

INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

JUNE 2021

A close-up portrait of Tommy 'Transit' Tompkins, an older man with a full white beard and mustache, wearing a black hat and a black leather jacket over a pink and white striped shirt. He is smiling and giving two thumbs up. The background is a blurred gym setting with yellow exercise equipment.

TOMMY
"TRANSIT"
TOMPKINS

INTO AUSTRALIA'S
RED CENTRE

TRAVEL PROTOCOLS
FOR SUMMER 2021

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Cover TOMMY TOMPKINS

You can make a living or you can make a difference. Tommy "Transit" Tompkins decided to make a difference in the lives of the people he served every day.

Photo: Tom Gould

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55+ lifestyle magazine

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THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



One of the unexpected gifts of the last year has been the opportunity to reflect inward. We get so caught up in the gyrations of running our lives that we don't notice when our lives start running us ragged.

After the initial shock of the pandemic wore off, many discovered the changes thrust upon us were not all strenuous. In fact, some discovered a new freedom created by having to slow down. Eliminating our social calendar, cancelling our vacations, and cutting down on trips to the store meant we had to figure out what to do with the time that would have gone into those activities.

Sure, some of this time was dedicated to learning new technology and systems of operation. Instead of visiting friends or attending meetings in person, we learned Zoom. Instead of roaming the store aisles and coming home with more than we went for, we discovered the simplicity of choosing items online and having them delivered – if not to our house, then to our curbside cars.

We were pushed to ask ourselves questions like “Is this really important?” and “Can this be done a different or easier way?”

Many industries have been able to use this time to re-engineer products or research new alternatives. We are witnessing the incubation of unexpected inventions aimed at improving our lives and making life easier.

On a personal level, reflection has made me aware of how much mental time I spend in the future and the past, rather than in the present.

I came to realize how often my mind wanders into the future – worrying about things that haven't happened or imagining what could be if I did this or did that.

If not in the future, I'm in the past – digging up historic events to see what lessons I learned and trying to leverage that knowledge into a better future decision.

My mind scurries frantically between the past and the future, rarely stopping to take a moment in the present to smell the roses.

How many times have you driven somewhere and realized you were on autopilot the whole way? When was the last time you stopped and asked your body how it was feeling and waited for a response?

Being present helps us tap into a deeper inner wisdom. Quiet stillness is calming and soothing. It helps us heal, balance, and discover hidden reservoirs of strength. It gives us a new appreciation for our magnificent minds and bodies. It awakens our spirit. It makes us more present to everything around us – people and nature.

This month our cover story features Tom Tompkins, affectionately known as Tommy Transit. For years he has brightened the lives of his bus passengers with a smile and words of affirmation.

Whether you are halted momentarily to consider the profundity of his words, or you're lost in the experience of tapping the back of the bus seat in front of you, Tommy gives you the gift of living in the present moment.

INSPIRED Magazine is honoured to share with our readers the stories of people like Tommy Tompkins. People who are making a difference in the world, one word or one drumbeat at a time. People who are finding ways to be in the present moment and draw others into it as well.

Stay present and stay inspired. |



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Tommy "Transit" Tompkins
Photo: Tom Gould

TOMMY TRANSIT: WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME BUS

by JOHN KELLY

Getting there, they say, is half the fun. If Tommy Tompkins, a.k.a. Tommy Transit continues to have his way, getting there may even become three quarters of it.

Altruism. Tommy learned it from an early age when he saw his father help a woman struggling with her groceries. He asked his father who the woman was. 'I have no idea' came the reply. That example of humanity, of helping for its own sake and not for the feeling of reward was not lost on young Tommy.

Tommy's father was from the old school, the hard knocks one. His tender, compassionate side was glued to another side, a practical, financially prudent one. Imagine if Francis of Assisi and Warren Buffet had a baby. Okay, imagine it's an adoption: equal parts selfless empathy and fiscal responsibility. When Tommy went to work at the ripe, young age of 45 for Vancouver Transit, it was his father's words of advice that echoed in his own aha! moment: Put in your time. Get a pension.

When Tommy found himself behind the wheel driving for the Vancouver Transit System, he encountered all sorts of people. It dawned on him that a certain sense of joy was lacking in so many. He had an epiphany: what, he thought, if I could brighten the day of a single passenger? With about 150,000 riders per year on his bus alone? Tommy knew he had a large test sample.

"You touch literally thousands of lives every day," says Tommy. "I have personally acknowledged over 1.9 million people over the years. Anything to let people know that they've been seen."

Someone else in Tommy's position may not have taken up the cause of spreading happiness. And you can't really fault them for it. After all, the bus operator's responsibility is to drive the vehicle and get its occupants safely to their destinations. It isn't in their job description to be comedian and counsellor, let alone comrade, comforter, and confidante. But Tommy's parents had set an early example of thoughtfulness toward others. And the perfect situation to put it into place and practice had presented itself.

"What I used to do... we have a speaker system in the bus. Now they have an automated system where they call out the stops... But before I left, part of our job description was you had to call out the stops. In the process of doing that I realized I had a captive audience. A fully loaded 60-foot bus would have a hundred people in it. So, I'd pick up the phone and I'd say 'This is your driver with a little thought for the day, and I hope it helps you on your way. Keep in mind there are a lot more people in the world looking for the right person than there are actually trying to be the right person... Thanks a lot for travelling with transit. Hope to see you again. Watch your step.'"

Tommy would do this 26 times a day. You might think it would get monotonous. Not so. Each 'Thank you' and 'Watch your step' came with a different thought, a little pearl of wisdom or whimsy to set his passengers on the right path. Riders began coming to him with quotes and books that Tommy could share with their fellow commuters.

"My desire to communicate and have those people have a good day was paramount," he says. "When I acknowledged people, I could see in their eyes how they hungered for that."

The hunger Tommy saw was what needed satisfying. His solution? Verbal candy.

"There was always an interaction with me. A woman got in with a red scarf one day. I flipped it up over her shoulder and asked her if she knew she was in the paper that day? I grabbed the newspaper and read 'Women who wear red are far more attractive to men. Look at that,' I told her, 'you're on the front page.' She got a giggle out of it and said something really nice back to me," recalls Tommy.

