

INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

MAY 2021

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, dark brown hair and bangs. She has light blue eyes and is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark grey, textured knit sweater and a necklace with blue beads. Her hands are clasped in front of her, and she is wearing a silver ring on her left hand.

NOVELIST
BARBARA
FRADKIN

RONALD MCDONALD
HOUSE VOLUNTEER
PATRICK HARTNEY

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ARTIST ELFRIDA
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content

MAY 2021



- 4 Author Barbara Fradkin
by [Kate Robertson](#)
- 8 Humble Heroes: Tribute to Mother
by [J. Kathleen Thompson](#)
- 10 Painting for a Cause
by [Myles Shane](#)
- 14 Dragon Boaters Fit & Connected
by [Jesmina Biserovic](#)
- 16 Stepping Up and Out
by [Joan Boxall](#)
- 18 Giving Wildlife a Second Chance
by [INSPIRED Staff](#)
- 20 Guide Dogs Offer Independence
by [Christine Blanchette](#)
- 22 Treasures of Vietnam
by [Linda Blair](#)

- THRIVE BEYOND 55 **2**
- DAY TRIPPIN' IN BC **9** **NEW COLUMN!**
- HOW WE MET **21**
- FOREVER FIT **25**
- FAMILY CAREGIVER **26**
- MARKETPLACE **27**
- LIVING ON PURPOSE **28**

resources

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Cover BARBARA FRADKIN

Writing since she was old enough to formulate words on paper, this school psychologist turned mystery novelist now pursues her passion without compromise.

Photo: Alan Dean Photography

INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

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Subscriptions (12 issues): \$36.75 includes GST, S&H. Canadian delivery only.

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THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



Spring in BC is arriving later than usual, and so are a lot of other things... including the first dose of the COVID vaccine. Many of us thought BC would be further ahead by now. Like many things this past year, I suppose, our expectations have been higher than what could be delivered. Sometimes that's just the way life is.

In this issue, writer J. Kathleen Thompson names some highly recognizable people who brought transformational change to our world through their determination and perseverance. Yet, she notes, it is often the quiet, non-descript people who have the greatest impact on our daily lives. These everyday influencers don't look for a lot of fanfare. They simply come with a desire to do good within their small sphere of influence.

I feel INSPIRED Magazine is one of those everyday influencers. And, as you'll read in this issue, charities are also among the biggest influencers and stabilizers in our communities.

This issue marks the completion of 17 years of publishing INSPIRED Magazine. It all started from very humble beginnings - with interviews and business meetings conducted around my kitchen table.

I started the magazine with a desire to tell the stories of people over the age of 55; to honour their experiences and wisdom. The magazine continues to fulfill that intention, even though it has morphed through name changes and expanded to a website and annual event.

I've heard wonderful stories of readers sharing their copies of INSPIRED - even mailing them to friends and family in other parts of Canada and the world.

Not unlike our experience with COVID-19, my small staff and I have weathered many disappointments and delays with the magazine. Just when you think you're getting ahead, something happens to knock you back a step or two. Then something unexpected pops up to give you a boost again. It can feel like a rollercoaster.

Through the magazine business, I've learned there's an ebb and flow to life. It doesn't make the back-steps any easier, but you come to realize everything has a season. It gives you something to hang onto when the gratification you expect isn't immediate. You have faith it will appear eventually and, meanwhile, you're grateful for the things that are present.

I'm grateful for many things: my health; my family, friends, neighbours and colleagues; for the assistance to small business by our governments; for the support of all our advertisers; for the encouraging words readers have shared with me during these past months that uplifted my heart and kept me moving forward.

In this issue, our content features charities and all they do to support the infrastructure of our communities and worthy causes. How often has a charity been there to make your day better, to support you in some way?

With so many aspects of our communities needing help, your donation can help ease the strain these organizations are under. It will help them deliver more services to people, animals and our environment. Thank you for whatever support you can give.

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Author Barbara Fradkin with her dogs on Sharbot Lake where she enjoys stoking her creativity.

BARBARA FRADKIN: PSYCHOLOGY MEETS “WHODUNIT”

by KATE ROBERTSON

What do a background in psychology and writing about topics like buried bones and a missing uncle have in common? For crime novel writer Barbara Fradkin, who spent 25 years as a child psychologist, the answer is “a lot.”

“My psychology influences every part of my writing,” she says. “Working on the frontlines of a large urban school board, I met people from all walks of life and heard many different life stories. All this inspired and enriched the stories I wanted to tell.”

In 2008, Barbara retired from her child psychologist career because there weren’t enough hours in the day, and the job was emotionally taxing.

“It became too difficult to manage that while trying to write on weekends and evenings, as well as juggling book signings, library readings and other promotional work,” she says.

A few twists and turns lead to Barbara’s discovery that crime fiction is her perfect niche.

“I’ve been writing since I was six years old and have always had stories spinning in my head,” she says. “For years, I wrote dreadful mainstream novels that, fortunately, never got published. Although I enjoyed reading crime novels, it wasn’t until I decided on a whim to write one that I found my home.”

“More than any other genre,” Barbara continues, “crime fiction deals with people’s struggles, their finest hour and their deepest despair. It’s about relationships gone awry and the dark choices people make. Nothing is rawer and more primal than murder. Crime fiction melds my two passions – writing and psychology.”

Barbara grew up in a house where bookshelves lined every wall. “I browsed through some of the great classics at random when growing up. As a teenager, I read every Agatha Christie

and Earl Stanley Gardiner I could get my hands on. I learned about suspects, twists, suspense, and the triumphant ‘big reveal.’ I loved playing the ‘whodunit’ game,” she says.

In university, Barbara also studied the classics and read many of the great Russian, Scandinavian and French writers, as well as those from the US and UK.

“Dostoyevsky stands out in my mind,” she says. “He tackled sweeping human struggles and created memorable characters full of conflicts and desires. To me, the best stories have always been about character and that, along with the suspense and game of the early ‘whodunits,’ shaped my own approach to mysteries.”

As inspiration for her characters, Barbara draws on news snippets she’s read, and experiences she’s been through, but mostly from her own imagination. She also borrows bits from people she knows and melds them into the characters she needs to tell the story.

“Characters have to be vivid, real and distinct from one another, and the more points of connection and contrast between them, the better,” says Barbara.

Her first series, featuring Inspector Green, is set in Ottawa, where she lives. After working for years throughout the city, Barbara knew all its neighbourhoods and communities, from the wealthy diplomatic enclaves to the crowded immigrant tenements.

