

# INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

OCTOBER 2019

A photograph of George Zukerman, an elderly man with white hair, sitting in a black chair in a library. He is wearing a light-colored, zip-up sweater and dark pants. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books.

BASSOONIST & AUTHOR  
GEORGE ZUKERMAN

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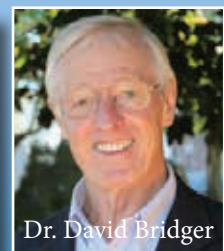
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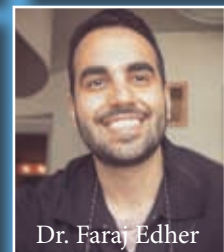
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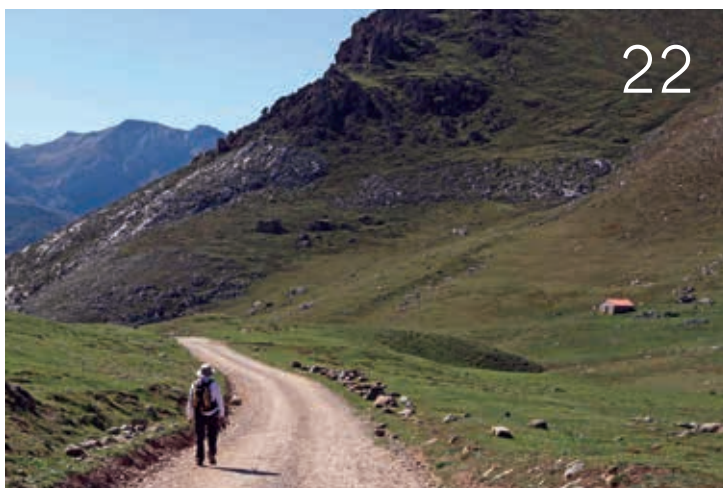
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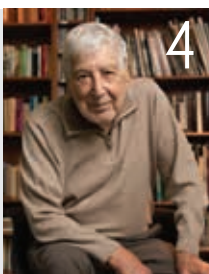
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Cover **GEORGE ZUKERMAN**  
Internationally renowned  
bassoon soloist, George  
Zukerman now organizes  
and hosts classical-music  
river cruises.

*Photo by Tom Gould*



## INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

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**Subscriptions (12 issues):** \$33.60 includes GST, S&H. Canadian residents only.

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# GEORGE ZUKERMAN: BASSOON AT THE READY

by JOHN THOMSON

George Zukerman, internationally renowned bassoon soloist, recipient of the Order of Canada, the Order of BC and a National Arts Centre Award, among others, slides a disc into his CD player. I'm with George in the South Surrey home he shares with his partner, Erika, listening to a recording of Mozart, Bassoon Concerto K 191. Jörg Faerber is conducting the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra, George is the soloist. He's entranced. His eyes are closed and he's waving his arms in time with the music.

"It sings out like a tenor or a soprano," he says of the featured instrument, the bassoon. "Now here comes the solo... here's some of the trills that Erika loves... then it gets very dramatic, more intense, more drive. Mozart extracted every ounce of intensity from what the bassoon could do," he says, his eyes still closed.

The bassoon has a low, deep sound not unlike that of the cello. It's usually part of the orchestra's woodwind section. It is not an instrument one thinks of as a showstopper, but George changed all that in the '60s, '70s and beyond, travelling the world as a virtuoso bassoon soloist and introducing international audiences to the instrument's subtle complexities.

"I released the bassoon from penal servitude in the background of the orchestra," he says with a laugh.

The CD plays on, shifting from allegro to andante as we continue our conversation.

George officially retired years ago. He says he gave away his bassoon, like a pet, to a good home and, although he's given up performing, he has doubled down on his other passion – his other "hat" he calls it – introducing the public to good music.

"My professional life, aside from playing, was organizing tours, the impresario side of my existence. Two hats. I never knew which one I was wearing," he says.

Today, those two hats have become one. For the past four years, he's been working with a boutique Vancouver tour company organizing and hosting its classical-music river cruises. The latest, this month, is a trip down the Rhine. Fourteen days, 10 cities and, at each stop, the guests are treated to a concert. He shows me the itinerary.

"The trick of these tours is to find public concerts happening in Strasbourg or Zurich or Amsterdam on exactly the day the cruise ship ties up," he says leafing through the schedule.

And as a special treat, the six on-board musicians will be writing a Rhine Rhapsody as the boat travels down river. It will be premiered on the last day of the cruise. The tours are always sold out, he tells me proudly.

George is preparing an even bigger event for 2020, organizing a tour of 13 BC communities – Parksville, Abbotsford, Kelowna and the like – to commemorate Beethoven's 250th birthday.

"Everyone thinks Beethoven is this great romantic, who solved the world's problems with great music through the drama, the intensity and the ferocity of his latter works. They are profound, but the earlier stuff is equally significant."

George will be presenting pieces Beethoven wrote between the ages of 18 and 25.

"I call it Beethoven Before the Scowl," he says. "Health permitting, I will be doing the commentary. I'm not there to bore people. If I have a good story to tell, I may add it."

George is good at telling stories. As a young man, he considered journalism as a career and although he eventually pursued music, he never lost his affinity for the written word.

He removes the Mozart CD from the player and fires up the computer. I'm now listening to George's audio files, a collection of memories written and delivered in his own melodious voice. I'm particularly struck with a cut called "The Audition." It documents his 1951 meeting with Leonard Bernstein when George, unsure about a career path, introduced himself to the principal bassoonist of the newly-formed Israeli Philharmonic then visiting New York. The bassoonist invited him to join the orchestra. "But you'll have to play for Lenny," the bassoonist warned him.

Later that evening, after a celebratory dinner, George's wife repeated the mantra. "You'll have to play for Lenny."

"Was I in good enough shape? I really didn't know," he remembers.

The following morning, he arrived at Carnegie Hall bright and early for his 10 o'clock audition, determined to warm up and be ready. After all, he had to play for Lenny.

The recording continues.

"Alone in the green room, I played and played and played and, finally feeling reasonably ready for whatever was to come, I sat and waited. Only then did I look at my watch. It was already 10:30. I began to worry. What was the procedure? I played some more excerpts but, by 10:45, I concluded the job must have already been filled or perhaps I had arrived a day

early. Reluctantly, I pulled my instrument to pieces and began to clean it out. Just before I was going to close the case, there came a gentle knock at the door. I opened the door to Leonard Bernstein standing there with a puckish smile on his face. 'I've been listening to you for the past 45 minutes; you have the job.' 'You heard all the stops and starts?' I said. 'I was just warming up.' 'Yes,' he said, 'good stuff.'"

And with that, George and his first wife moved to Israel to play in the Philharmonic. In 1953, they moved again to British Columbia, where his tenure with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra was cut short by a musician's strike.

"I led the strike," he says. "Not for more money, but for more work. We only had 23 weeks. We wanted 26." They settled for 24. When George attempted to re-negotiate his contract the following year, he found his position already filled.

"I didn't have a job. I had to find something else to do and I had always wanted to play solo. Here was my chance."

Striking out on his own, he travelled the world, winning rave reviews and building up a reputation. I leaf through his scrapbook of pictures and press clippings. China, Australia, the Caribbean... it's an impressive resume. I ask him about South Africa and Cynthia, a rescue elephant he met while touring in the back country.

"Here's the Canadian bassoonist playing for the African trumpeter," he says pulling up a faded photograph.

"I played Tchaikovsky for Cynthia. She stood there and raised her trunk and acknowledged me. She allowed me to nuzzle her. She was very affectionate. I always liked to play for animals."