The exchange was one of thousands Tommy had with his passengers. For him, they became simply anecdotes, small memories to chew on, but there is no telling the impact they may have had on the candy's recipient. Kind words are like gum drops, and they are easily understood, digested, and remembered. Tommy would urge us all to keep them in our back pockets and throw them around like... well... candy.

Snapshot

with Tom Tompkins

What advice would you give to your 20-year-old self?

"I'd pay more attention to my ears than my mouth. I wouldn't say I didn't listen, but I didn't listen deeply enough. Just listen. Listen to people. By listening you'll see value for yourself."



Who or what influenced you most and why?

"My parents. And I have to say my parents as opposed to one or the other. My dad. He taught me to go above and beyond of what you're expected. Do more than your job entails. Do it with joy and be of service. As for my mom, I was entering a speaking contest at school and I was a bit of a shy kid and really nervous. 'Picture the audience naked,' she said. I did, and I won. She said I could do and be anything I wanted."

How do you keep yourself grounded?

"For the last 10 months I've finally embraced and practiced meditation. Prior to that, when we start our buses in the morning, there is a space of about three to four minutes where you have to drain the compressor, which operates the doors and the brakes, and you have to wait there with your foot on the brake waiting for the compressor to build back up. I'd go through a series of thoughts, the first being 'this is going to be an amazing day. I'm going to get people safely to where they're going. I'm going to have fun doing it, and I'm going to meet some incredible people.'"

What's next?

"Michele Hall [Tom's wife] and I founded an online support group called Bus Drivers on a Mission and the purpose of it is to help address psychological issues that all bus operators all over the world face every day, every shift, many of which are not addressed by their companies. When I left the bus company, it was the camaraderie I missed most. I know the struggles my fellow drivers face, and we hope this passion project of ours can do some good." |

To learn more, visit <http://busdriversonamission.com/>

GALIANO ISLAND

Galiano Island is just off the coast of Vancouver. About a thousand or so people inhabit its 60 square kilometres. The irony is that with a name like Galiano, there is but a single pub on the island. It's called The Hummingbird Pub and it's a hike from Montague Harbour.

There is no transit system on the island, so the pub uses a converted school bus to bring thirsty sailors from the harbour five kilometers away for food and drink. Guess who drives the bus. That's right. Tommy has retired from Vancouver Transit, and he's collecting a pension. He drives between five and seven thousand people annually. Just when he thought he was out, they pulled him back in! Truth is he went quite willingly.

A drummer in a former life, Tommy has, piece by piece, assembled a makeshift cockpit percussion outfit even Buddy Rich would have been proud to get behind. It's a mix of tambourines and symbols, cowbells and maracas. Even the Latin American güiro with its ratchety rhythmic sound makes an appearance. Well, it's actually the knurled handle of the mechanism that opens the bus door. Tommy runs a stick across it.

"My left hand never leaves the steering wheel – that's my professional side. And the right side is pounding on the drum kit around me. It drives people crazy. They love it. I tell them it's a symbol of things to come," smiles Tommy.

Insert rimshot here.

"There are two wooden speakers on either side of the bus in the corners, so I put up a shower curtain rod, and I've got \$700 or \$800 worth of instruments hanging off the rod. It's wired to the ceiling with screws. If it ever comes down, whoever is sitting behind me is driving," jokes Tommy.

Tommy realized tapping their toes and banging on the seats in front of them wasn't going to cut it for the rolling audience, so he went out and bought a couple hundred dollars' worth of the same percussion instruments he'd been banging away on. Now he hands them out to pub goers when they board the bus. A few rows of seats taken out from the back of the bus means there is even room for a little dance floor.

"I put some plastic milk crates in the back and covered them with rugs. People will get on the bus and actually run to the back of the bus to get those seats. And I'm not talking about kids. I mean 30, 40, and 50-year-olds, and they're running to the back of the bus," laughs Tommy. "I get the music pounding and everyone is singing and clapping."

"It's an interesting demographic because I'm meeting people who come in on their own boats. They sail in Europe, South America, etc. ...and they fly here to visit friends and charter boats. They are, for the most part, retired, and they have lots of money."

"I've had groups come up from Colorado – I don't know where you sail down there – and they chartered five or six boats and there are six or eight couples that come in as a small social club... they're partying before I even pick them up. The beauty of this as opposed to the city where people are going to work and don't want to go to work... on the island, on The Hummingbird Pub bus, they've got money, they're traveling, they're on holidays, they're in a really good mood... they get on my bus, and I blow their minds."

You're starting to get the picture. Not exactly an Aerosmith tour bus, but...

Tommy has parlayed his driving gig and meeting people on the bus into a book *Bus Tales: How to Change the World from 9 to 5* and speaking gigs where he is keen to engage his listeners with his over-arching aesthetic – acknowledge people and realize all you have to be grateful for.

"The people who hire me to speak see how I am and how I interact with people. And they run companies whose

employees work with the public. They want to know how I deal with so many people in such a positive way that the media would have me on the six o'clock news... they want me to impart that spark to their people," says Tommy.

Tommy takes all the humour very seriously. It's not merely a means to an end, but an end for Tommy in and of itself. Kindness is the means to more kindness. The end.

"When I realized I was meeting more people than the pope, the president, and the queen, I lost sleep for two weeks trying to figure out what I could do to personally make a difference."

While in a vocation, i.e., transit driver, Tommy found his avocation, and turned that passion into a vocation. Twisted, but you have to meet Tommy! As for the speaking gigs, Tommy exudes a philosophical down-to-earthiness. He's not preaching from a pulpit.

"It's not so much about turning people into a bunch of acknowledgers but,

in the process of doing that whether they did it verbally or not, was to seek gratitude and to be grateful for the job that they had and be grateful for the people that you work with and improve your attitude toward getting up every day with a purpose as opposed to the guy with the bumper sticker that says, *I'm not in a hurry. I'm on my way to work.*"

I'm not the first nor will I be the last to say it – life is a journey. We can agree to disagree on the destination, but getting there should be, at the very least, half the fun. For over 20 years, Tommy's message has been a simple one: be kind. Acknowledge the value in others. Bring a smile to their faces. We are all on the same bus. And watch your step.

"When you do something and you come from goodness, you come from the heart all the time; and when you have a focused intention to make a difference in the world, a positive one, doors open," says Tommy.

Doors open indeed. |



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INTO AUSTRALIA'S RED CENTRE

by DREW SNIDER

Silence.