“Many people think of Ottawa as a grey civil service town, but it has many more layers and colours than that. It was the setting I wanted to share and, over the course of 10 novels, I think I have laid bare most of it,” she says.

After the tenth novel, Barbara decided she wanted to explore the broader canvas of Canada. In one of her Inspector Green books, she sent him up to the Nahanni National Park in the Northwest Territories. She had so much fun writing a completely different setting that she decided she wanted to travel again.

With this inspiration, the Amanda Doucette series was born. Each book in this series (the fourth was released in February 2021) is set in a different iconic location in Canada, starting in Newfoundland and moving west, so Barbara can take

readers on a journey across the country’s vast, varied land.

When Barbara starts writing a novel, she researches by reading, scouring the internet and talking to people, but what makes the story really come to life is when she walks in her characters’ shoes.

“I want to get a visceral feel for the place – the sounds, sights, and smells. Imagination is no substitute for getting down on the ground and drinking in the experience,” she says. “It gives me details I wouldn’t have thought of otherwise, which brings the story to life.”

The required travel for research has given Barbara some unforgettable experiences, like braving a winter camping trip so she could describe it in *The Trickster’s Lullaby*, or a horseback trail ride through the Alberta badland coulees for *The Ancient Dead*.

In the Inspector Green novels, Barbara often wrote about the struggles of people she had encountered in her years of counselling. With her latest protagonist, Amanda Doucette, she’s been able to turn her focus to global issues that she’s become more concerned about, like social justice and human rights.

“Doucette is a former foreign aid worker who has worked in the world’s darkest corners. She always reacts to injustice, so it was a perfect fit for me. Crime fiction, perhaps more than any other genre, often tackles the big social, moral, and human issues of the day,” says Barbara.

Another project Barbara is passionate about is Rapid Reads, an initiative by Orca Books, geared towards reluctant/emerging readers.

“As a school psychologist, I worked with many children who had trouble learning, and I know how important literacy is to their future. Orca Books has always been at the forefront of the literacy effort, and when they approached me and other crime writers with the idea of writing short, easy-read, compelling books for adult learners, I jumped at it.”

The protagonist she chose for her Rapid Reads series is Cedric O’Toole, an unlikely hero who lives on a scrub farm. The setting is fictional, but readers will detect a similarity to the Sharbot

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Snapshot

with Barbara Fradkin

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

"Don't follow other people's dreams; follow your own."

What or who has influenced you the most and why?

"My father, for his love of books and learning, and his unwavering moral integrity, and my mother, for the independent, principled path she blazed when women were supposed to make a good marriage and be a good homemaker."

What are you most grateful for?

"All the gifts I've been given in life. From being born in Canada, to those intelligent, inspirational parents, to the love and support that surrounds me."

What does success mean to you?

"A job well done. That means writing the best book I can, and having the story linger long after the reader closes the book." |



Lake area in Eastern Ontario, where Barbara has a cottage.

For most of us, writing sounds like an exciting career, but Barbara admits the process can be a rollercoaster.

"There are days of excitement and thrills when the ideas pour out and I can't get them down fast enough.

Then there are other days when each word is a struggle and the plot crawls along as I push forward through a scene inch-by-inch."

She admits she's a "modified fly by the seat of her pants" writer. She has a starting point and a vague idea what the story is about, plus a few roughly imagined characters that she'll need to tell the story. "But I have no idea where the story will go, what other characters will show up, how it will end, or who the heroes and villains will be. Hence, the excitement and terror of the unknown."

"It's like driving along an unknown road in the dark with headlights illuminating the road just ahead while the rest is in darkness," Barbara continues.

"It's as much an adventure for me as for the reader, but

sometimes I don't know where to go, or I feel as if I'm stuck in a maze. These are the moments of doubt and discouragement that plague every writer, no matter how many books we've written. Only once I finish the book and discover what happened and what the story is really about, do I believe it will actually be a book and not gibberish."

Despite Barbara's angst, her readers love her books and can't wait for the next release. She's also been nominated for several writing awards and is a two-time winner of the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel.

The award she cherishes the most is not

a win, but her first nomination in Crime Writers of Canada's Best Novel category for her second Inspector Green book, *Once Upon a Time*. In the novel, Barbara tackled a powerful topic, an old war crime from World War II, and she was afraid she wouldn't do the topic justice.

"It was a story very dear to me, with a personal connection to my late husband, and I had poured my heart into it. When a writer finishes a book and sends it out into the world, we never know how readers will receive it. I had hoped the story would touch people, and that nomination told me I had succeeded," she says.

Barbara splits her time between her home in Ottawa and her cottage on Sharbot Lake, a peaceful place where she says she finds her best inspiration.

"There are no distractions or temptations, like other people, shopping, revving cars or social demands. Just me, my dogs, my pen and paper and the soft lapping of waves against the shore. I feel a smile spread through me as I slip back into my creative zone," she says.

As a child, Barbara was a daydreamer, with exciting adventures and imaginary friends, and as someone who still spends a lot of time in the world of her

imagination, she doesn't think she will ever quiet the stories in her head and retire from writing.

"But one day, I hope to find the time to write the story of my parents' life, primarily my father's. I have done quite a lot of research about it, so that's an exciting project I will tackle when I don't have a book deadline hanging over my head."

Barbara loves a good adventure and feels that life should be filled with new experiences and places. She particularly loves nature and the "roads less travelled."

"While I'm still able, I would love to travel to wilderness destinations where I

"I'm learning to say 'no' more often, to choose the friends and activities I want, and not feel guilty... the older I get, the more I set boundaries to take care of myself."

can hike, boat, bicycle, or canoe, to fully appreciate the unspoiled wilds. Australia and New Zealand are high on my list, as are the mountains and ocean coves of South America. But I would also never turn down a trip to the vineyards of Tuscany!" she says.

"Money and safety are the biggest obstacles to some of my dreams," she continues, "like paddling in the Galapagos, sleeping under the stars on a remote Caribbean Island and going on a jeep safari in Botswana. I'd love to explore the narrow streets of Marrakesh, ramble across the moors of Scotland and see the beauty of the South Pacific."

Barbara's immediate travel plan is a trip to the west coast of Vancouver Island, where her next Amanda Doucette book is set. She hopes to make the trip before summer, depending on the easing of the pandemic travel restrictions.

Rather than viewing aging as a hindrance, Barbara sees it as a time of fewer obligations and fewer expectations.

"There's the obvious freedom from the daily pressures of a job and young family, but there's also more freedom to think, say and be myself," she says. "I'm learning to say 'no' more often, to choose the friends and activities I want, and not feel guilty. I've learned I don't have to be perfect, do what's expected of me, or always do the 'right thing.' This is a hard struggle, but the older I get, the more I set boundaries to take care of myself. And how freeing it is to wear comfortable old clothes and no makeup!"

