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55+ lifestyle magazine

OCTOBER 2021

SINGER-SONGWRITER  
ROBYN MCCORQUODALE

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CAMERA, ACTION!

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### Cover ROBYN MCCORQUODALE

Once a nomad, this Vancouver singer/songwriter returned home to care for her aging parents in what she calls her greatest role.

Photo: Mark Ellis, MuvoMedia

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55+ lifestyle magazine

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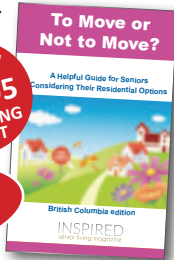
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## THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



As we enter the fall season, I’m looking ahead with great excitement to some projects I have scheduled for the next few months.

It all started with planning a backyard party for my sister’s 70th birthday, a landmark occasion that couldn’t go without a memorable celebration. It began with an afternoon dinner with close family and friends, followed by cake served in the backyard with a live musician performing well-known songs from the ’60s and ’70s, to which I invited our nearby neighbours.

Although we all live within feet of one another, and wave as we go by, it’s been 20 or more years since some of these neighbours have come together for an event. Once the music and conversation started flowing, there was no stopping it. In the warm autumn sunshine, with plenty of cake and years to catch up on, we made the most of a very short time to acquaint ourselves. We finally dispersed, talking about how nice it was to see one another and how we should do it again – soon.

There is definitely something about the warmth and connectedness of bringing kind people together that appeals to me.

And so, I began mulling over how I could bring folks together for more of that soul-soothing companionship... searching for ways I could create something new out of something familiar.

My first project is a co-creation with the people in my house and my closest neighbours to stage a fall display in our cul de sac around the theme of Thanksgiving and Halloween. It will be a display of painted, decorated and carved pumpkins placed on weathered Adirondack chairs – situated where everyone entering our neighbourhood will be able to enjoy them.

One neighbour has volunteered to secure the permit to hold fireworks

on Halloween night. It will bring all the neighbours into the street for a final autumn hoorah and tip of the hat to our pumpkin sentinels. And it will be the permission slip to start plans for the next season, Christmas...

I’m going to host what I call “Festive Fridays.” Starting in mid-November and continuing every Friday until Christmas Day, I will open my doors to neighbours and friends to gather at my house to make and/or bake something seasonal. With mulled cider in hand, we will create a holiday wreath one evening, decorate a gingerbread house the next, bake and exchange cookies, make figgy pudding, bake a yule log cake, sing or hum carols, share stories of family celebrations, and inhale the scents of the season.

In the last couple years some new people have arrived in our neighbourhood representing cultures that honour traditions different from those of my upbringing. So, it is with anticipation that I look forward to meeting these folks and learning and sharing some of the traditions we each hold dear.

I’m uncertain how my projects will unfold, but I’m excited about the people I’ll meet and the new memories we will create together.

Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on who and what is important in our lives. As we emerge from our COVID cocoons, why not create something new? Are there folks you haven’t seen in a long time, or maybe never met?

If my ideas spark you to try something similar, I’d love to hear about it. Please email me at [publisher@seniorlivingmag.com](mailto:publisher@seniorlivingmag.com) or submit a comment under this article when it appears on our website. I’ll look forward to hearing about your plans and adventures.

Happy Thanksgiving!



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Robyn McCorquodale  
on Cambie Bridge  
during a video shoot.  
Photo: Mark Ellis, MuvoMedia

# ROBYN MCCORQUODALE: NOMADIC CHANTEUSE COMES HOME

by MYLES SHANE

She was the only Westerner to sing for the Sultan of Brunei. She sang and played piano in Iran, had her own cabaret act on cruise ships from coast to coast, starred in her own musical production in New York, performed for audiences in Hong Kong and even crooned for a couple who were married on an iceberg in Antarctica. This is the story of Robyn McCorquodale, a quintessential lounge singer with a remarkable story.

Robyn's greatest achievement, however, would play out closer to home. For over 20 years, singing and playing piano on the road, never knowing where she'd wake up the next morning was her reality – until her world shifted 360 degrees.

## ROBYN THE CAREGIVER

In April 2015, after debuting her latest show *Diary of a Piano Girl* in New York City, Robyn was scheduled to return

to Vancouver. When she arrived home, she stepped into the role of caregiver for her parents. In recent years, their conditions had slowly worsened. Robyn couldn't bear the thought of living her nomadic lifestyle any longer. She needed to be with the people she loved most in the world. Mom and Dad were her biggest fans.

Robyn remembers her parents' encouragement in every facet of her life while growing up, "I was very involved in drama and took singing lessons. At age 10, I entered a community talent contest singing "The Lonely Goatherd," from *The Sound of Music*. Miraculously, I won the competition, which landed me as a solo performer in a community concert troupe that entertained in care homes, hospitals, extended care and even a maximum-security prison."

Robyn decided to hit the pause button on her career and devote herself to her parents. "I knew I would continue on with the writing, recording and performances of *Diary of a Piano Girl*,

but I also knew I wanted to travel less and be home more so I could be a support for my parents.”