And for people, too. He was becoming known as the Great Magician of the Bassoon; one commentator called him the High Priest of the Bassoon.

"I always strove for the lyrical side of it, which is why I became a soloist because I had something, I think, to express. Lyricism is an expression of the soul."

In addition to performing, he was also wearing his impresario's hat, organizing concert societies on a subscription basis, so smaller Canadian communities could afford to bring in professional musicians. In its



Musician, impresario  
and now author  
George Zukerman  
telling stories at his home.  
*Photo: Tom Gould*

# Snapshot

with George Zukerman

If you were to meet your 20-year-old self, what advice would you give him?

*“Go back and practice, instead of expecting things to happen by instinct. I was pretty good, but I could have been incredibly good technically.”*

What or who has influenced you the most and why?

*“Isaac Stern because he showed me how to trill, how to make a beautiful phrase and how to end it with a beautiful, comfortable conclusion. I met him many times. He was on the telephone endlessly.”*

What are you most grateful for?

*“Erika. She made it happen. And my general health. I have a lot of mobility problems, but they're tiddly compared to what other people have.”*

What does success mean to you?

*“Fulfillment of a project and that could be anything from a beautiful concerto to a satisfactory conclusion of a concert or a satisfactory cruise. Everything gets wrapped up and closed off as it's supposed to be. Completing the circle.”*



heyday, his company, Overture Concerts, provided 70 Canadian communities with over 400 concerts a year.

He visited the USSR eight times as a self-managed soloist, not only performing but arranging reciprocal tours for Soviet and Canadian musicians. He ran interference. When Air Canada delayed his guests' instruments in Halifax for a concert in Swift Current (a shipment of lobsters took precedence), George had to urgently find four concert harps somewhere, anywhere, in western Canada. He found them.

Later, he sent musicians to Canada's northern communities hopping from one remote school to another by small plane, often in frightening conditions.

“My biggest love was the North. It was a wonderful experience watching the kids' eyes light up,” he says of the 15 years he spent with the project. “We came in and we played, and they played with us. These were not concerts; they were links between societies. It was one of the few things that came to the North that was not confrontational,” he continues. “Every survey, every experiment from the South always came up to show the northern communities how to change their lives to be more like us, to make Inuvik more like Medicine Hat. Not needed. Let Inuvik be Inuvik,” he says emphatically.

And now, in his 92nd year, in addition to stickhandling his river cruises and his upcoming Beethoven tour, George is about to embark on his third mission – introducing Canadian communities to good music once again.

“I've been spending my life helping build audiences in these towns,” he says, “and the way to do that is to build a subscription base. ‘Do you want music in your community?’ ‘Yes, it would be wonderful.’ Good. Form a committee, run a membership. If you've got 100 members paying a \$100, you've got \$10,000 in the bank. You can do wonders with that. I'll show them how to

run a membership campaign, but I won't take a commission. I'll take a fee.”

And if they turn down his guidance after a year or so?

“That's fine. The idea is they should do it on their own,” he says.

Meanwhile, Erika hovers in the hallway awaiting the arrival of her mid-day student. An accomplished orchestral violinist, Erika met George at an after-party in Brandon, Manitoba 30 years ago. He had just completed a performance, and Erika was in the audience.

“She liked my trills,” says George. Erika concurs. “I like people being musical, and what impressed me about him was he played very musically.”

The couple enjoys a comfortable life together. True, George finds it difficult to walk great distances, but energized by his raft of current projects, he seems unperturbed by his mobility issue. Troubling yes, but not disabling.

“As long as I've got something interesting to keep me going, I can overcome a lot of things,” he says.

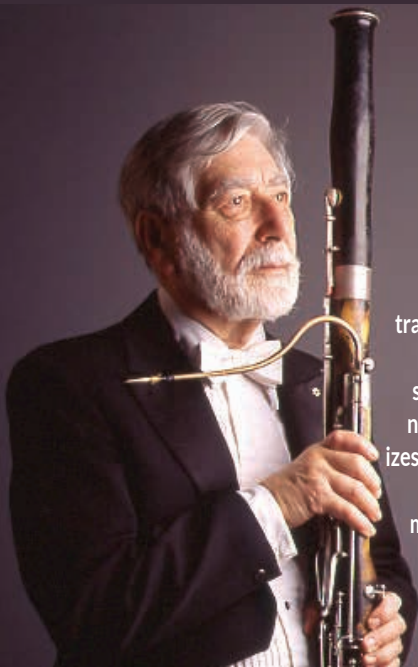
And there's more. He shows me an outline and chapter headings for yet another project, an autobiography he has written called *Concerto for Two Hats*. Completed and awaiting publication, it's comprised largely of anecdotal memories, many of which I've been listening to, written in George's distinct and entertaining style.

Leafing through his scrapbooks and listening to his music, I keep thinking about the many turning points in George's career or, for that matter, in anyone's career, about how we often enter an event or circumstance which, in retrospect, becomes a pivotal moment. George says the day he left the Vancouver Symphony to strike out on his own as a soloist was the most momentous day in his life.

And what would have happened, I ask, had he not played for Lenny?

“I would have arrived in Vancouver two years earlier, stayed in New York and become a freelance musician, or quit music to go into journalism,” he says. “The permutations are unlimited.”

Given his indubitable spirit, I think he would have done just fine. |



George travelled the world as a soloist and now organizes and hosts classical-music river cruises.





George playing for Cynthia in South Africa.



George sharing music with children in remote Canadian communities.



George with his partner, Erika.  
Photos: Courtesy of George Zukerman



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# ANCIENT TREASURES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

by IAN CARTER

*“Living is like tearing through a museum. Not until later do you really start absorbing what you saw, thinking about it, looking it up in a book, and remembering – because you can’t take it in all at once.”*

–Audrey Hepburn

The ever-brilliant Audrey Hepburn got it right, but this was no *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*! Here I am deep inside Cairo’s Egyptian Antiquities Museum scrutinizing the miniature ivory figurine of King Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza (c2500 BC), the largest Egyptian pyramid and the only one of Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still in existence.

This 4,600-year-old statuette is considered one of the most valuable artifacts in the museum: ironically, Khufu’s only surviving statue is the smallest piece of Egyptian royal sculpture ever discovered at just 7.5 cm high. I couldn’t take it in all at once, and this Canadian traveller needed to know more.

## EGYPT: DISCOVER THE PHARAOHS

Research and exploration are the main goals of all my trips. So, when I had a chance to join a small group of Australians ready to explore Egypt, Israel and Jordan, I jumped at the opportunity: three countries, three weeks, 16 Aussies and me, the token Canadian, eh!

This fully escorted journey through time launched in Cairo with a memorable stop in Giza: suddenly, that tiny Khufu

became real in the shadows of his Great Pyramid, one of the oldest travel destinations on the planet. Greek and Roman travellers visited these very sites – I felt infinitely insignificant in the dust of their footprints.

Abou Ahmed was the first of three brilliant tour guides that welcomed us to each country. Abou explained that the pyramids were built to provide the pharaohs with a staircase to the afterlife. This knowledgeable Egyptologist reminded us that despite steep, narrow interior corridors, each of the royal tombs had been looted over the millennia, so they are now empty. I was also surprised that those scars on the face of The Great Sphinx are not solely due to erosion – the monument was used for target practice by conquering Ottoman soldiers, French troops, or both – depending on whose story you believe. And oh, the stories! Every stop throughout our journey had its own story.

ABOVE | The author and his mates on a camel safari across the stunning desert landscapes in Wadi Rum, Jordan.