With such a rich life of studying and writing about the human behaviour of others, I couldn't help asking Barbara what one life lesson she would pass on to others.

"I love the old carpenter's adage," she answers. "Measure twice, cut once. Some things can't be undone easily, so before taking a leap, make sure you have all the facts, have listened to others and have weighed the possibilities. Then go for it!"

Wise words. |

To learn more about Barbara Fradkin, visit www.barbarafradkin.com

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HUMBLE HEROES: A TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER

by J. KATHLEEN THOMPSON

We all have our own heroes – people we admire for their single-minded devotion to a cause, who, despite the heartache and the hardship, accomplish the impossible. Their causes are usually directed to the betterment of humankind, and require strength, tenacity and courage of a superhuman sort.

We remember, for example, what Mahatma Gandhi endured for the people of India; Nelson Mandela for the blacks of South Africa; Joan of Arc for the French; Canadian soldiers for The Allies at the Battle of Vimy Ridge; Mother Teresa for the poor of Kolkata; Florence Nightingale for the injured in the Crimean War; T.E. Lawrence for Arab independence; Frida Kahlo for, despite the daily physical pain in doing so, her championship of Mexican art and culture; and songwriter Leonard Cohen for, after transcending enormous personal difficulties, continuing to see the hope and blessedness in this life.

These are but a few of the people that have shown us what belief and perseverance can do. No fanfare accompanied their deeds, indeed what seems to characterize the heroic is humility; that what is achieved is all in a day's work, with one foot after another, one unannounced "breakthrough" after another, and one kind gesture after another. Like the humility that distinguished your mother's care.

My own mother wore humility so naturally that, as an adolescent, she had me believing that nothing less than Buddhahood was a necessary precondition of motherhood. The oath she clearly took to eschew selfish desire and practice acceptance meant that my siblings and I had a solid ground beneath our feet and a warm wind at our backs growing up.

Unfailingly subjugating her needs for ours in order to manage and nurture a brood of six, it would take years to discover this was not the norm. Other mothers had the good sense to put their families to work, and to slip away now and again to the spa, a movie, or coffee with a neighbour. Mum's extra-curricular activities were also predictably altruistic, among them serving as secretary for our elementary school's PTA, attending every school concert, and scoring for our baseball games.

Leaving behind her training as a bacteriologist and prin-



cipal role in a government laboratory when she married my father made her sacrifice and adoption of a Buddha consciousness all the more spectacular.

Along with my mother's remarkably selfless, desireless nature, she effortlessly assumed other virtues that, unbeknownst to her, were hallmarks of a highly evolved human being. Wisdom, prudence, patience, tolerance, kindness and forgiveness – my mother exuded them all. Her stoic ability to rise above difficult situations and meet challenges without drama or hesitation was legendary and taught us that complaining and blame shifting had little to teach us. With her mantra, "if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all," casting the first stone was never an option.

Being the wise and reasoned person she was, my mother's love was larger than a hug or a Hallmark greeting and manifested itself in her generosity of spirit. She had the grace to accept us as we were, forgave us our trespasses, and wisdom to lead by example. Her compassion played out in her annual door-to-door campaigning for the BC Cancer Foundation and her love was woven into all the handiwork done for others – the quilts, hooked rugs, Norwegian sweaters, embroidered wall hangings, macraméd plant hangers – without assistance, without a word of self-congratulation.

A humble person's greatness is revealed slowly, and it is only now that I see how extraordinary my mother's contribution was to the landscape of our growing up lives. Like the humble heroes before her, it wasn't because she expected her work to turn heads, it was because that was what someone who takes their calling seriously does. I wager she had no idea the company she kept! And I'm sure I will not be alone in raising a glass to these special heroes in our lives, our mothers, this month and for many to come. |

ABOVE | The author's mum enjoys a moment with what she considered the most valuable aspect of her life – her children. Photo: J. Kathleen Thompson



PEDAL POWERING THE ARBUTUS GREENWAY

Spring is finally here! And though pandemic restrictions are still in place, we can get out of our COVID confines and enjoy some fresh air. In the next few issues, I'll share local day-escapes where you can have some fun and stay safe. So, toss off those PJs and come along for the ride.

Riding is the key word for this piece. With travel on hold this past year, my husband, Brent, and I decided to cash in some airline tickets for a couple of e-bikes. Although they won't take us overseas, with a little (or no) pedaling, we can cover a lot of local territory in a day.

The Arbutus Greenway in Vancouver is one of our favourite cycling jaunts. The 8.5-kilometre former railway bed that snakes its way from the Fraser River to 6th Street and Fir is now a paved dream-come-true for anyone with a good pair of legs or set of wheels.

We like to start at the most southern end, near 75th and Milton, where parking is free and there is less pedestrian traffic. This end is quieter and less scenic, offering only peek-a-boo views of industrial landmarks. But the nearby historic Fraser River Park, can be a delightful detour if you want to stretch your legs before the ride. And the hidden gem of Milton Bar and Grill can offer a delicious deck-dining reprieve after you return. Both venues boast vistas of the adjacent river – and departing planes (although fewer this year!).

Our cycling corridor is all downhill from here. And even though the rail grade is gradual, what goes down must come back up, hence our delight in having a throttle.

There aren't a lot of visuals until 53rd Avenue. And then the flora begins. Tulips that were planted last autumn are now in bloom. Vibrant reds, sunshine yellows, virgin whites will soon hug up to fragrant

hyacinths and honeysuckle. In another bed, petals and greenery cascade from hanging baskets and hidden beneath the well-tilled groundcover are germinating seeds. With so many garden plots bordering our byway, we literally take time to smell the flowers.

The quaint community of Kerrisdale is home to 200 diverse shops, many of which will also slow down your pedal power. You might want to sample the Portuguese egg tarts at Michele Cake Shop on 44th, the yummy rolls at Sushi Bar Ajisai on 42nd, or Bufala's acclaimed pizza at 38th Ave. All strictly adhere to the current COVID protocols, so there really is no harm in stopping for a bite. Or two!

Distancing is not a problem along this entire route. The paths are wide, directional flow is respected and grassy sidelines permit further separation, if necessary.

Going north from Kerrisdale, you'll parallel Arbutus and enjoy sneak peeks into upscale homes that are backed by the distant North Shore Mountains. Dismount at 33rd for traffic, as well as at King Edward Boulevard and 16th Avenue. In need of a little hydration? Then don a mask here and pull into Loblaws City Market.

