torment of time, friction, circumstance and foment. I drew, and draw, inspiration from it and them all.

My writings arise to interrogate, invent, preserve, elevate, treasure and celebrate. They probe ideas, people and events that might explain soon to be forgotten times. And as such, they plead forgiveness for the failures of hope and faith, and the fecklessness of understanding.

My writings admit that discernment is difficult, even at the best of times. Such an obviously fragile enterprise exposes how easy it is to stumble on the road of life, of course, and how wrong turns get taken, how life sometimes proposes a way to come out somewhere near even, even as now, at the worst of times, and maybe the end of times.

My writings are drawn from a collection of notebooks I have long used to document my life. A life generally defined by optimism, exploration and creativity, with bitter notes thrown in to keep it from unreeling into happy fish stories. There are actually a few fish in my poems, as wild life, wildlife and the wilderness were a constant companion, pursuit and pleasure. Nevertheless, grave laments and morbid anticipations play a recurrent role in the intrigues and insights unfolding through my musings, mumbles and memories.

My writings resist dipping their often tender toes into the shallow depths of branding, or any of the other toxic narratives of innovation, or any embracing of the last vain vestiges of the unrelenting scourge of capitalism.

My writings also propose we understand why the darkness that haunts our pursuits is not the narrative, that we might look out for something uplifting in the only world left for us, in spite of our evident imperfections, before it is too late. In other words, my writings want us to go back home while we still can, get our shit together and stand tall while facing into the multiple disasters heading our way.

My writings seem to intuit that whirlwinds blow this way: hot hate first, then darkness and disdain, then astonishing stupidity, and, eventually, a darkness beyond our ken. We find ourselves, our friends and families and our community somewhere on that spectrum. Beware the consequences.

My writings propose that should we care to turn our soon to be grief-scarred face against the prevailing, let's hope we can pray – for whatever reason, by whatever means – to find a sanctuary place somewhere out into the vast sorrow rushing towards us. And in that place may we find an uplifting solace. That may be our last refuge against the relentless incoming perdition.

My writings, while they're at it, take lessons from vibrant voices from the last century to help me understand, and maybe navigate, our wonder, our wounds and our unwinding:

"I tell you that what has changed is the whole conception of human life – that men of every race on this earth may have the same opportunity to live beautifully – to live

The Marks of Makers

Iconic places to discover, and move
into, as bright spirits discover lift,
where insights instruct, arise:

Dusty carpentry shops, rich scent
of wood and varnish, make toil
surrender, signal trial by error.

Wet lowlands, fecund amid decay,
rot, ruin, grime amid glory, soil
and air rich past any pathos.

Widow gardens, making easy amends
of distraction, as tears lift bulbs
to sunlight, forgiving sorrow.

Decaying cabins in ill woods, artists
building sanctuaries, tucked away
in easily deprived landscapes.

Offshore, grim boats, brined with guts,
salt slick and expectation, nets
lifting toward revelations.

Laboratories, discovering potential
purpose, solutions, possibilities,
constantly recalculating hope.

Promise schools harbouring children,
striving for better, for the insight
to imagine, to gift, to conjure.

Urgent suburbs, festering edge of civility,
hunkered down into easy pretend
worlds, ideals left behind.

Bright hospitals, last chance to make
amends, create life, take it back,
test limits, invent forever.

in purity without fear or hunger or hatred – as brothers, not as brutes tearing through these hideous swamps of ignorance and war. Men speak of a belief in God. I am beginning to understand what every Christ – and their skins have been every color – what every Christ has taught: That love of God is love of mankind. That no one can profess to love God while he hates the least of his fellows. Jesus, if he were on earth right now, would fight to free men from oppression and evil and war, and you who have made a pious mockery of his every commandment – you would kill Him.”

– Kenneth Patchen, *Sleepers Awake*, 1946

My writings ask whether we can forgive ourselves for the ruins of our wildly wrong expectations of our ability to give and get grace and goodness, to receive and give compassion, to reclaim the shallowness of our unrelenting acquisitions of land and objects, to maintain our distance from the horrific dangers our children and grandchildren will face. Is that too much to expect? Of course not.

My writings are an expression of my soul, as all writing should be. I find myself in the midst of things, and I look for the meaning, the soul outside of the machine, the hope hidden in the middle of chaos. I struggle and question the fundamentals, I seek forgiveness, ask the powers that prevail to lift me into grace. I look for inspiration from those more gifted than I, from those who may have figured out the script:

“There are two types of writers, the architects and the gardeners. The architects plan everything ahead of time, like an architect building a house. The gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it. They kind of know what seed it is, they know if they planted a fantasy seed or mystery seed or whatever. But as the plant comes up and they water it, they don’t know how many branches it’s going to have, they find out as it grows.”