PAGE 10 | (Top) Aswan’s Abu Simbel Temple is considered the single most beautiful landmark from ancient Egypt. (Bottom) Riding high above the Valley of The Kings, Egypt for stunning views at sunrise. Photos: Ian Carter

A one-hour flight took us from Cairo to Luxor, the ancient city of Thebes, and the beginning of a magnificent five-day Nile River Cruise. Travelling with Australians is always a party, and this little cruise ship added to the fun with nightly entertainment and classic buffets of local and international foods. Abou explained that the earliest pharaohs considered themselves to be living gods and ruled with absolute power while building numerous temples, monuments and burial tombs along the Nile. We saw the most impressive:

- Luxor Temple (c1390 BC): An avenue of human-headed sphinxes connects the temples of Karnak and Luxor – this temple was built by many pharaohs over centuries, including Tutankhamun, Rameses II and Cleopatra. We arrived at dusk for a visit during an unforgettable light show.

- Valley of the Kings: It was only after we had booked a Luxor Balloon Ride that we discovered the 3:30 a.m. departure time! Only the loud noise of the burners blasting hot air into our balloon broke the silence as we soared over the Valley of the Kings, this necropolis of the pharaohs. Later in the day, we explored a half dozen of the more than 65 royal tombs in this “Gateway to the Afterlife.” Many have been visited since antiquity (and have the graffiti to prove it), but Tutankhamun’s treasure trove was just discovered in 1922.

- Abu Simbel (c1300 BC): Our Nile Cruise disembarked at Aswan at 4 a.m. for a 3.5-hour coach trip to the incredible twin temples of Abu Simbel. The temples were originally carved out of the mountainside during the reign of Pharaoh Ramses II as a monument to himself and his queen, Nefertari. Abou saved the best of Egypt for this astonishing visit... what a finale!

#### ISRAEL: SACRED SITES AND BEACH RESORTS

Our group took a return flight to Cairo, bid farewell to Abou, and then flew on to Tel Aviv and fascinating Israel, a destination brimming with archeological, cultural and sacred stories. Tel Aviv is a modern city on the Mediterranean Sea, rich in culture and beachside pleasures.

Mira, our Israeli tour guide, knew all the ropes and skillfully maneuvered her charges across this diverse and beautiful country. She introduced us to Caesarea, the ancient city of Herod the Great (22-10 BC), Haifa, and the historic walled city of Akko before moving on to these sacred sites:

- Jerusalem’s Old City is the spiritual centre of the world for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and regardless of your religious inclination, it is profoundly moving. The city is home to several of the most sacred religious sites, namely the Western Wall, Temple Mount, the Dome of The Rock, and Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Our first stop was the Mount of Olives, overlooking the oldest cemetery in the world, before exploring Gethsemane and the ancient alleyways of this 5,000-year-old walled city.

Lions’ Gate leads to The Via Dolorosa, the processional route believed to be the path that Jesus Christ walked on the way to his crucifixion. We marvelled at the 14 Stations of The Cross that lead to the final five stations within The Church of



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The Holy Sepulchre. *Lonely Planet* warns to “expect crowds rather than quiet contemplation.” Despite the terrible truth, I was transfixed by the significance of this holiest of Christian pilgrimage sites.

- **Bethlehem:** There can be no town in the world with such a glorious history and dignified status as the birthplace of Christ. Bethlehem is just across the “Green Line” in the West Bank and is completely under Palestinian rule – razor wire, armed border guards, multiple passport checks, and souvenir shops stand in stark contrast to Manger Square and The Church of the Nativity, one of the oldest surviving Christian churches.

- **Masada:** This astonishing fort is situated atop a rock plateau on the shore of the Dead Sea. A cable car delivered us up to one of the most famous archaeological sites in Israel, built as a palace complex by Herod the Great, King of Judea (reigned 37–4 BC). Its violent destruction and the epic last stand of Jewish patriots in the face of the Roman army (73 AD) gives it great importance as a symbol of determination and heroism that continues to this day with many Israeli soldiers.

I was saddened to leave Israel the next morning – so much more to learn – but we were scheduled to cross the border into Jordan. I counted at least a dozen passport checks... so it was a relief to meet Ahmad, our jolly Jordanian guide who seemed to know everybody! Then it was back on a bus for our drive north to Aqaba, Jordan’s only seaport and our beautiful beachside resort on the Red Sea.

#### JORDAN: DESERT WILDERNESS AND ANCIENT MONUMENTS

Jordan is an ancient Arab nation defined by desert wilderness and ancient monuments. Truly stunning Wadi Rum is just an hour’s drive west of Aqaba and an unexpected surprise in an idyllic desert location. *Lawrence of Arabia* was filmed here and, like him, we took an exciting jeep tour and camel ride across a landscape of red-pink sand, stunning natural



arches and mountains, and prehistoric rock engravings. Night was spent under a blanket of stars in the splendid Bedouin Rahayed Desert Camp before travelling north for a closer look at the best of Jordan’s ancient monuments:

- **Petra:** I had heard about this ancient city, but nothing could prepare me for the stunning reality of a vast, unique complex carved entirely from the sheer rockface of a red sandstone canyon. Arab Nabateans built this beautiful capital city more than 2,000 years ago as an important junction for silk and spice trade routes that linked three continents. Its famous Treasury, monumental tombs, temples and palaces make

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it one of Jordan's national treasures.

• Visits to crumbling crusader castles were somewhat less memorable than our beachside resort on the Dead Sea, a lake at the lowest point on earth almost 400m below sea level. As the name implies, it is entirely devoid of life since its high salt content is more than *four times* the salinity of most oceans. However, we proved a lively and raucous group of swimmers stumbling over each other on the shallow beach. Swimming is impossible; floating is a pushover!

• The road to Amman took us to Mount Nebo, a pilgrimage destination from the earliest Christian times. According to Biblical tradition, this elevated plateau is the sacred place where the prophet Moses was granted a view of The Promised Land and later buried – on a clear day the panorama includes The River Jordan and Jerusalem on the horizon.

Our journey continued past pine forests and olive groves to our destination in Amman (7200 BC), one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world. It provided a perfect base for day trips to Jerash – reputed to be the best-preserved Greco-Roman city in the world today – and Umm Qais, which offered breathtaking views over the Sea of Galilee, Golan Heights and the southern borders of Syria.

In many ways, Umm Qais defines all the ancient conflicts that have accompanied territorial struggle. In that quiet moment, it crossed my mind that these Syrian fields in front of me continue to be plagued by roadside bombs and terrorist activity.

This adventure was my gateway to the past. So many ancient treasures... so much conflict... so many questions for further research. Audrey Hepburn suggested looking it up in a book. I'm grateful for travel – and Google. |

For *IF YOU GO* information, visit [www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/middle-east-ancient-treasures](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/middle-east-ancient-treasures)

Ian Carter is a retired educator and mental health professional, published author, freelance writer, photographer, and inveterate world traveller. He welcomes contact: [heritagematters@bellaliant.net](mailto:heritagematters@bellaliant.net)

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# SKÅL TO COPENHAGEN

by JANE CASSIE

Buses, boats and bikes. During our stay, we discover these are three of the best ways to check out Copenhagen's vibrant offerings. "Watch out," my husband, Brent, shouts, just before I step off the curb into oncoming traffic. "You always have to look both ways, shoulder check and yield."

Anywhere in North America, you might think he was referring to motorists. But here, in Denmark's capital, it's all about the cyclists: they are everywhere, have the right of way and rule! In fact, the morning commute is more like a professional's pedal parade. Women dressed in long skirts, men in ties and suits, kids tucked into attached carts, briefcases lashed to rat traps, blonde ponytails blowing in the breeze. And, collectively, while getting where they want to go, they exude that effortless chic, scandi-cool style.