Or if you're still feeling peckish, keep pushing the pedals and weave your way downward to the beginning of this route – past more gardens and bountiful blooms – to 6th Avenue, where you have your choice of take-out goodies at either the trendy Beaucoup Bakery or historic Arbutus Coffee, a café with roots that date back to 1907.

If you don't have an e-bike, you just may need the additional fuel to make the return trip! |

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PAINTING FOR A CAUSE

by MYLES SHANE

In 2007, Victoria, BC had grown increasingly concerned about the number of homeless living on the streets. Subsequently, advocates, a street pastor, and the local council decided to build a central community centre to serve the city's most vulnerable.

At the same time, Elfrida Schragen, a retired special needs teacher, felt an overwhelming need to give back to her community. "I hit upon the idea of painting portraits of the homeless to raise money for the new central facility," she recalls. "My friends went to bat selling them to individuals, companies, churches, etc." Their plan was extremely successful, and they raised \$27,000. All the funds were donated to the new facility called Our Place.

OUR PLACE

Our Place is a unique inner-city community centre whose mandate is to assist people struggling with homelessness, mental health challenges, substance use issues, the working poor, and impoverished elderly.

It provides over 1,000 meals every day plus snacks, 400 units of housing plus transitional shelter spaces, hot showers, education, job skills, health care, addiction recovery services, donated clothing, counselling, outreach services, and a storage facility. Most importantly, it provides a sense of hope and belonging to people in need.

Shortly after Elfrida gained exposure for raising funds for Our Place, her husband had a severe stroke.

"He became wheelchair bound. That finished any traveling we might do," says Elfrida. The couple used to spend winters in Florida, but with her husband's limited mobility, Elfrida developed a new focus in her work.

"It occurred to me to paint [homeless people's] portraits. The portraits were a way to honour them and their achievements. Our Place staff supported me. Even when the pan-



PHOTOS | (top to bottom) Artist Elfrida Schragen. Parker Johnson painting. Agnes Stieda painting.

PAGE 10 | "In the Forest Deeply." Photos: Elfrida Schragen

demical came, I just kept on painting. We sold work through an online donation site and raised almost \$50,000 – the portraits went to some of the subjects, some to the family of the subjects, and some are on the walls of Our Place facilities.”

Recently, Our Place asked Elfrida if she would paint a series of “Admired Youth,” between the ages of 18-29 who were making a difference in their communities through advocacy.

“So far, I have painted 10 and expect to get up to 20-30, she says. “These will go on another sale site in late spring or early summer, or if the pandemic allows there might even be a show and a fundraising event focused on the portraits.”

BORN TO PAINT

Elfrida was born an artist, one might even say a prodigy.

“I was the daughter of professional artist CW Kettlewell. Colour, design, layout and self-expression were a constant thread through our dinner conversations, and during reports on his latest commissions.”

Elfrida began wanting to please her father with her daily drawings on the cardboard that came out of his laundered shirts.

“In his loving ignorance, he tried to teach me, and to my horror he actually drew on my work, when all I wanted was approval and attention.”

One time, her dad went a little too far and ruined Elfrida’s creation. “He took a drawing that really expressed how I felt. A pony being led back to the barn in a fog. I didn’t know anything about art therapy then. He was a bit aggressive asking me how I came up with the idea, and he tried to tell me how to make it show better, and then he started painting over it. I was devastated.”

Elfrida wanted to leave home as fast as possible when she turned 18. She didn’t see herself having any sort of future in rural King City, Ontario.

“I wanted something bigger but didn’t know what. So, I tried out for a more cosmopolitan university while all my cohorts were going for local universities. McGill was a huge challenge. After a small-town education, I didn’t even know how to use a library.”

Eventually, Elfrida moved to Victoria with her first husband. She applied for a position at a place called Seven Oaks, a treatment centre for disturbed children.

“It was fascinating and totally absorbing,” she says. “All the staff were in therapy and I learned a great deal about myself. I went on to get a teaching degree at the University of Victoria. Once I became a teacher, I worked with delayed and disturbed students in elementary school, then went on to oversee a new program for autistic children where I managed 7-9 childcare workers, write reports, and design individual programs.”

Seven years on, she was asked by the provincial government to work on an interdisciplinary team investigating services for severely handicapped children. Two years later, she was back with the school district and working in the children’s unit at Eric Martin Psychiatric Hospital.”

Part of the reason Elfrida believes she became involved in the education of and worked with difficult children was her relation-

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Photo credit: Mitchell Raphael

David has worked for close to 20 years as part of Oxfam’s International Programs team



It’s important to me to continue to support the work I believe in, even once I’m gone. I’ve seen first-hand how Oxfam makes a difference with people and partners in developing countries, through rights-based programs and policy change. I’m making a difference today, and with my legacy gift.”

If you share Oxfam and David’s values and vision of a just world without poverty, contact Rowena.Griffiths@oxfam.org or phone 613-627-8634

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ship with her father.

“I was a very sensitive child, easily hurt and desperate to please,” she says. “I never found the words to describe my feelings, as feelings weren’t discussed so openly as they are today. I am basically an upbeat person, but I frequently felt sad, unheard, and unable to label what was going on with me. I worked with kids because I wanted them to feel they had a right to their feelings, that they would be listened to, and that they would get some support and guidance on how to handle those feelings in a socially acceptable way.”



After many years working with children at the Queen Alexandra Children’s Centre, Elfrida finished her teaching career at a regular school. “We had a great time learning many subjects through the use of art and drama.”

Elfrida started pursuing a career in art therapy at age 40. “Well, my real love of creating started then. I bagged the idea of therapist, kept teaching and delved into the artistic process strictly for myself. It lit a fire in me – it was like coming home!”

“My preferred subject matter has expanded from portraiture to plein air and just about anything where light and line catch my fancy. I find huge caches of energy when I am painting. The absorption of the task is like meditation but with an external and internal result.” |

To see more of Elfrida Schragen’s Portraits of Caring, visit www.ourplacesociety.com/events/portraits-caring

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DRAGON BOATERS REMAIN ACTIVE & CONNECTED

by JESMINA BISEROVIC

In 1996 as part of his research into exercise for cancer patients, UBC's Dr. Don McKenzie questioned the practice of limiting upper body exercise for women who had gone through surgery for breast cancer. The results of his research showed dragon boating did not harm nor increase arm lymphedema in the participants of his research.

The women found dragon boating so beneficial, both physically and mentally, that they continued after the study. This was the birth of "Abreast in the Boat" team. Today, there are breast cancer survivor teams all over the globe.