– George R.R. Martin

My writings ask if it is too late for us. Yes, of course. For our children? No, not quite yet. But not because of anything we’ve done. Instead, it will be their luck and lottery, and a lot of prayer and good fortune that will fare them as well as they can, given the prevailing circumstances.

My writings proclaim, nevertheless: fare us all well for our however brief while, while we are still here, let us learn what we still can from our mistakes, while we still can, until we reach the inevitable vanishing point.

“Concerning all acts of initiative and creation there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to one that could not have otherwise occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising one’s favour of all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no-one could have dreamed would have come their way.”

– William Hutchinson Murray

CONTEMPLATING HOW TO TRUST

Laura Foster

Thanks to all contributors, this issue of the journal is a great collection of thoughts on “trusting the process.” It led me to ponder further, how do we really do that in art and in life? A tendency I can have is to want to be in control and to have certainty, rather than let go and trust, and I need to make a conscious effort otherwise. Of course we can’t be in complete abandon all the time, there has to be an ebb and flow, and finding a way to stand in the balance. In my art, one way I have learned to loosen up is to start an art studio session using a mindful approach to creating mandalas (circular compositions) with watercolour, using a technique called wet on wet, which basically means taking a brush and dropping colour onto an already prepared wet surface.

The manifesto on the back of each *Sage-ing* issue encourages you to engage in your inner life and to experience the grace of wisdom, to express gratitude for your gifts and to share them. This is the spiritual dimension of creative aging. As I ponder this, I am drawn to writers who have influenced me in the past with their wisdom for navigating this dimension of life.

One such writer is Richard Rohr, a national bestselling author and globally recognized ecumenical teacher. Rohr’s teaching is grounded in the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy and practices of contemplation. I was drawn back to his work this summer as I pondered uncertainty, letting go and trusting the process, not just in my art but my inner life.

In one of his books titled *Yes, And... Daily Meditations*, Rohr writes on trusting and letting go of certainty poignantly. He provides a refreshing yet challenging alternative to all-or-nothing thinking. He posits, “Yes/And thinking leads to a third way, which is neither fight nor flight, but standing in between...” (p.403). Though it is from a specific Christian perspective, I find much of the wisdom offered to be relevant for all faith traditions and world views. This book of daily meditations is like a synopsis of many of Rohr’s texts. It is a deep expression of spirituality from a contemplative perspective, and it is best to read it as it is intended as a daily resource for meditation. This allows time to chew the morsels of wisdom a bit at a time. Having said that, I find it’s not easy to put it down after reading just one meditation because each one draws me to seek more in the next.

In this world we are living in with polarized religious and political views, this offering of an alternative, of what Rohr

Painting a watercolour mandala



calls non-dualistic thought is as refreshing for the mind as a nice cool dip in the lake on a hot day.

Here are some favourite excerpts, tidbits of wisdom I have chosen to tantalize your meditative taste buds:

On literalism:

“Literalism is the lowest and least level of meaning... willful people use the Scripture literally when it serves their purposes... willing people let the scriptures change them instead of using them to change others.” (p. 13)

On worry:

When you are worried “you cannot have faith... when you cannot enjoy [nature] don’t waste time thinking you can enjoy God... If you can do that, it only gets bigger, deeper, wider, higher, deeper, and better...” (p.139)

On perfection:

“[It] is not the elimination of imperfection, as we tend to think. Divine perfection is, in fact, the ability to recognize, forgive, and include imperfection...” (p.367)

On trust:

“...faith might be precisely an ability to trust the river, to trust the Flow and the Lover. It is a process that we don’t have to change, coerce, or improve, we only need to allow the Flow to flow through us...” (p.107)

There is so much more in Rohr’s collection of 366 meditations, one for each day of the year. If you are curious and seeking to be challenged in your world view I highly recommend *Yes, and...* I found that, as suggested in a review on the back cover, these meditations were not what you might expect, boring or bland, rather they “are exciting, soul-renewing, and deep.” I found that reading one of these meditations followed by creating a watercolour mandala to be an effective beginning to a session of art-making, allows me to trust and create from this deeper, soulful place.

Reading one of these meditations followed by creating a watercolour mandala ... allows me to trust and create from this deeper, soulful place.

The Journal of Creative Aging

SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,
GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE
Okanagan Institute

NUMBER 50, FALL 2024

ISSN 1920-5848

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Our Manifesto

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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