Although we opt out of two-wheeling on this trip, the Hop On Hop Off boat and bus tours provide us with the perfect perspective to take in the attractions from both the land and water.

"You can get off at any marked stop on the map," we're told by the kiosk ticket seller, "then catch a later ride when you want to move on." We know the drill. Pretty much every major epicentre on the global tourist trail hosts this sightseeing option, and we've always found it's been a great way to get a quick overview. So, with map in hand and earbuds plugged in, we unite with other sun lovers on the top open floor of the double-decker.

The Mermaid Tour is the most popular of the three routes: stoic castles, grand monuments, tranquil canals, cobblestone streets. Our coach breezes by Tivoli Gardens, the second oldest operating amusement park in the world, which has been entertaining thrill seekers since 1843; motors past the National

Museum, where exhibits explore the Stone, Viking, Middle Ages and Modern Danish History; and makes a stop at The Little Mermaid, a sculpture by Edvard Eriksen, inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about a mermaid who gives up everything for a handsome prince. Since August 1913, she has been sitting, immortalized in bronze, staring longingly towards the shore in hopes of seeing her man. And tourists, like us, come in droves every day to see her do just that!

We hop off at Christiansborg Palace, where the seat of Danish Parliament and Danish Prime Minister's office reside today. "That's quite the workspace," Brent says, while we pose for a photo in front of this impressive landmark. "And quite the living quarters for our daughter-in-law."

Although there are clearly lots of reasons to visit Copenhagen, the main purpose of this trip is to celebrate our son's marriage. Two years ago, he wed his Danish sweetheart in LA, where they now live and, this week, they are returning to her roots and uniting her family with ours for a belated "Lovefest" bash. Her father was once an Ambassador to the Queen of Denmark and, during that time, her family had resided in one of the palace wings. Quite the digs, indeed!

ABOVE | Amalienborg Palace, winter home of the Danish Royal Family.

RIGHT | (Top to Bottom) Tourists come in droves every day to check out the Little Mermaid. Stream-lined longboats provide roving views. Nyhavn takes the prize for its pretty pallet. Photos: Brent and Jane Cassie



We amble along the canal that neighbours this fortress and stop for lunch at Katz, a sidewalk café that dishes up humungous burgers and scrumptious salads. We're not surprised. Pretty much every meal we've had during our visit has been stellar. Over the past couple of decades, this city has risen in the culinary ranks, has deservedly earned accolades and has become a favourite destination for serious foodies.

To burn off a few calories, we stroll the quaint nearby streets that wind their way throughout the city's central hub.

Many are linked to courtyards boasting statues, historical monuments and talented street performers.

Strøget, one of Europe's longest pedestrian pathways, offers us a slew of shops – everything from budget-friendly to pricier name brands. Nearby is Studiestræde, once the city's Old Latin Quarter, now home to a string of thrift stores and cool coffee hangouts. And Strædet tempts us with its many eateries, gift shops and retail outlets. Although I can't pronounce a single street name correctly, each block is unique with their varying painted façades that create rainbows of colour.

But Nyhavn takes the prize for its pretty pallet: once a hangout for sailors; now one of the trendiest areas of the city. Sidewalk cafés spill out from the crayon-coloured buildings that line up hip-to-hip along this bustling canal. Picture worthy? You bet! In fact, it's one of the most popular postcard snaps of Denmark.

Two days later, we return to this area with our new extended family to check out the sites from the water's perspective. "Okay, everyone, climb aboard," our son and daughter-in-law command, as they greet everyone dockside.

Some guests claim seats that are under cover, others head to the back of the stream-lined longboat where roving views can be clearly photographed. And while we schmooze, we cruise.

"Amalienborg Palace is the winter home of the Danish Royal Family," our commentator says. "You may see Danish princes and princesses driving in and out as we motor on by." With eagle eyes, we pan the entrance gates of the palatial homestead. No such luck today. We also discover we can have our photo taken with the Guard here. These royal gents march from Rosenborg Castle to this posh spot where the Changing of the Guard ceremony takes place every day at noon.

While cruising through the historic canals of the old city, we get a glimpse of what it would be like to live on a houseboat. Historical buildings border our aquatic byway, many which were constructed by King Christian IV in the early 17th century, then meander our way along Christianshavns canal, where the controversial Christiania is home to a hippie community and free-spirited souls. Directly opposite, and in stark contrast, is a view of the ultra-modern Copenhagen Opera House, donated by one of Denmark's most prominent businessmen, Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller. It's a grand achievement and one that melds beautifully with this vibrant city.

"Skål," our son and daughter-in-law say to everyone while raising their glasses of champagne. They then clarify, "It's the Danish word for toasting or saying cheers." Little do we know, it's also a command that we are going to hear several times over the next few days during their Lovefest celebration. But this time, it's not about the happy couple. "Skål," we all respond, and lift our glasses in a toast to amazing Copenhagen. |

*For IF YOU GO information, visit [www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/skal-to-copenhagen](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/skal-to-copenhagen)*

# VIVA VAGABONDS

by BARBARA RISTO

As we age, we often go through social and relationship changes that affect how we travel.

I've always considered myself an intrepid traveller, ready to hare off in any direction on my own to discover new and exciting adventures. As I've gotten older, this spontaneous wanderlust has gradually morphed into an appreciation for camaraderie.

I'm ready to own the fact that having someone alongside to share the adventure is more pleasant than absorbing it in my usual solitary fashion.

I'm also accepting the added level of security that comes with travelling in a group under the watchful eye of an experienced tour manager. Where once I would have felt restricted, I now enjoy the freedom of not having to worry about the details that go into planning and executing a vacation.

Since starting the 55+ Travel Club earlier this year, I've realized age often brings changes in our accessibility to travel companions. An increasing number of us are either divorced or widowed. Or we have a partner that doesn't enjoy travelling like we still do. While we may have some close friends, they're not always available to travel when we are, or have the finances to do so. This leaves many of us scrambling to find a suitable travel companion.

For those who find themselves in these situations, I have created a couple of options within the 55+ Travel Club. The first is a Buddy Brunch, a hosted luncheon where I invite those who are looking for travel companions to meet, share a meal, and hopefully find a potential travel companion among the attendees.

The second is the creation of a group I am calling the VIVA Vagabonds. This is a group of travellers from the Vancouver Island (VI) and Vancouver (VA) area who will be notified when I'm hosting a trip, with the understanding that they can join and be among a growing group of people who are familiar with each other. You can look forward to always being with friends on any trip you book with me.

These trips will vary in type, location and cost. You will be notified whenever I add a new trip to my VIVA Vagabonds schedule.

The first thing to do is join our 55+ Travel Club's monthly e-newsletter. You can find the sign-up form at [www.seniorlivingmag.com/travelclub](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/travelclub). This newsletter, emailed to you every month, will contain a variety of travel information, including the trips I will be hosting.



The second thing to do is contact me at [travel@seniorlivingmag.com](mailto:travel@seniorlivingmag.com) to let me know you want to be added to the VIVA Vagabond group. Throughout the year, I will be getting in touch for your ideas on where you'd like to travel, and I'll make sure you're among the first to know when I have booked a trip you can join me on.

Come join my VIVA Vagabonds group! Let's continue to enjoy travel and each other's company. |

For more info, visit [www.seniorlivingmag.com/travelclub](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/travelclub)

ABOVE | (Top) Barbara Risto at a mosque in Abu Dhabi. (Bottom) Barbara hiking Mt. Doug on Vancouver Island. Her t-shirt says it all! "Your life is now."