Not eerie, foreboding, midnight-in-the-graveyard silence, but a profound calm and a total absence of sound.

It is 1 a.m., and I am lying on my back in a swag on the soft red sand near the middle of the Australian desert. I've never seen a sky like this: a carpet of little lights, with the Southern Cross laid out brightly and the Milky Way, a faint brushstroke by the Almighty.

A dingo howls in the distance. Another answers. Nice timing – albeit a bit cliché.

But star-gazing and nocturnal creatures are mere side-lights: I'm here for Uluru.

Uluru, aka Ayers Rock, is one of the most recognizable symbols of Australia: a giant loaf of sandstone, rising 348 metres out of the desert plain. I had been obsessed with Australia since I was five, but my first trip Down Under – 50 years later – was mostly spent in cities. So, when I came back, I decided this was “next-level” time: four days and three nights on Way Outback Tours' Galah Dreaming Red Centre Safari.

My group consists of 15 people: a dozen are young enough to be my kids, and I must confess to a little trepidation about being “the old guy.” There are other tours, with older participants and more creature comforts, but I wanted the Bush Experience: sleeping under the stars in “swag” and clambering by day over rough, unstable terrain in 30-plus-degree heat.

Leading us through this is Emily Sewell, Way Outback's guide and master multi-tasker. She drove the bus, cooked, provided water, and hectoring us out of bed at 4:30 a.m. so we could finish each day's hike before the midday sun turned us into mad dogs (if not Englishmen).

More than that, her range of knowledge of the region (something that appears to be typical of the guides there) made our tour into a “taster course” in its history, culture, geology, and even botany.

In the desert night, I can reflect on what I had learned about Uluru, just in that day. The sandstone monolith is pock-marked with holes, caves and crevices. Each one has meaning for Aboriginal people: legends, meeting caves for the men and women (separately), a teaching cave for boys (you can still see ancient rock art on the walls), and a meeting cave for the elders (eldership is more about wisdom and experience than age). There are watering holes, a source of meat-on-the-hoof.

But it's not for climbing. Until October 2019, climbing Uluru was a “must-do” for adventuresome visitors. But when the land was handed back to the Aboriginal people in 1986, a campaign began to ban climbing. After more than 30 years, the climbing chain was finally removed and a AUS \$10,000 penalty was enacted.

I had to ask. “What's the big deal about climbing Uluru? Because it's there?”

“Lately, it's been Japanese tourists,” Emily answered. She explained that they would re-enact a scene from a Japanese movie, in which a young woman dies; her lover finds a list of things she planned to do and does them, finishing by climbing Uluru to scatter her ashes.

ABOVE | The first look at Uluru, from the road.

TOC PAGE | Kata Tjuta is part of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, 1,334 square kilometres near Australia's centre. Photos: Drew Snider

“So, people who had seen the movie,” Emily says, “would come, climb Uluru and shout, ‘I love you!’ when they get to the top.”

Romantic? Maybe. But Uluru is not a Hallmark movie. It’s the focal point of Aboriginal Australians’ traditional laws and spirituality. In the interpretive centre, you can read about the legends, consider the striking similarities with other cultures’ legends of creation and the eternal war between good and evil, and the generational connection to the land. On a video, you can hear Aboriginal elders talk about what Uluru means to them – especially having it handed back to them. Climbing Uluru would be almost like putting a Ferris wheel on Temple Mount.

Besides, climbing anything is about self: experiencing Uluru is about connecting with others and their culture, and you can do that at ground-level. Is it not sufficient to stand and gaze in awe at this enormous thing rising out of the desert? Climb it? Why?

Any urge to climb is satisfied at two other landmarks on the tour, Kata Tjuta (aka The Olgas) and Kings Canyon. More magnificent than Uluru, but not as culturally significant.

Emily explains that the monoliths began as sand, compressed by a prehistoric sea covering central Australia. When the sea dried up, a series of seismic events called orogenies tilted these sandstone formations upwards.

Kata Tjuta towers nearly 550 metres above the ground. The hike takes you over rough, uneven terrain and steep, slick hills. The Valley of the Winds is aptly named – the cooling breeze is a relief, but hold onto your hat! Be prepared to be surprised at the amount of green around you. Porous sandstone allows whatever rain that falls to seep into the earth, rather than evaporate, and acacia, desert oak (whose branches tilt downwards to direct the rain to its roots), and the spectacular grevillea survive: the ghost gum tree sends roots as far down as 75 metres to find water. The torrential rains that hit Australia in March 2019 were devastating in some parts of the country, but welcome in the Red Centre.

Kings Canyon is “only” 300m high and starts with “Heart Attack Hill”: 420 steps almost straight-up, with sheer drop-offs on each side. Unlike Kata Tjuta, though, these steps are generally solid, so once you’ve made it, the “Rim Walk” is relatively easy. You’ll see spectacular views at the top and descend into the Garden of Eden with its surprising variety of plants. Emily shows us her favourite: the palm-like Western McDonnell Ranges cycad, estimated to be over 600 years old.

“The cycad adds one frond for every year,” Emily explains. “When a frond dies, it droops, then eventually falls off and leaves these nubs around the trunk. Someone has actually counted all the living fronds and the dead ones and the little nubs and that’s how we know how old it is.”

Speaking of “old,” it didn’t take long for me to get over the trepidation I felt in the company of millennials. They came from Germany, Switzerland, the UK, France, and I have to confess to being surprised at the number who, at that young

age, were on “life-reset” journeys, stepping back from careers to get their heads together. And I did not feel out of place: when I would straggle – partly because I was recovering from a knee injury, and partly because I like to take pictures – there would always be one or two who would walk with me. “We’re in no hurry, and it’s good company,” says Emma, a young woman from Netherlands.

Some of the tours have now resumed after a COVID-imposed hiatus, so it’s worth checking online to see what’s available again. A journey to the Red Centre brings you in closer touch with a civilization that many of us in North America rarely consider. Your eyes are also opened to the fact that a place may be a “desert,” but it’s not deserted, given the plant, animal and human life that have lived there for thousands of years. You can feel it in the heat of the day, the cool of the valleys or the almost tangible silence of the night, and this tour brings you up-close-and-personal with life as you have never seen it. |

For *IF YOU GO* information, visit www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/uluru

Drew Snider is a writer, communications consultant and recovering broadcaster living in East Sooke. His most recent book, *God At Work – A Testimony of Prophecy, Provision and People amid Poverty*, covers 10 years of pastoring on Vancouver’s Downtown East Side. This trip was not sponsored.