The "Island Breaststrokers" (IBS) dragon boat team of Victoria, BC was formed in the fall of 1996 by Marjorie Woodroffe after she witnessed Vancouver's Abreast in a Boat, the original breast cancer survivor team, race in the 1996 Victoria Dragon Boat Festival.

Made up of breast cancer survivors, IBS members range in age as young as 28, with the majority being in their sixties and seventies. Since their debut in 1997, the Breaststrokers have amassed medals and miles from around the world to show for their dedication to health and wellness.

Team members are committed to the community in support of breast health, healthy living and raising awareness about breast cancer prevention and early screening. The team participates in the Women's Expo, Encore, Run for the Cure, Jingle Mingle, the May Day parade, and fundraising for the BC Cancer Foundation. IBS practices throughout the year and attends local dragon boat festivals, often in the summer.

In 2006, Heather Biasio was working as a nurse in

Victoria when her friend and colleague, Marjorie Woodroffe, encouraged her to join the team. Catriona Campbell joined the team on a recommendation from her doctor in 2010.

"This camaraderie of being in the boat paddling as one confirms the sense of there being life after cancer," says Catriona.

The team participates in annual festivals in Victoria, Comox, Vancouver and Campbell River. Every four years they compete for the International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission event (130 teams from around the globe); the most recent was 2018 in Florence. The next IBCPSC competition they hope to join is 2023 in New Zealand.

With COVID restrictions on gatherings and social distancing, dragon boating is on hold and IBS members are taking it upon themselves to stay in shape for the next practice and, ultimately, the next race.

"We are still doing things throughout the year," says Catriona, "we just aren't actually in the boat very often because it's more about being in that proximity with everyone, right?"

"Yes, because there's 20 of us in a boat," adds Heather, "there's no way you can be two metres apart, so the team, as a whole, hasn't been active. Maybe by the fall we might be able

ABOVE | The Island Breaststrokers dragon boat team is looking forward to being together again and getting back on the water when restrictions lift.

to get out, maybe this summer. It's hard to say with the virus."

Some of the ways the team has been keeping in shape and staying connected is through weekly outdoor exercises in the park, led by their coach, plus submitting weekly mileage to Abreast in the Boat in their virtual "Around the World" activity in celebration of their 26 years as a team.

"Over last summer, some of us took up paddle boarding and practicing in single person outrigger canoes (OC1) to get on the water," says Catriona. "Some members are continuing with OC1."

"There's still the optimism that the national teams are planning on having a festival in October and you have to practice beforehand," says Heather. "So, you know, at some level, I think we will get back in the boats soon."

For those wanting more competition, the Vancouver Island team, Flat Out, takes part in national competitions and qualified for the World championship. The Island Breaststrokers is a team for

all levels of fitness and competition.


"We want every woman who has experienced breast cancer to be given the opportunity to try dragon boating," says Heather.

"We see ourselves as thrivers not just survivors," adds Catriona. "It's more about living a healthy lifestyle. In fact, I am a Breaststroker on one team, but eight of us have chosen, at least for the last two years, to go on and become part of the more competitive team, Flat Out."

IBS team members have managed to stay well connected throughout the pandemic and they look forward to being together again in the boat.

"Our coach sent us a video the other day on Facebook, and everyone's in sync with each other," says Heather. "It's amazing paddling. Seeing that video really brought it back because it's that oneness I think for me. And also, the camaraderie in that boat is one of my best experiences. I really miss it." |

For more information, visit www.island-breaststrokers.com



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STEPPING UP AND OUT

by JOAN BOXALL

When a child needs life-saving treatment, Ronald McDonald House BC and Yukon steps up for families. The mission of Ronald McDonald House (RMH or the 'House') is about keeping families together.

In their 73-bedroom House (Vancouver), and four-bedroom Family Room (Surrey), they assist up to 2,000 families a year from over 200 BC and Yukon communities. Cancer, heart surgery, or neo-natal intensive care (NICU) can require a stay of a few days and up to a year.

Robyn Ives, Communications Officer for RMH says, "The main challenge during COVID-19 is that it takes a village to support the House – and we have had to keep our village at a distance for everyone's safety."

Volunteers normally help run programs, cook meals and support fundraising events, but the pandemic paused programs and restricted visitors.

"We have new protocols for sanitizing and distancing to ensure families' safety and are looking at safe ways to bring more volunteer programs back," Ives adds.

"Our community has stayed in touch and found new ways to support our families virtually and from a distance. We were able to stay open all 365 days in 2020."

Ives says they have a diverse team of volunteers who answer questions at the front desk, keep kitchens clean and stocked, organize a group to cook dinner, raise funds, or host programs for families such as paint nights, teen game nights, or Lego Robotics where communication and teamwork skills prevail.

* * *

Patrick Hartney is an RMH volunteer with over 1,000 hours of service.

"No job is too big or too small," says Ives of Patrick's dedication. "And he is such a calming presence for our families... the reason we can do what we do!"

A smile from a child or a thank you from a family is Patrick's reward.

"My work life was project management, new construction, facility renovation," says Patrick. "In late 1994, I heard of a Society that was renovating a large heritage home to create a pediatric palliative hospice. I took the Family Volunteer training program."

From Canuck Place (for 12 years), Patrick's experience led him to the Vancouver Hospice Society doing Bereavement Walks, and later volunteering at Ronald McDonald House BC and Yukon, where he's been since it opened in 2014.



Ronald McDonald House BC and Yukon volunteer Patrick Hartney.

"It was an honour to work with such an exceptional professional care team; the stories, tears and, yes, laughter at times are many," says Patrick.

"The families have had their world turned upside down; the House is there to provide them a 'home' away from home... to ensure that their stay is as comfortable and safe as possible, allowing them the time they need to care for their child during treatment," he says.

As for COVID-19, Patrick says, "In late November of 2020, House management invited a few of us back, on a limited basis, to assist staff with administration duties, kitchen and pantry arrangements. Staff is currently reviewing all the pre-COVID-19 programs offered to families, with a view to how they will function, and when they will be able to return the House to full occupancy."

An RMH volunteer should be a good listener – caring, non-judgmental, understanding and flexible, according to Patrick. He learned early in his volunteer work to leave his workday at the curb. The same goes, to the extent possible, for when he leaves his volunteer role.

STEP UP FOR FAMILIES

Ives admits that although in-person fundraising events are still a ways away, "Step Up For Families" is a way to get outside and move, with some friendly competition and the support of a community.