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# BERLIN: EMBRACING THE PAST

by ALAN G. LUKE & JACQUIE D. DURAND

While Berlin embraces its history, it adapts to modern times – adopting a liberal perspective even as its culture perseveres.

An essential experience is a visit to the Story of Berlin exhibit. This enticing time traveller’s tour takes you from its medieval origins to the present. Displayed in a multimedia format on three floors, 25 theme rooms depict different epochs or historical events.

Passing through a heavy steel door, we found ourselves entering the darkest chapter of the city. Walking over the spines of innumerable books encased on the floor, signified the titles Hitler had banned and burned in 1933. The exhibition does not attempt to sanitize history, rather it displays graphic photos and reminds me of the famous quotation: “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Should that occur, there still exists an original and operative atomic fallout shelter under Kurfürstendamm. Hourly guided tours of the Cold War nuclear bunker are also available to the public.

When The Wall fell 30 years ago, 360 significant sections of it were numbered and certified then sold in Monte Carlo to worldwide purchasers in June 1990. Exhibited in the Story of Berlin museum are the only segments from the numbered edition still in Berlin, which were removed from Oberbaumbrücke crossing point (#002-#006).

For a genuine appreciation of the influence and impact of The Wall (Der Mauer), we visited the Mauermuseum – Checkpoint Charlie. As equally an objective exhibition as the Story of Berlin, it presents both sides of the divided city. Further stages display the building of The Wall, the Four Powers Agreement and the fall of The Wall and the subsequent German reunification.

On August 13, 1961, the armed military units sealed off the west section of the city and the erection of the Berlin Wall began. The reinforced concrete wall stretched 43 km through the city with the West Ring around Berlin reaching 155 km. This once-modern frontier, regarded as an anti-fascist wall, fell on November 9, 1989.

Several sections of the wall still exist; a lengthy section (1.3 km) known as the East Side Gallery is worth a visit.



Walking beside the almost 3.6-metre-tall wall, we saw myriad murals and international graffiti adorning the series of segmented sections.

The Mauermuseum has numerous original objects from successful escapes, which demonstrate the courage and creativity of the escapes of which more than 5,000 attempts were made under, over and above ground. Eighty people were killed (60 shot) as they strived for freedom from oppression.

Authentic signage and enlarged photographs tell the story of a city divided.

On June 14, 1963, Checkpoint Charlie became “an island of freedom” next to the border. Today, a mock guardhouse surrounded by sandbags and three uniformed soldiers representing the occupying countries (Britain, France and the United States) is just down the street from the museum.

One cannot experience Berlin without visiting the emblem of the city, the Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburg Tor). This sturdy symbol was built along classical lines and completed in 1791. It is crowned with “The Quadriga,” the chariot of triumph with the goddess Victoria. I tried to envision the eras and events that have occurred around this monumental structure. The war wounds on

ABOVE | (Top) Berlin Wall view from East and 1962 black-and-white archival insets. (Bottom) Berlin Wall murals – East German Trabant depicted crashing through the Wall. Photos: Alan G. Luke

TOC PAGE | Tourist imitates mural at East Side Gallery Wall. Photo: Jacquie D. Durand

the gate columns it has endured have had aesthetic reparations.

This year is the 75th anniversary of Colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg's ill-fated assassination attempt garnering him an acknowledgement with a street honouring him, while any evidence of Hitler's existence has been expunged. Had the officer's bombing attempt succeeded, the war could have been terminated nine months earlier saving millions of lives, since more people were killed in the last nine months of war than the previous 59 months.

Pulsating sounds of music emanate from Kurfürstendamm, an ideal location to experience the annual International Gay Pride Parade or "Love Parade," which has increased in popularity since its inception in June 1988. The extensive procession mirrors the right to self-determination and the value of tolerance. Known by the locals as the Ku'damm, a 3.5 km-long street was modelled after Paris' Champs Élysées by Otto von Bismarck. The historic boulevard features bountiful boutiques, cafés, theatres and museums.

Berlin has been regarded as an avant-garde society and popular fashion centre. A lengthy procession of scantily clad individuals making their own fashion statements gyrated to the music on assorted floats along city streets. The liberalism in this urban environment is reflected by the local gay and lesbian movement and punctuated by such a parade.

The term "homosexuality" was coined in Berlin in 1869 as the history of homosexual emancipation was initiated here. In 1897, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was founded. It became the first example of self-organization to promote the interests of homosexuals.

A diverse gay nightlife developed in the capital, which established Berlin's legendary reputation in the 1920s. During this period, the Eldorado became a popular gay bar for artists and was even a favourite haunt of Marlene Dietrich. Berlin's pioneering role in gay liberation was abruptly terminated due to the repressive nature of Nazism. After World War II, support for the lifestyle re-emerged with three distinct urban areas conducive to the gay and lesbian scenes today.

Germany has always been a proponent of technological advancements. Their prowess in cinematic production has been substantial. At the Berlin Film Museum's Sony Center, one can admire the celluloid contributions. This expansive museum houses 1,000 exhibits, photographs and documents; costumes and props; film excerpts and awards, as well as several multi-media stations.

The Film Museum's prize focus is the inimitable Marlene Dietrich (1901-92). Born in Berlin, she is still regarded as a German even though she became an American citizen. The Nazi regime attempted to lure her back to Germany following her Hollywood success. She declined, attaining US citizenship in 1939, months prior to the outbreak of World War II.

Berlin remains resilient in its various transformations while freely acknowledging its past and embracing the present, overcoming social and physical barriers. |

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# QUEST FOR A PERFECT CUP OF COFFEE

by ANN BUSH

I am one of those early morning foggy headed souls that bump into furniture on my way to the kitchen to grind my beans and heat up my little Italian coffee pot. I spend a small fortune on organic, perfectly roasted beans from foreign lands.

Three years ago, after retiring from a grueling job as CEO of a non-profit organization, I filled a spot on a 21-day bird-watching trip in Colombia, South America. So, of course, drinking a boatload of coffee was on my priority list. Starting high in the Andes Mountains near Bogota and ending in the middle of the Colombian Amazon near Brazil, I was chauffeured through the Andes spotted with coffee bushes reaching from the valley floor to the mountain top. You can imagine my disappointment during my first breakfast without coffee, as Colombians drink hot cocoa instead. In fact, coffee was rarely served. The upscale grocery market near the hotel, however, offered a variety of coffee products with handsome men smiling brightly on the package. I filled my suitcase.

A year later, I return for a two-week bird-watching venture on the Caribbean side of Colombia known for its beaches, sharks and shrimp. Somewhere between the Caribbean and the Amazon, maybe in the middle of the Andes, I fell in love with Colombia. Hiring a driver and car for an extra 10 days to explore this amazing country as a retirement second home site, I aimed for the famous Coffee Triangle area.

Visiting a coffee farm touted in many brochures, I was taken by a young college student, dressed in historically correct coffee culture attire, on a journey through Victorian Garden rows of perfectly shaped coffee plants. I picked a few beans, added 200 photos to my memory card and squirmed through a cup of bitter coffee.

Along most country roads, 10 cents will buy a small paper cup of coffee from a thermos that had a strange metallic taste called “tinto,” which translates to “black ink.” By now, I am totally confused. Juan gently tells me that these open coffee fields do not produce the best coffee. It gets worse. Colombia exports their best coffee beans, leaving the poorest crops for the locals. I am astounded.

But Juan has a surprise for me. A few days later, his four-wheel SUV takes me higher and deeper into the Andes off the well-travelled coffee track to a small village called El Cairo. There, in a coffee shop full of cheerful young Colombians, I find coffee heaven while sipping a mystical coffee with rich, smooth flavour.