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ITALIAN VISTAS - COLLETTE VACATIONS	SEP 18, 2021	12
DISCOVER CROATIA & THE ADRIATIC COAST - COLLETTE VACATIONS	SEP 30, 2021	13
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TRAVEL PROTOCOLS SUMMER 2021

by J. KATHLEEN THOMPSON

Remember when the pause button was pressed in 2020 and the advice to “go home and shelter in place” was followed soon afterward by medical directives and government advisories to avoid travel of all forms? Fast forward a year and the recommendations, due to the persistence of the COVID-19 virus and its variants, remain unchanged.

Travel is tightly controlled, and many countries, Canada included, have implemented strict entry requirements and protocols. With the increasing accessibility of vaccines, many of these restrictions will lift, but at this moment, best to keep our more ambitious travel plans under wraps a wee bit longer.

When you do have an urgent or essential reason to travel – for business, family care, work, repatriating – it is important to assess the risks and plan accordingly. With advice from industry experts and those who have needed to travel in the last year (myself included), let’s look at ways you can travel in a safe and responsible way this summer.

PREPARATIONS

One thing for sure, travel during this period will not be the “let’s grab our bags and go” variety. Critical to all travel now and likely in the future will be one’s thorough research and preparations in order to meet new protocols for travel within and outside of Canada. Among the things you will want to check and plan for:

Domestic Travel in Canada

- what parts of Canada can you travel to?
- are there provincial or regional requirements; which provinces/territories require periods of self-isolation?
- what types of accommodation and services will be available to you?

International Travel: Departing and Returning to Canada

- what is Canada’s current advisory about travel?
- what requirements are necessary to travel safely; vaccination against COVID-19, a pre-departure COVID-19 test?

- what are the requirements for re-entry; a COVID-19 test, quarantining, arrival forms?
- what type of insurance is available and would protect you should you contract COVID-19 while travelling, and need medical intervention?

International Travel: Destination

- what is the travel advisory in your destination country?
- is the country open to foreign visitors?
- is a COVID-19 test or vaccination required of visitors prior to entry?
- are visitors required to quarantine upon arrival?
- are there other forms that must be submitted prior to entry?

At time of publication, essential travel within Canada was possible via land or air, with a 14-day period of self-isolation still required for out-of-province visitors in all Maritime provinces, and northern territories.

To dissuade people from any non-essential travel and restrict the spread of the virus until cases lessen and the majority of people have been vaccinated, international travel comes with a more detailed list of requirements. Chief among them is proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken by an accredited lab within 72 hours of boarding your flight.

In speaking with Michelle Stilwell at CVM Medical Ltd. in Richmond, BC, it is clear that travel clinics of this sort are playing a vital role in the reopening of the travel industry. I ask her about the logistics and timing of the testing for out-going airline passengers.

“Well, first thing is to book your flight, then check our online calendar, and book accordingly. Tests are \$195.00 and results are available within 48 hours.”

ABOVE | Parliament Hill, Ottawa. Now that Canadians are getting vaccinated, itchy travellers will soon be planning their next adventure. But be warned, there are several protocols to understand before you go. *Photo: J. Kathleen Thompson*

I try to imagine the complication this is adding to travel – having to co-ordinate testing and results in time for boarding.

“While the PCR test is considered the gold standard in testing,” adds Stilwell, “some airlines are now trialling rapid antigen testing at the airport, where you can receive your results within four hours.”

In a press release published on March 30, the International Air Transport Association stated they support the greater use of rapid antigen kits, citing their convenience and cost-efficiency in comparison to PCR tests. Hopefully, considering these benefits, these tests will be considered the new gold standard in the not-too-distant future.

The IATA is also working on a travel pass, a mobile app that will help travellers store and manage passengers’ verified certificates for COVID-19 tests and vaccines, which will soon be trialed by various airlines.

In Transit

Keep in mind that some services may be limited and practices that permitted congregating of people and sharing of materials will be discouraged or temporarily suspended. Be prepared for a slimmed down experience, where efficiency and safety are prioritized over comfort and sociality. Book transport and accommodation well in advance to ensure these services are operating.

Packing

Your supply of masks, small bottles of hand sanitizer, gloves and sani-wipes will be more important than your supply of sunscreen and mosquito repellent. Also, as packing ‘light’ might also be a rule to follow for the foreseeable future in order to minimize your contact with the environment and extra crowds and procedures, taking only carry-on bags with you on flights might be advisable.

Those of us who needed to travel in the last 15 months, either domestically or internationally, report that the experience was a surprisingly pleasant one, and might be a harbinger of things to come. From uncrowded airports, aircraft, and buses to scrupulously cleaned hotels, to restaurant staff delighted to see you, travelling had the ease that only remote locations during shoulder season usually enjoy!

It was, however, at the cost of a tremendously devastated travel industry (best not to think about the chocolatier in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea in New Brunswick or the ice-cream seller in St. Mark’s Square in Venice!), and one can only hope it creeps back to the level where the small souvenir shop and other tourist-oriented businesses can still keep their doors open.

In the meantime, until the transmission rates of the virus have been substantially reduced and the majority of people immunized, a much scaled-down travel industry will continue to serve those who must travel. And we will all collectively hope that, within the year, we will be able to wrap our arms around those people and those places we have so longed to see again! |

For up-to-date information, check government websites prior to travelling, such as www.travel.gc.ca for Canada.



HOW WE MET

by VERENA FOXX

MY RMT

I first met her while I was face down on her massage table. She was referred by my regular guy, who had left the city. She asked me what kind of music I’d like to listen to during the massage, and that special touch immediately endeared me to her client care and personal touch. She was an excellent therapist, so I continued to see her once a week, twice a week, once a month. The 10+ year relationship, which is now an ongoing friendship between an elder and a dynamic young woman, mother, wife, dog-trainer, and professional, evolved and grew through our many conversations in dimly lit rooms, not looking at each other. The situation enabled us to talk freely about much. And we did.

Initially, we exchanged recipes and entertaining ideas. She gave me fitness suggestions. From there, we moved on to movies and TV series, fashion, art, travel and, ultimately, into discussions about friendships, our families and partners. I sent my similarly aged son to her on one of his trips home, secretly hoping there’d be a connection between them, but they each had other plans.