"This May, virtually assemble your team of family, friends, classmates or co-workers," says Ives. "Move a total of 73 kilometres while raising awareness and funds for RMH BC's 73-bedroom House and Family Room."

"No matter where you live, you can participate by walking, running, cycling or moving... bring our community together." |

To learn more, visit <https://rmhbc.ca>

Joan Boxall is author of *DrawBridge: Drawing Alongside My Brother's Schizophrenia* (Caitlin Press).

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GIVING WILDLIFE A SECOND CHANCE

by **INSPIRED STAFF**

Wildlife Rescue Association has been saving wild animals for 41 years with the help of people like Paul and Rosemary. The couple contacted Wildlife Rescue Association when they noticed an injured bird near Vancouver General Hospital. Being new to the country, they were unfamiliar with the local wildlife.

“All we knew was this injured animal needed help and we felt sorry for it,” Rosemary explains. That was 13 years ago.

Since then, Paul and Rosemary’s passion for the care and rehabilitation of injured and orphaned wildlife has continued to grow. They are firm believers that when they provide for others, the reward is tenfold, and they knew they could make a difference: “We saw these vulnerable animals not having a voice or access to help.”

This philanthropic commitment to rescue aligns with their deeply felt values to help vulnerable wildlife and give them their best chance to return to a free and natural life in the wild. To this end, they are donors, volunteers, and have arranged a planned estate gift to the Wildlife Rescue Association.

Paul and Rosemary take an active role in the wellbeing of the animals they bring to Wildlife Rescue for care. They became volunteers for the release team, so they can participate in returning the animal back to the wild once it has recovered. They appreciate being part of the solution and shared success with Wildlife Rescue.

“I get a kick of endorphins when I have the opportunity to release a recovered animal back to the wild,” says Paul.



Wildlife Rescue donors
Paul and Rosemary.

Wildlife Rescue has treated more than 125,000 animals since 1979 and has grown into an internationally recognized organization with the highest standards for best achievable care.

For them, it was natural to become Freedom Partners through Wildlife Rescue’s monthly giving program. It feels good knowing they are helping to provide medicine, veterinary care, and species-appropriate nutrition to wildlife all year round.

“Whenever we see a story in the news about Wildlife Rescue saving an animal, we know we are a part of that.”

As the population of Metro Vancouver continues to expand, pressures on urban wildlife are increasing. It is important to Paul and Rosemary that they can help wildlife for years to come. With the help of their investment advisor, they included Wildlife Rescue in their estate plans.

“We have seen first-hand the compassion of staff and volunteers at Wildlife Rescue and want to ensure their good work can carry on far into the future.” |

To learn more, visit www.wildliferescue.ca






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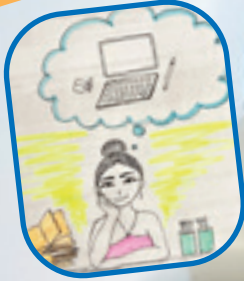
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GUIDE DOGS MAKE INDEPENDENCE POSSIBLE

by CHRISTINE BLANCHETTE

Sabine Laubental has always been a dog lover, and as her vision started to deteriorate, the idea came naturally to apply for a dog with the Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind is a national charitable organization that provides Canadian-bred and professionally trained guide dogs to Canadians who qualify, changing the lives of individuals by improving their safety, freedom, and independence.

“In our 37 years, we have created over 900 successful guide dog teams!” says Alex Ivic, Manager of Development.

Sabine, a Victoria, BC resident, shared her experience in having a guide dog: the companionship, and the many benefits that have improved her quality of life.

“I had always seen myself as getting a guide dog in the future. Over the years, I recognized that it was time to start



Sabine Laubental and Stella out for their daily walk.

making an application for a dog. I knew it would probably take quite a long time to get a dog once I had applied, but they called me within two weeks with a dog. I was pretty lucky and pretty excited.”

Sabine and her dog, Stella, a yellow Labrador crossed with a golden retriever, have become inseparable. It was a natural fit right from the beginning of the Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind program.

“When I went to the school (in Ontario), I was the only student due to COVID. Percy worked one-on-one with me for the 10 days that I was there. We would go out into the community on busy sidewalks. We went on transportation, like buses and trains, and down escalators and then to elevators and all the different environments that I might encounter when I’m out walking Stella.”

One of the school’s objectives is to match the dog according to the client’s personality and temperament.

“They really did an excellent job matching our personalities,” says Sabine. “You put the harness on her and she’s ready to go to work. And then when the harness comes off, she’s just a dog. A wonderful dog.”

Stella has helped Sabine maintain her independence and provides safety in the daily activities of life – from grocery shopping to errands. Around dinner time, Stella likes to put her head on Sabine’s lap.

When it comes to achieving plenty of exercise, they get an hour or more daily, along with Stella playing in the yard.

Upon graduating from the program in September 2020, Sabine and Stella have become a strong team in learning how to work together and develop a pace that suits them. |

For more information about Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind or the Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind program, visit <https://guidedogs.ca>



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by VERENA FOXX

HOW WE MET

HENDRIKA & WILLEM

When Hendrika, the second eldest of 11 children, emigrated to Canada from Holland in 1959 with her family, she didn't know that Willem, a young Dutch engineer had also arrived in Toronto at almost the same time.

But it wasn't long after, when they had all settled in, that her father, Ben, met Willem at a Dutch Roman Catholic Church gathering for limited English speakers. Realizing Willem was on his own in Canada, Ben invited him home to join his Sunday family dinner.

What Ben hadn't mentioned, though, was that he had four sons and seven daughters around the table! At the time, Hendrika, the oldest girl, was 16 and Willem was 22. After two years of weekly dinners and numerous family occasions that gave them plenty of time to get to know each other, Willem and Hendrika began a courtship when she turned 18.

"He was someone that I felt I could trust," Hendrika recalls, "so we dated for two years and then we married when I was 20."

Willem, who had met and grown to know all seven sisters of the family, always knew it was Hendrika that he would wait for. She remembers him saying early in their relationship that he hoped they would have a few children and a long life together.

Fifty-six years later, the couple, with their grown sons, a daughter-in-law and two teenage granddaughters, now all call Victoria home, while the rest of Hendrika's large family remain in Ontario. |

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TREASURES OF VIETNAM

by LINDA BLAIR

To find the real treasures of Vietnam, you have to stray a little from the main path. Big cities like Hanoi, Da Nang, or Ho Chi Minh City, all have hundreds of intriguing historical sites, unforgettable museums, vibrant night life, and exotic foods. The real treasure, however, lies a little deeper.