This small village next to the best coffee in the world seemed like the perfect spot to rest my bones. With hopes of buying property, I soon returned, after a brief Spanish class, to live for two months in a hippie hostel run by an artist who spoke no English. It was an experience of a lifetime.

A colourful Spanish colonial town of almost 10,000 located in the Valle de Cauca Department, El Cairo is surrounded by coffee and sugar cane farms. Set high in the Serrania de Paraguas

ABOVE | The village of El Cairo, a UNESCO site, in Colombia's coffee region. (Inset) Ready-to-pick coffee beans in the forest.

TOC PAGE | View of Andes near town with Bougainvillea flowers. Photos: Ann Bush

Mountains, the town has been designated a UNESCO historic site. The clean and well-cared-for community teems with activity from sunrise 'til past midnight, portraying the vitality and success of this place.

I spent my mornings visiting the local bakery and farmers market, hiking the hills, swimming in very cold rivers and writing. Once, I watched fourth-generation artisans make panela the old fashion way in a historic sugar cane factory and toured an organic herb farm.

Often riding a motorcycle or standing on the back of a Willy Jeep on muddy dirt roads, I found amazing birds. My Spanish never improved because everyone wants to learn English. My hostel keeper made me California pizzas in her artsy "La Roma" café located on the patio below my room, where I met interesting Colombians from the big cities looking for a weekend of peace. I learned to make delicious juice from wild orange and mango trees and drank a lot of coffee.

On the town square is the Serraniagua Coffee Shop offering coffee so good that customers pay twice the regular price for a cup. Their secret is based on conservation methods, community involvement, cultural traditions and a love for their country. It is forest coffee.

Twenty years ago, the coffee farmers struggled with severe climate fluctuations resulting in the whole community suffering. Many generations before, farmers mingled coffee plants with sugar cane, vegetable gardens and fruit trees under the forest canopy. During the coffee industry boom, farmers were convinced they would make more money if they cleared the forest and planted only coffee. The tradition of growing and harvesting coffee in harmony with other plants had been lost.

In fear of losing family traditions and their culture, El Cairo's leaders formed the Serraniagua Foundation and began to establish partnerships with coffee farmers to give the traditional methods another try. Most importantly, Serraniagua built a network of businesses to purchase their new high-quality forest coffee. Throughout the years, one by one, the El Cairo coffee farmers tested their belief in Serraniagua's vision and willingly changed their coffee process, slowly allowing the forest to grow



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back. The benefits have surpassed all expectations.

Forest coffee farming is basically tending coffee plants within the forest. The term shadow coffee has been around for many years, however, plantain plants are planted for shade. A native forest contains not only plantains, but also tropical fruit trees, flowers and bamboo. The forest shades the coffee with just the right amount of sunshine necessary for healthy coffee plants.

Forest coffee farms are also an important factor in preserving biodiversity in the region. The trees within the farms create a corridor of forests between two protected reserves near El Cairo: the Cerro el Ingles and Galapagos. The term bird-friendly coffee has often been used by promoters, but many animals benefit from these non-interrupted forest corridors. I often hiked these trails spending hours watching birds, taking photos of almost 30 different varieties of orchids, and chasing slender lizards, purple dragonflies, prehistoric beetles, colourful frogs or graceful butterflies.

Due to the severe destruction of the forest that had occurred in this area, the Serraniagua Organization took the responsibility to consolidate various properties over a span of 10 years to create the Cerro El Ingles reserve. As a result, recent discoveries of amphibians, reptiles and plants confirm the role of this reserve as a unique refuge for many species that have evolved there. Several expeditions and research projects concerning amphibians and plants are conducted by various organizations such as the National Universities of Colombia,

the Valle de los Andes, various universities in New Mexico, the New York Botanical Garden and Düsseldorf.

Some of the most important discoveries are frogs listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and endemic to this reserve such as the Broken Jumping frog (*anomaloglossus atopoglossus*), Glass Armed frog (*Nymphargus armatus*) and Prickly Rain frog (*Pristimantis kelephas*). These expeditions have found a wide diversity and endemism of orchids, many new to science such as the Paz orchid (*Epidendrum pazii*) discovered by Professor Philip Arthur Silverstone of the University del Valle. The survival of these frogs and orchids are completely linked to conservation efforts in this reserve. I found that members of the community were immensely proud of their contributions.

Even though I am an avid nature lover, my favourite feature of a forest coffee farm is their aesthetic beauty. From the road, the farm is hidden under trees providing a beautiful endless view of an untouched Andes. Akin to a Garden of Eden, I walked peacefully in the cool shade between thriving vegetable plants placed haphazardly in sunny spots. Bees and butterflies flutter between gaudy flowers savouring rays of sunshine spattering through trees. Taking a break on the cool pathway, I munched on a just-picked juicy nispero while listening to a songbird symphony above my head. Ahhhhh, now all I need is a cup of coffee. |

*For more information about visiting a forest coffee farm, visit [www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/colombia-coffee](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/colombia-coffee)*



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# FOREVER FIT

by EVE LEES



## HEALTH BENEFITS OF BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES

No time and no equipment to weight train? No worries. You can do a quick workout at home using your own bodyweight as resistance.

For weight loss and maintaining a lean body, resistance training is the best for fat loss – more so than cardio exercises. And research also shows less time exercising is more effective than longer sessions, if done properly. A full-body home workout can be done in 30 minutes. However, we add more time to that with preparation and travel time going to the gym, including time waiting to use the equipment.

A home workout can be effective without being complicated. Just keep it simple. Traditional exercises like push-ups, squats, lunges and the plank have been around forever because they work. And at home, you can keep moving, to increase fat usage and fitness benefits. That's hard to do in a busy gym, as waiting for equipment creates a time lag between exercises.

Equipment – even improvised equipment – isn't necessary to get the benefits of weight training. You can do everything using body weight, with one exception: The “pulling” movement (for the back, biceps and rear shoulders) can be challenging to replicate without equipment. You can improvise using a towel, belt or rope: Anchor it around a secure object, lean back and pull yourself forward. Exercise elastics, a minor investment, also enable a pulling movement. Verify the correct “pulling” technique with a Certified Fitness Instructor.

If you choose to use something other than your own bodyweight, you don't have to invest a fortune. Common household items can be improvised as exercise equipment. Here are some examples: as mentioned, a towel or rope for “pulling” movements; four-litre milk jugs as dumbbells (filled or partially filled with water); a broomstick (inserted through milk jug handles creates a “barbell”); and staircase steps (stepping for leg muscles and cardio fitness). Low-cost items include light dumbbells and resistance (elastic) bands.

Exercise variety is important, too. Work your body from all different directions to use different muscles. If you keep doing the same exercises, you risk muscle imbalances, and that's a concern if you already have, say, poor “desk posture” from work.

If your exercises are mostly push-ups for the chest and crunches for the abs, your back is ignored. “Pulling” movements for the back will counteract poor posture developed from daily overuse of the “pushing” movements of the chest. Learn more about balanced training and working opposing muscles from a fitness instructor.

Before you exercise, do a five-minute aerobic warm up (like walking or stair-stepping). And stretch after your workout to relax muscles and promote flexibility. |

**Eve Lees** has been active in the health & fitness industry since 1979. Currently, she is a Freelance Health Writer for several publications and speaks to business and private groups on various health topics. [www.artnews-healthnews.com](http://www.artnews-healthnews.com)

# THE SENSORY EXPERIENCES OF NORTHERN SPAIN

by AILEEN STALKER

The melodic sound of bells is one of the lasting memories of my recent trip to Northern Spain. Bells from the townhall to mark the time of day, church bells to alert the devout, and the constant, distant sound that told the location of the horses, goats, sheep and golden brown cows in the high alpine – they all provided a background to the other sensory experiences in this unique and fascinating area of Spain.