Since we met, she has married, built a house, and had two children; I have retired, bought and sold and moved twice, and travelled the globe. During the pandemic, she sent me regular video clips of her young children growing into their daily lives; I sent her performing arts videos, wildlife, cloud, and food photos, and we both went down the Oprah interview rabbit hole for a while.

I gave her my Princess Di black strapless gown of many Hallowe’ens ago, and she sent me a photo of her wearing it at home. At Christmas, she did a drive-by with her children, so I could lay eyes on them, and to drop off a surprise. Finally, after I was vaccinated, we met up for a brisk walk in the woods with her well-trained dog.

We have no friends in common, and rarely see each other in person, but we share many mutual interests and dynamic conversations about endless topics. Special people can (and do) often show up in the most unexpected ways! And for that I’m grateful. |

FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS NO MATTER YOUR AGE

by MARTIN DONNER



Do more of whatever
brings you joy.
Photo: Logan Weaver

In 1833, Alfred, Lord Tennyson penned the poem “Ulysses,” which chronicles the yearnings of an aging mythical hero to again set out in search of the adventures that made his life worth living. Almost 200 years later, older adults are still inspired by its message that it is not too late to “push off” and “sail beyond the sunset.” The poem’s final words are among the most inscribed words of the English language:

“...that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

Is there an age at which people should no longer strive to achieve, no longer follow their dreams? The answer is a resounding “No”! For example, is it ever too late to get that post-secondary education you dreamed of many years ago before “life got in the way”? Well, American Nola Ochs was 95 when she received her bachelor’s degree. She went on to get her master’s degree at age 98 and was the *Guinness Book of World Records* holder for the oldest master’s graduate. Who said there’s an age-limit on learning? Clearly, there isn’t!

But would the same apply to running a marathon? Cynics might say “almost anyone can sit at a desk and study, but what about running a marathon, which takes months and months of gruelling training?” It turns out even if you are 104, it is not too late to run a marathon because Fauja Singh was 104 when he ran the Mumbai Marathon.

Is there an age when one is too old to help others? If so, what would that age be? I don’t know, but it would have to be more than 99 years old because that is how old Captain Thomas Moore (later knighted to become Sir Thomas) was when he set out to benefit the UK’s National Health Service by raising 1,000 pounds sterling (approximately \$1,760 CAD).

Captain Moore proposed to do this by walking 100 lengths of his property, which he hoped would inspire

people to make donations. His efforts produced donations exceeding 33,000,000 pounds (\$58 million CAD). Clearly, there is no age limit on wanting or being able to help others or for being inspiring!

Is there an age at which someone is no longer able to run a multi-billion-dollar company? If there is, Warren Buffett, 90, doesn’t know about it. Not only is Buffett known as one of the most generous philanthropists in the world, but he also still goes to work every day as the CEO of Berkshire Hathaway!

And age 92 isn’t too old either because, at 92, Jimmy Pattison still goes to work every day as the head of the Jim Pattison Group with its 45,000 employees. Maybe there is no age limit on being the head of a successful multi-billion-dollar corporation, although oddly enough, corporations barely a fraction of the size of Berkshire Hathaway and the Jim Pattison Group (and which are not nearly as successful) arbitrarily impose age limits!

In her Ted Talk titled “Let’s End Ageism,” Ashton Applewhite notes that “companies aren’t adaptable and creative because their employees are young; they’re adaptable and creative despite it.”

One fundamental change we have witnessed in our lifetime, and of which we are a vital part, is the significant and ever-increasing role of the population over 55. Not only is that demographic increasing in size, but they are helping make our planet a better place – people like Bill Gates, Anthony Fauci and Jane Goodall to name a few.

It is not “bad news” that our population is aging. In fact, that’s great news because it shows we are living longer, healthier and more active lives. More than just living longer than our parents and grandparents, we are doing things later in life they would never have attempted. Of that, we should be proud!

Despite natural aging, we only become “old” when we stop having a purpose or give up on our dreams. That is not to say that as time goes by, we may not modify our goals or the way we achieve them. At age 99, Captain Moore relied on his walker to help him realize his goal. He still had a purpose and the will to achieve it. Like Ulysses, he showed us it is never too late to “push off” and “sail beyond the sunset.” |

TRIBUTE BANDS IMMORTALIZE GOOD TIMES

by BRENT STUMPH

When Bob Seger sang, “Today’s music ain’t got the same soul, I like that old time rock and roll” his words became an anthem for many music-loving Boomers!

There was never a better time to be young and carefree than in the fifties and sixties. Rock was well-established, on both sides of the water, and we created some of our best memories while listening to 45s.

But hearing was never as good as seeing. Attending a concert back in the day was so cool. How groovy was it to collect a little scratch, put on your best threads, down a couple of brews, hop in the rod and head off to see your favourite band?

Okay, so I’m getting a little carried away, but the music that molded us has left us all with lifelong memories. How often have you heard a song that instantly brought you a happy smile or a joyful tear? A lot of our ‘firsts’ happened while listening to the radio. Sometimes in the front seat, sometimes in the back.

The sad problem today, though, is that our favourite performers have aged just as fast as we have. They look in the mirror every morning and say the same thing we do: “What happened?”

And while many of them are still performing in smaller venues, it’s simply not the same. They rarely hit the high notes, their moves are a little slower (if at all), and they no longer exemplify that rebellious, hard-living existence from just sixty, short years ago. They even talk about their grandkids during the show! What?

Now playing – tribute bands.

It’s difficult to say when they officially began because, as someone once said, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and a good way to make a few bucks. But Beatle-like bands started appearing in the mid-’60s. Their goal was to look and sound exactly like the originals. And let’s not forget the legions of Elvis impersonators.

Over time, though, tribute bands developed their own style and presentation, while still emulating (or sometimes parodying) their namesakes.

They often match vocal styles and sometimes dress in



Bendy Buddy

Photo: Blue Frog Studios

the same outfits as their authentic counterparts. Some will forego the convenience of wigs, for what could be called coiffure authenticity. Can you imagine going to the office today sporting a Beatle’s mop-top because you’re pretending to be Paul McCartney every Saturday night? Okay, maybe that’s not happening these days because of the lockdowns, but you get the point.

Tribute bands have become incredibly popular for those of a certain age. And while they may touch every musical genre, none are as prominent and revered as the rockers and rollers. Makes sense, right?