A treasure trove of magnificence and rich culture can be found in the 15th century city of Hoi An. Sometimes overlooked, this up-and-coming city of 150,000 people has been busy reinventing itself over the last two decades. This exciting new tourist destination became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. For a full measure of culture, history, cuisine, and hospitality, a visit to this perfectly preserved destination should be included in your itinerary.

Roots of Hoi An are traced back to the Kingdom of Champa during the 2nd to 10th century A.D. Hoi An became the biggest and most important seaport city for trade during the 16th century. Ships arrived from Europe, Japan, and Asia in search of silk, porcelain, lacquer, and medicinal herbs.

Colonies soon developed along the waterfront when many seafaring merchants set up shop during the off season. By the beginning of the 19th century the Thu Bon River began to fill with silt and ships were no longer able to enter the port. As a result, merchant ships diverted to Da Nang, which then took over as the major port city.

Ghosts of ancient times can be recognized while meandering through the streets. Influences of Chinese and Japanese that once settled here are most notably found in the big timbered assembly halls and merchant shops that lend a hand in providing the city some of its ambience. A great number of descendants of early Chinese settlers make up a significant portion of today's population. Some houses have 7th generation families living within them. Approximately 800 heritage

buildings in pristine condition, including Japanese merchant houses, Chinese Temples, and Shrines are located primarily in "Old Town."

You can stroll through the 15th-16th centuries when you cross the wooden Japanese Covered Bridge, built here in 1593 to connect the Chinese and Japanese neighbourhoods. This bridge has become the symbol of Hoi An, and even though it has been rebuilt over the years, it still retains the original arched frame and ornate roofing.

Shuffling along the streets and pathways of Hoi An are persuasive street vendors (mostly women) wearing the iconic conical hat. Shouldering the weight of their yokes with dangling baskets laden with fresh fruit, produce, and fish; a scene one might have expected to see a century ago. It appears that not much has changed. Even as they carry their heavy loads for 14-15 hours every day, they are quick to smile and aim to please. With English widely spoken, communicating does not usually present a problem.

Today, strolling down tree-lined streets with a bohemian vibe in Old Town, you'll pass numerous art galleries showcasing local works of art, quirky boutiques, and funky little coffee houses with notes of jazz floating through their open windows. Take a detour into some of the many alleyways to poke around in the little nooks and crannies as that's where you're most likely to find something out of the ordinary. Expert tailor shops abound in this city. During my visit, there were more than 700 listed tailor shops all eager to fit you with custom-made clothing in a remarkably short time.

ABOVE | Ba Mu Temple. RIGHT | A street vendor.

PAGE 24 | Ms. Lys' Cooking School located in Old Town serves up the weird and the wonderful. TOC | Neighbourhood of old houses. Photos: Linda Blair

A unique way to view Old Town with its vibrantly coloured French colonial-style buildings stained with age, can be done from the comfort of a bicycle rickshaw. At every turn something unique and unexpected appears along these pedestrian-friendly streets. Whichever way you decide to explore the streets, you will be sure to find some measure of delight in your discoveries.

Visiting the Central Market in Old Town, you will enjoy a visual adventure and uncover everything from soup to fresh fruits and veggies and every notion in between, including roofing tiles. It's best to arrive early in the morning to catch the beehive of activity as locals gather to barter for seafood arriving on fishing boats, hear farmers haggling over freshly picked produce alongside butchers, and noodle makers. With the aroma of freshly baked baguettes wafting through the air, you will definitely be searching for breakfast by the time you finish here. Housewares, fresh flowers, handmade items such as leather goods, silk lanterns, bamboo baskets and, of course, souvenirs, can be found in the stalls surrounding the market.

If coffee or a perfectly blended cappuccino is what you seek, a stop at Hoi An Roastery in the heart of Old Town would be an excellent place for a coffee break, or light meal. With the ground floor often filled to capacity, the upstairs level usually has avail-



able seating, often next to an open shuttered window. Here you will have a vantage point with a different perspective of the street scene below, especially at night.

The real magic of Hoi An begins to materialize as the sun starts to slip below the Thu Bon River. Hundreds, if not thousands, of lanterns begin to illuminate the streets and pathways. People surrender to the pull of the waterways in Old Town, where they set a burning candle afloat on the river, and watch it sedately drift away carrying their wishes. Glowing silk lanterns are strung through the trees and crisscross the streets, magically lighting the way as you saunter along these historical avenues. Dinner in a restaurant with a rooftop view would be a romantic way to watch the sunset, but to really feel the vibe and excitement, you need to be in the streets with the people.

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All manner of sweet, sour, and savory can be found here. More than just a school, the cafeteria-style restaurant on the ground floor serves up some fantastic gastronomic delights. Here, you simply rove among the different food stations, make your selections then take a seat and enjoy your meal. Cooking classes are held on the second floor with a formal dining room called Morning Glory on the third. A good selection of wine, excellent food, decadent desserts, ambient lighting, and impeccable service, all contribute to a memorable evening in this restaurant. Window-seats available under a star-studded sky with the soft glow of lanterns spilling over the streets below further contribute to the experience of fine dining at this establishment.



Vietnam has much to offer with its colourful history, vibrant cities, breathtaking landscapes, spectacular beaches, tantalizing cuisine and expert tailoring. Hoi An appears to have it all from high-end resorts situated on white sand beaches to family operated homestays. Any number of adventurous day trips can be arranged for diving, snorkelling, or kayaking around the unspoiled and undeveloped Cham Islands just 25 nautical miles off the coast of Hoi An. Cycle through the countryside to see water buffalo and farmers work the rice fields just as they have for the last 200 years or take a yoga class. The possibilities are endless, and I believe Vietnam is a place that has something for everyone. The warmth, charm, and hospitality of the local people will make your trip most memorable, and leave you wanting more – as it did for me. |

For additional photos, visit www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/hoi-an-treasures

Linda A. Blair is a travel writer and photographer.



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by EVE LEES



TIMING EATING WITH EXERCISE

The guidelines for timing eating with exercise are general because there are many factors to consider (like how much we eat, and how long and hard we exercise). In addition, we are all individual in our response to foods combined with physical exertion.

Everyone should follow a healthful, balanced diet every day: this, essentially, is considered your long-term pre-exercise “fuel.” That’s simple advice for us all. And so is the general recommendation to eat mostly carbohydrates (carbs) before activity for fuel, and more protein with carbs after activity (protein to rebuild; carbs to refuel).

However, there can be grey areas even with simple recommendations because we each differ in our needs. Let’s discuss a few of them.

If you exercise early in the morning, eating before exercise is up to you. Generally, it’s a good idea to eat first, for a good source of fuel, especially if your activity is long and you are really exerting yourself.