Superlatives like spectacular, incredible and fantastic come to mind naturally when describing the landscape of northern Spain. Tall hills rise from the seashore and the jagged towering mountains in the National Park, the Picos de Europa pierce the sky. Golden beech, oak and walnut trees often shade parts of winding lower paths – a welcome relief from the unusually hot weather that all of Spain was experiencing in October when my partner, Tony, and I were travelling there.

Another surprising but consistent part of the alpine landscapes were the gigantic sad-eyed mountain dogs, who focus on their job of protecting their sheep, goat or cow charges from predators such as wolves and suspiciously watch passing people.

The villages provide their own delights. Boxes of geraniums sit on century old windowsills and village cats (a necessity for mouse control) sun themselves in church yards. Red-tile roofs that indicate the small villages – sometimes with only several houses but still named and identified on a map – can be seen for miles perched on the side of the mountains and in the valleys when looking from a vantage point high on the mountain roads. When we saw the snow-marker poles along the roads, we wondered, ‘How do the people living here ever get out of these valleys in the winter?’

Many pilgrims walk through these rural and alpine areas using the northern coastal route before heading southwest to Santiago de Compostela, but Tony and I chose to plan day hikes and walks within easy driving or walking



distance from the self-catering apartments we booked for accommodation in the countryside.

We arrived in Bilboa and joined other tourists to visit the Guggenheim museum. The museum architecture is as spectacular as any description you have read and far outshines the mainly contemporary art within. We learned that in the 20

ABOVE | (Top) A Royal Hunting Lodge high in the Picos de Europa. (Bottom) Exterior of the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao.

PAGE 24 | Playa de las Catedrales near Ribadeo, Galicia, Northern Spain.

TOC PAGE | An alpine trail leaving from the top of the Fuente Dé cable car, Cantabria. Photos: Tony Keen



years since the Guggenheim was built, Bilbao has transformed itself from a dirty, industrial port to a vibrant city filled with art and renewed interest in its history. Walking about in the old part of the city gave us our first taste of Spanish architecture, and sampling the artistic pintxos (the Basque name for tapas) gave us a taste of the Spanish meals to come.

Then off for a brief stay close to the fishing village of Comillas where a visit to Gaudi's extravagant El Capricho, a seaside day walk and a visit to the Altamira cave paintings was in order. As well, the seafood "menu del dia" lured us to try the local delicacies. Eating your main meal using this menu has several advantages: it provides a lot of choices of regional dishes; it costs less; and it means you can have a lighter meal in the evening, which you can make in your accommodation kitchen.

Depending on our travel and hiking/walking plans, we would usually make breakfast and a packed lunch at our apartment or, when in towns, choose sometimes to eat lunch ("menu del dia") or have dinner at a restaurant.

Every village, town and city in Spain closes most commercial enterprises from 2pm until 5pm and evening restaurant meals are served at the earliest beginning at 8pm – more frequently at 9pm.

Whatever the serving time, however, no trip to Spain would be complete without sampling regional foods such as paella, fabada, white asparagus, squid, stuffed peppers, octopus and a variety of fish with their various sauces and ham/pork in every meal and in every sandwich.

Beware of the highly salted nature of the food – delicious but directly related to a spike in my blood pressure upon return.

The Europa de Picos was to be the highlight of our trip but getting there verged on terrifying. The roads are at best winding and generally have hairpin turns about every 50 metres. The gorges are exceptionally deep, with the other side of the road either rock or a steep hill. They are narrow as are many of the streets in the small towns and back roads we used to arrive at historic sites or the start of walks/hikes. A small automatic car is best – though Tony managed a stick shift with skill.

Only two events in 24 days created a "We are going to die" response – and both were on corners. One was an approaching righthand-drive Range Rover in our lane, the other was a rural driver careening round a curve. Buses and trucks – and there are lots of each – always took up more than half the road meaning a constant beeping of the "too close to the wall" warning sound from our car. The roads are not ones on which to initiate conversations about family, finances or relationships!

Once there, however, the area was indeed the most amazing of all our experiences. A ride to 1,823 metres via the famous Fuente Dé cable car resulted in a 360-degree view of the tops of the highest Picos mountains piercing the morning clouds. For the rest of the day, we had sunshine as we walked the 14km path to the bottom through alpine meadows



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surrounded by the towering limestone mountains with late blooming flowers, past a royal hunting lodge and close to stone shepherd sheds.

Lower on the walk, we passed by trees and green pastures where more of the bell-ringing fluffy-eared golden-brown cows worked on their task of producing milk to make the delicious Spanish cheeses.

Driving to the west through more of the national park was interesting for Tony, who was a mining engineer. There was extensive – and still some existing – coal mining in this area and the remains of many headframes could be seen. In these mining areas, the attractive and compelling mountain towns with their ancient buildings, requisite stone church and red-tiled roofs were replaced by bleak soulless apartment buildings.

An interesting sight as we left the area of the park was a large lake at Riaño. Entire valleys had been flooded and eight communities relocated to create this area. The water was to provide irrigation for all the surrounding areas but with very little snow in the winter and a hot, dry fall, it was at about one quarter of its capacity.

Then back to the coast we went where the roads were of average size (a relief) and there were many more tourists, commercial towns and activities – a shock after the quietness and gentle rhythm of the country landscapes and towns.

An apartment close to Ribadeo proved to be a good transi-



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tion area. It was easy to walk to local sites such as the shrimp farm created within a rock crevice by the ocean or to the local village serving superb seafood. The market in Ribadeo and the large houses built by Spaniards returning from the West Indies both provided lessons on Spanish history and life.

With fewer tourists in the autumn, a visit to the Playa de Las Catedrales (beach of the cathedrals) and a walk through the rock arches provided me with an opportunity and time to paint a picture and for Tony to get the perfect photograph.

With only 1,200 km of driving in 24 days, we had visited the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias and a small area of Galicia. We visited small hill villages, such as Taramundi, a town devoted primarily to the production of forged, handmade knives, and larger coastal towns, such as Llanes, and made opportunities to complete numerous scenic hikes.

Each area had its unique culture, geography and food, and we spent enough time in each region to get at least a taste, not just the flavour, of the way of life. We met gracious Spaniards, talked to fellow travellers and marveled at the fortitude of the pilgrim walkers.

We moved at our own pace and observed, touched, smelled and tasted as we explored a unique part of Spain. The harmonious bells are already calling us to return. |

Aileen Stalker is a retired Occupational Therapist, avid traveller and author of *Snowshoe Trails in Southwestern British Columbia*, her fifth book.

# REBOOT

by VERENA FOXF

ROB HAYNES received the Mayor's Award of Excellence for Civic Volunteers in his native Vancouver in 2016, the same year he was honoured with a Star on Granville Street's Walk of Fame – both for his outstanding contribution and service in the city's entertainment communities.

Since retiring from his work as a producer of special events and consumer shows in Vancouver and abroad (London, UK and Palm Beach, Florida), Rob has served as Chair on the Vancouver Civic Theatres, and as President of the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame volunteer boards.

The former actor got an early start on stage as a child in the 1960s at the Kitsilano Show Boat. He went on to perform in CBC musicals (1970s) and make guest appearances on Alaska-bound Princess Cruises before launching his own talent agency. Later, in the '80s, he started an event production company, which eventually led him to global projects in a VP role for DMGT (Daily Mail & General Trust) London and then Florida.