Kelly Breaks owns Blue Frog Studios in White Rock. He brings in tribute bands from all over North America. At least he did, until this raging pandemic came along. He now hosts regular online concerts, filmed live at his studio. Not surprisingly, people from all over the world tune in.

“Many people never got to see a lot of these [original] bands when they were younger or, if they did see the band, they want to experience it again,” says Kelly. “The tribute bands also help bring back great memories, such as a first date or good times from younger years.”

He goes on to say that, while rock and roll is overwhelmingly the most popular genre, pop groups and soloists are also popular.

Solo acts follow in the footsteps of John Denver, Rod Stewart, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison and Cher, to name a few.

Some of the newer pop acts include imitations of One Direction, Adele, Taylor Swift, Britney Spears and Beyoncé. But today's music ain't got the same soul, as we've already established.

The Beatles, Elvis, and ABBA are the most copied. They were the giants of the music industry, and none are together anymore. In addition, The Eagles, Elton John, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and The Four Seasons are heavily copied, because they were the biggest selling bands of the time and the ones we sang along with the most.

You most certainly had a few of their 45s and a couple of their albums, along with an old-style turntable to play them on. Don't you wish you would have hung on to them after all these years? With the surge of interest from millennials, they would have helped finance your retirement!

Tribute bands frequent bars, night-clubs and larger theatres. Many of the performers have day jobs, which is a good thing, with live events being all but obliterated in the last year.

One of the best things about tribute bands is that they set the stage for each song. They tell a little bit of the back-story. How and why it was written, by whom, and they add a little outrageous drama that contributes to the song's cachet.

Another great thing is the costuming. Because tribute bands focus on only one band's music, they can really get into wearing the same styles worn by the original performers when they sang each song. Think of The Beatles going from Beatle cuts and Nehru jackets to beards and brocades. One more way to stir up all the nostalgia and memories of those unforgettable, bygone days.

Just as we fondly remember the music of the '50s and '60s, each generation looks back at the music and memories they grew up with. And just as it was then, today's music will one day become tomorrow's classics.

But I still like that old time rock and roll. |

For more information about watching tribute bands perform online, visit www.bluefrogstudios.ca



PICNIC IN THE PARK

Although restaurant restrictions are still in place, thanks to the warmer weather, there's nothing stopping us from ordering take-out and making a beeline to our favourite park. For this month's day-escape, I'll take you to Victoria where these three hidden gems are somewhat off the beaten picnic path. Each park is also accompanied by a nearby eatery that adheres to the current COVID-19 protocols and caters to outdoor dining.

UPLANDS PARK

When my daughter and her family lived in Oak Bay, this was one of our favourite haunts. The 30-plus hectare land mass, nestled between upscale homes and ocean shores, is well-loved for its natural beauty, flourishing eco-system and expansive vistas. Like protective sentinels, the windswept outcroppings rise up just north of Willows Beach and are laced with a network of walking trails and quiet green spots, many of which are shaded by towering Garry Oaks. Undeveloped, untarnished, unblemished – that describes Uplands to a tee.

Nearby take-out: Willows Galley Fish & Chips. This Estevan Village eatery has been an Oak Bay icon since 1980. Their original Neptune Burger and sourdough fish batter won't disappoint. 2559 Estevan Ave., 250-598-2711, <https://willowsgalley.com/>

LIME BAY PARK

This park seamlessly blends the urban with the natural while sandwiched (no pun intended) in between Vic West apartments and the scenic shoreline.



Saxe Pointe. Photo: Destination Greater Victoria

When the tide is low, leave your beach blanket behind to check out the star fish and Dungeness crabs. And when the tide is high, diving dolphins might be your centre-stage attraction. Either way, this park is a superb spot for viewing sea-planes and yachts that navigate Victoria's harbour.

Nearby take-out: Boom & Batten. This upscale eatery offers regionally-inspired cuisine – either from their waterfront deck or at your private picnic spot at nearby Lime Bay Park. 2 Paul Kane Place, 250-940-5850, <https://boomandbatten.com/>

SAXE POINT PARK

My sister and brother-in-law have raved about Saxe Point Park ever since moving to Esquimalt, and I can understand why. A pedestrian pathway bisects this manicured green space and offers picturesque panoramas of the Salish Sea, Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Olympic Mountains beyond. During World War II much of this 7.5 land parcel was used as a shoreline defense. Today, its forested trails and pebbled beach bays are perfect spots for any picnic lover.

Nearby take-out: Kwao Thai Restaurant. This family run business offers Traditional Thai that's 'cooked from the heart.' 1207 A, Esquimalt Road, 250-389-1845, www.kwaothai.com |

FOREVER FIT

by EVE LEES



SUMMERTIME SIGHT SAVERS

Minimizing sun exposure and wearing sunglasses will greatly reduce risk of eye damage. Long-term exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can build up in the eyes, and may lead to cancer in the eyes, cataracts and possibly glaucoma.

When shopping for sunglasses, low-cost brands can offer protection. However, the more you pay, the better quality you get. With cheaper products you won't be sure which of the ultraviolet (UV) rays or how many nanometres (units of light) the glasses will block.

There are three types of UV rays: UVA, UVB and UVC. With higher-end glasses, you're assured protection against all three, and they offer the recommended 400 nanometres of light protection. And you are assured optical clarity, unlike cheaper glasses that may distort your view, adding to eye strain.

If you purchase "over-the-counter" sunglasses, make sure the label says 100% UV protection. And a darker tint has nothing to do with protectiveness against the sun's ultraviolet rays. A chemical in or on the lenses provides the protection. Darker tints are more a factor concerning the sun's brightness.

Test optical quality by holding the glasses about a foot from your eyes. View a straight line through each lens; the line shouldn't be warped.

Small, fashionable sunglasses offer minimal coverage for the entire eye area, particularly the sides of the eyes. The best protection is from the wrap-around style, which fully cover the eyelids and all the way around to the temples.

When buying sunglasses for sports use, be concerned with impact resistance, as well as UV protection. Look for polycarbonate lenses (it should be stated on the label). These lenses won't shatter when hit by an object. Sturdy, well-fitting frames offer more protection from eye injury if a ball strikes you. Choose curved, wrap-around lenses for sports where wind protection, or sun reflection is a concern. Darker tinting is helpful in very bright conditions, like snow or water activities.