While some people can’t exercise on an empty stomach – they feel lightheaded and have no energy as they exercise – others don’t seem to need that extra food fuel before they hit the gym early in the morning. This could possibly be because they ate a large evening meal the night before or their activity isn’t too intense or strenuous. And there may be other factors.

For those who need to eat before activity – especially early morning – try finishing breakfast at least one hour before being active. If that’s not possible, have a small amount of food 30 minutes before exercise.

Small snacks immediately before and during exercise can be tolerated by most people, but it’s best to experiment and do what works for you. Carrots, an apple, a banana, grapes, or whole-grain crackers are good high-carb choices. You can include small amounts of yogurt if you like, as it provides a reasonable amount of carbs to help fuel your workout.

If you are going for a moderate

30-minute walk, eating before exercise is not necessary. Just take some water with you. However, the harder and longer you exercise, the more carbs you may need in your pre-exercise meals. And because this meal will be a large one, you should wait at least three hours before exercising to allow the food to digest.

You don’t want to interrupt the digestive process by shunting the blood supply from your stomach to your working muscles. Or you can choose to have a small high-carb, pre-exercise snack 30 minutes before intense exercise and take several high-carb snacks with you (like those mentioned above) to consume frequently throughout your activity.

Eating after exercise is also important to help your muscles recover and replace their glycogen stores (their stored fuel). Have a meal composed of both protein (to rebuild tissue) and carbohydrate (to refuel) within two hours of your activity.

When it comes to eating and exercise, we all differ. Experiment by paying attention to your performance and how you feel during your activity. This is your best guide to your personal pre- and post-exercise eating habits. |

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

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CAREGIVER SUPPORT PLAN: MAKE IT PERSONAL

By WENDY JOHNSTONE

Caregiving is caregiving. Frequency, intensity, duration, and types of caregiving vary, but each caregiver is on a continuum. With that comes change and uncertainty. Developing a caregiving support plan creates a foundation and strategies to help navigate the ups and downs and twists and turns. It allows family caregivers to think about how best to care and what supports will help.

Putting together a caregiver support plan is driven by caregiving needs and is tailored to what will provide the greatest support to reduce emotional and physical stress for the caregiver.

For instance, let's take Anna. She is a student who is caring for her sister with kidney disease and is just learning to navigate dialysis and the care routines at home. She used the following steps to create a caregiving plan that still made it possible for her to go to school and care for her sister at home.

1. Identify Caregiver Needs: Where could more support help? Where is a caregiver having trouble or where is there a gap in caregiving strategies? For Anna, she identified her needs as having time during the day to complete her school assignments, an opportunity to take part in a young caregiver support group and staying physically active.

2. List Current Caregiving Activities: What caregiving activities require the caregiver to be present and which ones can be delegated? Being able to share the care and decisions with others can help create healthy boundaries and balance time, while establishing a circle of care and support for both the caregiver and care recipient. For Anna, she feels she needs to be home on most evenings to help her sister manage the evening care routine and to be there to support her emotionally. She feels

she can delegate some of the evening cooking tasks to a family friend who is willing and able to support them.

3. What's the Carrot? Writing down why these needs are important helps shine a light on how they will affect a caregiver's overall well-being, as well as their role as a family caregiver. For Anna, her carrots are: 1) she wants to support her sister to feel empowered in decision-making and in managing her disease and 2) knowing what is expected of her in a caregiving role will allow her to manage her school schedule so she can still graduate.

4. Getting Specific and Finding Support: Writing it down and being specific in planning and finding support improves the chances of sticking with a caregiver plan. Finding support can include seeking out and utilizing resources like friends, family, local organizations, self-management programs, your family doctor, etc. For Anna, part of her plan was to have her family friend come over three times a week to cook evening meals, so she could stay active and attend a virtual caregiver support group.

Two other important steps are dealing with possible setbacks (they happen!) and celebrating successes. Think about what might get in the way of filling needs and ways to overcome these things. Create a contingency plan. And finally, celebrate the successes, no matter how big or small they seem. They reflect a caregiver's commitment and astuteness towards overall well-being and the importance of them as a person.

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



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Living
on purpose

by LAURIE MUELLER

The year I went to Africa wasn't planned years in advance like some people plan their travel. But something happened in April of the year that I would later fly off to Tanzania. I had bumped into a casual friend on the ferry. We chatted about her work in Tanzania, a place I had never thought of visiting or, heaven forbid, working in. At first, I was politely interested, but when she spoke about the difference it made in people's lives, I was hooked.

In fact, it was the beginning of five-year adventure! By the time I was driving off the ferry, I knew I would be travelling to Africa with a team to help in the building of a technical school. The enthusiasm and joy that I had heard about building schools for various organizations in the capital city of Dodoma sounded like just what I needed. I was only a couple of years from retirement, I loved my job, but now I decided, something was missing in my life.

The farthest I had been from home was a couple of trips to Europe in my lifetime and to Mexico and Hawaii several

more times. My husband had no interest in going, so I invited some girlfriends and, lo and behold, three of them said yes!

I took a risk. But one I felt safe enough doing because of the organization's track record. There had been teams going several times before I went. We were working with a well-known and respected agency in Tanzania.

The highlights for me were many. Touching down in Tanzania was the first bit of amazing. Driving through the countryside on a day's bus ride to our destination was a bit hard on the bum, but still worth every minute. We arrived in Dodoma in a blackout, only to find out this was a daily experience for the residents of the city.

Seeing the area where we would be working, meeting the people, touring past projects and being thanked over and over again for the work past teams had done and hugging multitudes of small children who could now experience preschool and primary school filled my heart. Each night, we wrote reports about our day for folks back home. We got to know the teachers, the builders, and our team grew closer.

We volunteered at the job site for three weeks. I'm not big on scraping and painting but scrape and paint windows I did! When the task was completed, the fetes with community members ended, the goodbye hugs given and received, we drove north to Safari land and saw the animals before boarding a plane for home.

It was a trip of a lifetime. An adventure I had never planned on taking. A memory I will have for the rest of my life. My money, my time, and my energy were well spent. I was able to use my skills in writing to share the experience with people back home. I stayed with the organization for five more years.

My next great adventure? I'm exploring an organization in Mexico that could definitely use help... and it's one of my favourite places to travel. |

Laurie Mueller, M.Ed is retired and living in Victoria with her husband, Helmuth. She recently published *The Ultimate Guide on What to Do When Someone You Love Dies* on Amazon. More about Laurie can be found at www.lauriemconsulting.com or on Facebook.

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