During October 2017, Robyn’s dad had been released from hospital after a serious fall. “By my own diagnosis, he was released too soon so I stayed with Mom and Dad 24/7 afterwards.” Fast forward a few months and Robyn was at a rehearsal for an upcoming concert. Within a couple of hours, she received the call with news that her parents fell on each other, and paramedics were on the way. At the time, her parents were living at an independent retirement living residence. The fall left Robyn without a choice. She needed to move them into long-term care. She could no longer handle taking care of them without help.

While caring for her parents, she’d jog to help deal with the tension and listen to music to relax. It was while running near the sea wall that the first lyrics of a game-changing song imprinted on her brain. Those lyrics would be the foundation for “We Fly Together or Not at All.” The song went on to become a viral hit online.

“The song was inspired by my chapter as a primary caregiver and advocate for my parents and was written just before COVID-19 hit.”

It honours seniors and celebrates health care professionals and medical first responders. The song began to take on a lot more meaning as the pandemic unfolded.

“It was a cathartic project that helped when I was locked out of my parents’ care home and continued with even more passion after my dad passed away. The song and video were a way to honour my dad, who was my No. 1 fan throughout my life.”

### PLAYING FOR THE SULTAN

Rewind: After Robyn graduated from UBC with a degree in music her agent asked if she would play for the richest man in the world – The Sultan of Brunei. At this point, she had no pop repertoire as she was classically trained. She had one week before flying out to shop, pack and learn enough pop lounge songs to get her through a four-hour engagement. Of no surprise, Madonna’s “Material Girl” and “Like a Virgin” were huge hits!

Robyn performed at the palace seven nights a week from 8 p.m. until 3 a.m. for the Sultan, his brother, Prince Jefri, many other male government ministers as well as a haram of 30 to 50 woman.

“I was overwhelmed and in shock the first evening when I arrived to a lounge full of young beautiful women, all dressed up to the nines in designer clothes,” she recalls.

Caroline, the Prince’s property manager, a young English woman, quickly befriended Robyn and assured her of her safety.

“I never felt that I was in danger after that first moment of sudden panic, and that was due to my connection with Caroline,” she says. “I had many conversations with Prince Jefri and was always very careful to be professional. He liked me not just because I was female and blonde, but he was impressed that I could also play piano and learned songs in his native language. I was never propositioned to join ‘the girls’ – but the opportunity was definitely there, and I would have come home a lot richer in dollars, but a lot poorer in spirit and soul.”

For Robyn, the experience was life defining. “Living in a kingdom for two months under the power and control of one

man, a kingdom that had everything that money could buy and not so much of what it couldn’t buy, like happiness, that gig was the beginning of my journey towards being a strong and independent woman, and seeds were planted to write my own songs, uplifting songs with meaningful lyrics that could empower and inspire and celebrate inner beauty.”



Lighthouse Park  
West Vancouver.  
Photo: Lex Vides, LCMediaCorp

### DIARY OF A PIANO GIRL

Robyn is best known for her original multi-media presentation, *Diary of A Piano Girl*.

The performance showcases her original songs, and she shares personal anecdotes from her journey, life lessons and the stories behind the songs. The photos and videos from her travels through seven continents are synched up to the show.

“It was exciting to debut it first at the Orpheum Annex in Vancouver, and even more rewarding to debut it in New York with multiple performances and to wonderful reviews,” says Robyn. “It was something no one else had done before, even in New York, and it worked!”

### THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

After Brunei, Robyn’s world exploded. Talent managers from across the globe wanted her to play their venues.

“As a solo entertainer travelling internationally, the travel stories alone are endless and I have to say that, at times, my life has felt like a James Bond action movie just getting to the gig and home again, dodging bombs and police dogs in airports (Madrid and London), climbing up rope ladders to embark on moving cruise ships, as well as hitchhiking along the Grand Canal in Venice just to make it to my ship in time.”

The music has always been her joy and the easy part. Arriving at the concert and staying physically strong and healthy can be challenging. She’s learned to travel with only carry-on luggage.

# Snapshot

with Robyn  
McCorquodale

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

*"Believe in yourself and your abilities, keep raising the bar and stay focused, follow your heart and always trust your intuition."*

Who or what has influenced me the most? And why?

*"Definitely my parents were a huge influence, by how they raised me and by how they lived their own lives. They were there for me every step of the way, finding me teachers, taking me to lessons, watching the track meets and other sporting events, taking me to music exams, attending the concerts and shows, and following me around the world to hear me perform in New York, Hong Kong and aboard numerous cruise ships."*

What do you do to keep yourself grounded?

*"Running, music, awareness, gratitude and humour keep me grounded. Running is when I release any stress or negative energy and rejuvenate with positive energy and creative ideas. Music is my emotional release and creative outlet. I love the creative process – the challenge and the reward when a project comes to fruition!" |*

Photo: Lex Vides / LCMediaCorp



"After my suitcase going astray 14 times in 10 months, I realized my suitcase had seen more of France, Italy, and Spain than I had."