Prescription sunglasses are advised for those serious about certain outdoor activities, like golfing, mountain biking, skiing or fishing.

Wear sunglasses even if your contact lenses provide UV protection, because contacts lenses won't protect the entire eye. Children's eyes also need to be protected. Their natural lenses are clearer making them more prone to sun damage.

Once protected, enjoy all the beautiful sights summer has to offer! |

To Move or Not to Move? A Guide for Seniors Considering Their Residential Options

This 128 page book provides helpful, easy to read information and suggestions to help BC seniors and their families understand the decisions they need to make.

Whether you decide to stay in your home or move, this book will help you navigate to where you want to be.

Information written and compiled by
INSPIRED Magazine publisher, Barbara Risto

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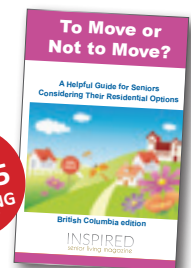
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Eve Lees has been active in the health & fitness industry since 1979. Currently, she is a Freelance Health Writer for several publications and speaks to business and private groups on various health topics. For more information, visit www.artnews-healthnews.com



NEW DISCOVERIES

by LINDA BLAIR

One could easily be seduced by the irresistible charm of Italy. Robust red, and crisp white wines, rainbow-coloured gelato in a dizzying assortment of flavours, foods to wake up your taste buds. Magnificent fountains, Renaissance and Baroque style buildings and golden sunshine – what’s not to love?

The ever-changing cinematic scenery of the countryside alternates between gentle rolling green hills dotted with sheep, to soaring snow-capped mountains then back to hill-sides with cascading ribbons of olive trees and grape vines. Emerald-green lakes, crystal clear rivers and streams will have you pulling off the road to drink in the beauty of it all.

With no shortage of medieval towns and hilltop villages, one could easily become lost in the unique stories and history of each as you wander along the winding cobbled streets and lanes. There are copious numbers of discoveries here. However, where I found buried treasure was not in the countryside, but instead it was unearthed within the ancient city walls.

The “Eternal City” of Rome with its wealth of beauty, grace, and style, continues to uncover ancient history. On a pre-COVID trip to Rome, I stumbled upon the first and only masonry stadium in Roman history, 4.5 metres directly beneath the unique and elongated shape of Piazza Navona. As one of the most recognizable squares in the world, located within the beating heart of Rome, and where millions of visitors’ flock annually, very few people including the Romans who live there are aware of the existence of “Stadium of Domitian” beneath their feet.

Opened to the public in 2014 and now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, discovery of Stadium of Domitian happened in 1936 during demolition of houses at the north end of Piazza Navona. Numerous remains of the curved portion of the stadium were discovered, while other remains were found in cellars and basements of palaces also located in Piazza Navona.

Reinforced during renovations and having been sheltered for centuries, the remains are in remarkably good condition. Many fragments of sculpted marble statues were found and believed to be Roman copies of original Greek statues. Indications point toward the belief that marble statues of emperors and gods posed in niches along the corridors as adornments. A well-preserved marble torso of the Greek statue of Apollo is one such piece, now proudly displayed in the underground museum.

Inaugurated in 86 AD, Stadium of Domitian (once a 30,000-seat stadium, 275-metres long, 106-metres wide, and 18-metres high) was used primarily as a sports arena until the fourth century. Always believing statues of nude athletes were sculpted in this manner to show the strong muscles and lean bodies, it might surprise you to know they were sculpted nude because that’s how they competed. Women were not permitted to attend the games for this reason.

ABOVE | The remaining wall from the Stadium of Domitian and reflected in the mirror is a statue of Apollo.

TOC | Medieval era window. Photos: Linda Blair

Spectators gathered to watch various competitions, such as foot races on a dirt track, discus (bronze, lead, or stone weighing 1-6 kilos), javelin (made of wood or bronze), and long jump. Combative competitions consisted of wrestling, with no time limit, boxing with gloves made of leather strips, and pankration. Pankration, considered the most brutal of all, is best described as a combined technique of boxing and wrestling. Any and all blows were permitted, including bone fractures, limb twisting, and contortion. A raised arm with an open hand indicated surrender.

Emperor Domitian, a great enthusiast of Greek culture, wanted to give the Romans an eternal structure for these competitions. Other arenas were constructed of wood then covered with plaster, whereas his stadium was constructed entirely of brick. During Medieval times, the arena was used to train and race horses but during the heyday of Stadium of Domitian, it was used exclusively for sports. To the Emperor's dismay, these competitions were under-appreciated by the people. Romans preferred the more brutal Gladiator-style competitions held at the Colosseum. When Stadium of Domitian ended as an athletic centre, the area continued as a vital neighbourhood until the end of the 5th to early 6th century.

At some point between the 8th and 10th century, a deep deposit of soil was brought in to raise the ground floor level. More deposits believed to be caused by the flooding of the Tiber River essentially buried the now ancient stadium. By the end of the Middle Ages, new construction began to emerge above the buried stadium and a new floor was constructed over the central area. Homes, shops, and other services opened and once again the area flourished.

National churches, hostels, and hospitals for pilgrims and foreigners began to spring up around the perimeter of the central area. Many builders used the stadiums' (now buried) seating areas and other supporting structures as basements or foundations. With the central area being paved in brick in 1485, a weekly market was born. This new market contributed to the social life as well as the economy of Rome.

Construction of many new buildings followed at the request of several prominent families, which greatly contributed to the increased economic importance of this area. During the 17th century, a palace (currently the Brazilian Embassy) was built facing the square, and Piazza Navona began to take shape. The famous artist Bernini sculpted the Fountain of Four Rivers in 1651, so named for the four major rivers known at that time – Danube, Ganges, Nile, and Rio de la Plata. The Church of Sant' Agnese in Agone ("in Agone" is a term used to refer to Piazza Navona during medieval times) – considered to be a masterpiece of Roman Baroque architecture – was built by famous artists Borromini, Girolamo and Carlo Rainaldi.

With the disappearance of the

stadium, the name of this area also vanished. The area became known as Campus Agonis, then changed to Innagonis, and changed again to Nagone, which led eventually to Navona, now known as Piazza Navona.