Rob came full circle when he and his long-time partner, Wayne, returned to Vancouver and the theatre and entertainment communities he loves, in a board leadership role.

"Once it's in your blood, it's always in your blood," he says, on his way out the door to conduct another historical tour of Vancouver's iconic Orpheum theatre.

REVEREND STEPHEN GARRETT, formerly a corporate banker and later a social worker and Warrior Sage leader, says he found his true "calling" about six years ago, when all his earlier personal and professional experience culminated in the end-of-life, death-and-dying work he has been doing since.

Montreal-born and Toronto-educated, Stephen left the banking world when his sister suddenly died in 1988. He expanded his education to complete an MA, and then spent 12 years as a social worker on the Sunshine Coast and in Vancouver's Downtown East Side.

Eventually, after also teaching relationship and conflict res-



Rob Haynes

Photo: Carollyne Sinclair

olution strategies, the Maple Ridge resident says he "stumbled" into death and dying.

"I want to help people die well," says the recently ordained minister and author of four books. He's also the Executive Director of the non-profit consumer advocacy Memorial Society of BC, for which he has compiled a "Ready-to-go Binder" that aims to put everything in one place for those left behind.

Stephen has been hosting monthly Death Cafés, an informal forum for discussion about the inevitable, at Brock House. "I feel that I've arrived, with this work," he says, "as I'm slipping into elderhood myself." |



Stephen Garrett

Verena Foxx is a Vancouver writer/educator. If you have a story to share, contact her at: [verena.foxx@gmail.com](mailto:verena.foxx@gmail.com)

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# Strategies for Spousal Caregivers

By Wendy Johnstone

Lisa has been living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for over five years. She and her partner, Michael, just celebrated 20 years together. Each have children from their previous relationships, and both are still working part-time. As Lisa's symptoms worsen, she requires more assistance. Michael is struggling to balance the demands of being a partner and caregiver to Lisa.

Michael is finding himself feeling sad about the debilitating effect MS is having on Lisa. It's hard to watch the person he loves no longer able to be the person she once was, and he feels guilty for feeling like he's losing the partner he once had. Michael is also physically more tired. He's not sleeping well and his morning exercise routine is being impacted. Both Michael and Lisa are finding themselves socially isolated. They were involved in several community programs and had a healthy social network. Now, they are struggling to figure out a new "normal" for themselves.

Here are a few strategies from spousal caregivers:

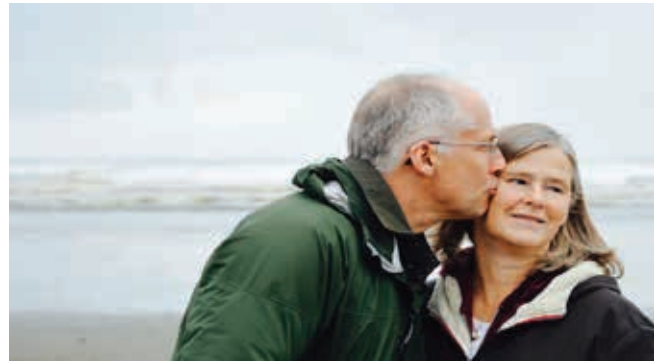
## **Nurture the Bond**

Nancy, who cares for her husband, Bruce, suggests, "It can be hard to maintain a healthy relationship amidst doctor's appointments, fatigue, changes in physical abilities that can impact sexual intimacy and a range of emotions. Find small but important ways to stay physically and emotionally connected. For us, we both realized our relationship was changing and we had to adapt. We like to snuggle and watch movies and shows together. I also read a novel out loud to Bruce in bed and it's been one of best ways for us to stay engaged with each other emotionally."

One thing they are both working on: showing appreciation for each other and avoiding making assumptions. Both Bruce and Nancy agree communication is essential (even when it gets sticky and tricky!)

## **Lighten the Load**

Sam, who is caring for his wife, Sarah, with early onset dementia, speaks about the importance of allowing his wife to do as much as she can. "It might be easier for me to do everything, but she wants to help as much as she can because it keeps her feeling purposeful. I want her to stay as independent as possible, so we lighten the load for each other." Sam also prioritizes having some



one clean their home to free up time for other activities. He and Sarah have already discussed Sam's need for respite down the road.

## **Find Your Tribe**

In Sam's case, it turned out that a work colleague was going through a similar situation. They've created a regular system of support in a safe way to express and process the wide range of emotions that are surfacing. For Nancy, her primary support is her siblings with whom she is very close. They stay in touch regularly by phone and text and once a month she meets with her sister to connect in person. Some spousal caregivers seek out support groups to connect with other spousal caregivers. It provides a place to find comfort and understanding, as well as inspiration and tips from others' experiences.

## **Create Opportunities for Well-Being**

Prioritize your well-being through physical exercise and emotional and spiritual support – one of the keys to cleansing your mind of stress and maintaining stamina. Research shows feelings of overall well-being are linked to better mood, improved cognition, better self-regulation of emotional responses and improved immunity. Staying well might feel like "just one more thing" when you're faced with caregiving. Try seeing it as a welcome reprieve and a way to keep yourself a priority. |

*Wendy Johnstone is a Gerontologist and a consultant with Family Caregivers of British Columbia in Victoria, BC.*



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# SEE YOU AT THE POLLS

by PAT NICHOL



## COURAGEOUS & OUTRAGEOUS

As I write my October column, my thoughts turn to being grateful. Grateful for where I live, for who I have in my life (including my patient editor), and for all I have been given since inhabiting the earth. This year, in addition to it being the month we, as Canadians, celebrate Thanksgiving, I also want to celebrate the opportunity we have in shaping our country. I'm talking about our federal election.

I am so thankful we have the freedom to vote as we choose! Some of you know the story of my political life: my father was a political animal; he came out of the time in Ireland when it was not safe to be political. He was a councillor throughout most of my childhood. When I got my driver's licence at 16, my job on election day was to drive people who did not have transportation to the polls.

My most memorable passenger was a lovely lady who was 83. She lived in a walk-up apartment block and she had arthritis, but she never missed an opportunity to vote. You see, she had fought for the right to cast her ballot.

When I was 18, Dad convinced me to attend a political meeting – by myself – even though I could not vote until I was 21. Like most things in my life, I jumped in with both feet. By the time I was 21, I was on the executive of a local

political party. I spent the next seven years campaigning for others, discussing world affairs with those people leading the country and having a blast.

My point: on voting day this month, please don't let your opportunity to make a difference pass by. Exercise some due diligence, then get out and make a difference. It might be a small difference, but it is a difference!

Women, it is still less than 100 years that those who came before us, fought, went to jail, and were abused simply to have their say. Don't make what they did seem trivial.

If you have a friend, neighbour, colleague or acquaintance who needs your help getting to their polling place, please lend a hand, if you can. It is a short time out of your busy life. And it is an important short time!

See you at the polls. |

Pat Nichol is a speaker and published author. Reach her by email at [mpatnichol@gmail.com](mailto:mpatnichol@gmail.com)

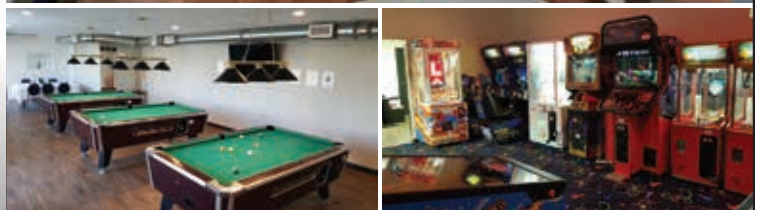


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