The entrance to this historical excavation site can be found inside a small bookstore and gift shop located at one end of Piazza Navona. A small sign hangs above the door with a larger one on the back wall inside the shop. Available for purchase in the gift shop are history books, artwork, and souvenirs. Once inside the store, visitors descend the 4.5 metres below street level to view the arches, passageways, and stairway that once led to the upper seating areas. The outer walls no longer exist but experts have re-constructed a model of the entire stadium. Wandering through the site you will find several reader boards describing the items you are viewing along with related Roman history. The fascinating stories on the boards describe the sports that took place in the stadium as well as the most loved of the ancient games, chariot races.

Still relatively unknown to the general public, you can leisurely wander this uncrowded site. The cost of admission is 8 Euros (at time of writing), which includes a headset. For a fee, you may hire one of the on-site guides to walk you through and verbally provide the history instead of listening to audio or reading story boards.

Another area of the Stadium of Domitian is located under the French School of Rome situated at #62 in Piazza Navona. Excavations and repairs are currently underway beneath the Brazilian Embassy (formerly the palace built by the Pamphilj family) and are expected to be available for public viewing "soon." These three areas pieced together will render a more complete picture of the history of Stadium of Domitian and the use for which it was intended.

The Emperors and Popes knew that if they kept the Roman people entertained, they would also keep their favour, so it was not uncommon to simply bury an area, haul in some soil to build up the foundation, then construct something new over top. So, whether you are in the countryside, the mountain regions, or in the "Eternal City" you just never know what you might find beneath your feet. |

Linda A. Blair is a travel writer & photographer.



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CONNECTING WITH SENIORS IN CARE

By WENDY JOHNSTONE

Last week, I captured this photo of a client during a visit with her in long-term care. She absolutely loves her interactive robotic pup. It's a wonderful and meaningful way to share a connection with a mutual love – dogs!



I hesitate to describe our client as someone living with dementia. It's true, she is. But such a label can create a social, emotional, and physical distance between us and the person for whom we are caring. This gap might limit our interactions because of our own biases or fears around aging and disease and can result in lost opportunities to engage, connect and have meaningful moments.

It's understandable and normal for families to feel uncertain or uncomfortable in how to be with the person in care when the usual connections have changed or been altered in some way.

The key message I want family caregivers to take away: Connection is still possible – it just looks different.

The hope is to connect with the person we are caring for wherever they are at—in that moment, on that day. This list of tips about communication is adapted from the Alzheimer Society of Canada (you can use the search terms “tips for visits” on their site) but is applicable to other cognitive impairments. In fact, most of the tips are simply good advice for communicating with anyone, in general.

- Visiting in its most basic sense means being “present.” Check in with yourself before visiting with your family member or friend. How are you feeling? Our anxiety, frustration, and tension are easily communicated through our body language.
- Maintaining our identity – our sense of competence – is central to all humans. This attribute continues as we age and even when faced with illness and disease.

- Ties of affection are affirmed by spending time with the people we are caring for. A client of 11 years always says to me, “You and I have been us forever.” I know what she is saying. “You and I have known each other for a long time.” She understands I'm her foundation of memories, support, and friendship, even if she can no longer remember.
- Change your expectations as the functioning changes in the person you are visiting.
- Validate feelings and emotional states. Empathy goes such a long way – with it, you can redirect or move ahead in a respectful manner.
- If language skills diminish, place less emphasis on expecting answers to questions. You can avoid or minimize frustration and feelings of inadequacy when removing the expectation to “perform” or answer. Turn questions into statements about the here and now. For example, “It's good to see you today” or “I like your shirt.” Provide the person you care for with information such as, “Today is Friday, the day you attend Music Therapy.”
- Who doesn't like a sincere compliment? They're usually welcome and help create a comfortable mood.
- Providing links and visual cues with past things they have enjoyed can help shape your visits. Take pleasure in activities. For example, try brushing their hair or massaging their hands with lotion. Listening to music, browsing a magazine, sitting at a window or going with them to a program are all activities that provide pleasure and stimulation without the need to make conversation.

Success is sharing an experience with the person you are caring for. Letting them know they are not alone is an accomplishment. Enjoying an activity that gives them meaning and purpose is a win. A good visit is about enjoying the “moments of reality” they experience. Success is seeing them smile and knowing that your visit is leaving them with a good feeling. And hopefully you feel it, too.

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



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MORE THAN A BREAKFAST GROUP



Living
on purpose

by LAURIE MUELLER

It all started with Christine, who, newly situated in the personal banking department, asked her boss if she could go with him to his networking group. “No, you can’t. But you should create your own group.”

So, in 1990, Chris pulled together a group of women from varied careers. Brenda, a lawyer. Karen, a chartered accountant. There was a banker, but no baker or candlestick maker. The original purpose of the 12-women group was to use each other’s services and to tell others about them. It has turned into much more.

As Cathline said recently, “I was a single mom, no family in town, running my own business. The mornings with the breakfast group were my only time with adults who would listen, share, and accept me for who I was. It was something I looked forward to.” She also loved the fact that joining the breakfast group didn’t involve taking on extra duties.

Now that we are mostly retired, our conversations have shifted to being grandmothers, and on retirement rather than career, and on travel – mostly to Europe. Best places to stay, favourite foods, attractions not to miss. Did you know French fries are served in a lot of continental European countries because they are popular with the English? I didn’t know that, but I learned it when one of our members returned. Sometimes we talk about the fear of getting older or of not having a career anymore.

One year we dressed in our finery and took tea at The Empress Hotel. Another year, clad with fried eggs adorning the front of our t-shirts, we participated in a breast cancer fundraiser. Like a sisterhood, we have strong bonds, and we help each other out when needed. Sometimes a member will say, “I have a question.” And all thinking caps are applied, and brainstorming takes place. Advice is freely given; no judgments are passed. We simply support each other and cheer each other on.

When Pat Nichol was in her final days, a parade of breakfast group cars made its way slowly down the road in front of her home. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and the drivers honked and some whistled through their open car windows. It was a final tribute to the group’s dear friend. Fifteen minutes after the last car drove past, Pat took her final breath and moved on. Our group is like that: we support each other through joys and sorrows and transitions.

Our breakfast group is different without Pat sitting at the table and being her Courageous and Outrageous self. I will be forever thankful she introduced me to these amazing women.

If you haven’t thought of having such a group, I urge you to pick a few friends and start the tradition. Make your own agenda, like meeting at lunch or supper or sometime in between. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it’s that we need each other. |

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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