Other than in Vancouver, New York, Hong Kong, and Brunei, her performances have been on cruise ships as a guest entertainer-headlining act on the main stage. "It has been fun to share my stories and music and meet people from around the world."

## NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Time Robyn spent in New York City shortly after the events of 9/11 established her career.

"I was booked to fly to New York September 11, 2001 to meet an entertainment management team that was interested in my talent," she says. "I had my airline tickets in hand. Then my Vancouver agent told me I was booked for the Fairmont Vancouver Airport Hotel lounge gig the following weekend. I was not happy at the time. I tried to get out of the Fairmont gig, but ultimately decided to keep the peace and move my flights to October 2."

Robyn can recall 9/11 like it was yesterday. "Like everyone, I was in shock and very emotional. Given all my past cruise ship gigs, I knew many people in the US and especially in the NY Metropolitan Tri-State area. And, of course, I now had a connection with a management company in Manhattan."

"Vancouver family and friends called that morning, realizing my near miss

and what could have happened had I flown that day. It's in those moments that you really think about the Universe and if things happen by chance or by design. I, for sure, felt incredibly grateful and called my Vancouver agent to thank him for making me rebook my flights."

Robyn waited a week before calling the manager in New York, but when she did, she inquired if it was still "appropriate" to come to New York. Without hesitation he said, "it's always appropriate to come to New York!" Robyn emphasizes, "That is the New York spirit I came to know well and love!"

The city embraced her, especially since this was an era when people were trying to leave the chaos of the big city for somewhere safer.

"I made friendships fast and had a full-time gig with a Jazz quartet within a few weeks, singing in hotels and restaurants and fronting a Big Band through the Christmas season. I was performing solo shows of my original music."

Today, Robyn is as busy as ever. "I'm just starting a new recording project with Producer Vince Mai. My song, "Front Row of Life" shares a poignant message honouring the magnificence of seniors and advocating for their care and support in living joy-filled lives."

In addition, Robyn is singing twice a week at the Windermere Care Centre – leading *Sunday Singspiration for Seniors* as well as entertaining with *Summer Songs for Seniors*. "I plan to do a lot more performing at retirement residences and care homes in the future when it feels safe to do so – I love it!" |



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# ENCHANTING PRAGUE

story & photo by MARILYN JONES

I am excited to be here. Prague is one of the most visited cities in Europe and I wanted to visit for a long time. By the time I walk across the Charles Bridge, I understand why so many tourists love this city with its rich history and architectural wonders. It has evolved into a charming, picturesque, and fairytale-like city.

I am in the Czech Republic as part of a Viking River Cruise. The city is a pre-Elbe River stop on the itinerary. Always included is an overview tour. This day our group follows a knowledgeable local guide as he takes us along winding streets into the city's heart.

## HISTORY

Our guide offers a brief history as we walk toward Old Town. Known as the “City of a Hundred Spires,” it dates to 870 and Prague Castle’s foundation.

Old Town was established four centuries after the castle was built. When Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Holy Ro-

man Emperor, came into power he escorted Prague into the golden age. He founded Charles University, the oldest university in Central Europe, in 1348. He also built the New Town and adorned his residential town with Charles Bridge and the magnificent St. Vitus’ cathedral.

With its 50,000 citizens, Prague became the largest city in Europe at that time.

Culture flourished when Emperor Rudolph II moved his seat to Prague in 1583. He endowed Prague’s galleries with the best Mannerist art in Europe and invited respected scientists to his court.

The Hapsburgs took over in 1621, marking the end of the dark ages for the Czechs. During this period, a reawakening began when Queen Maria Teresia prioritized all children’s education – boys and girls. Commercial life developed, and many factories started manufacturing in the city.

In 1939, Hitler’s armies occupied Prague. Fifty years later, democracy returned to the country, with Václav Havel becom-



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ing the president. After the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Prague became the Czech Republic's capital.

### EXPLORING THE PAST

It helps to have this background as we start to explore. Old Town offers inviting streets, alleys, and passageways lined with Romanesque to Art Nouveau architecture.

A 60-metre tower adorns the town hall, constructed in 1338. The 15th-century astronomical clock is also featured here. As the hour arrives, death tips an hourglass and rings a bell before the 12 apostles march by, the cock crows, and another bell rings.

Crossing the famed Charles Bridge, we enter the world's largest castle complex guarded by blue-uniformed sentinels. Prague Castle is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

During darker days, Hitler occupied it. In better times, first democratic president Tomáš G. Masaryk and dissident-playwright-turned president Václav Havel ran the country from here.

Dominating the complex is the breathtaking, Gothic Saint Vitus' Cathedral, which took 1,000 years to build. It is crowded inside, but not too crowded to see the beautiful stained-glass windows, stately statues, and ornate design.

Outside again, our tour guide bids us farewell. Because I signed up for an optional tour, I continue into the castle and the official Prague residence of the Lobkowitz Princes.

Opulence surrounds me. This fairy tale continues.

An audio guide narrated by family members and the museum curator makes the experience even more personal. The family's priceless collection, including portraits, decorative arts, weapons, and tableware are on display.

Art by Canaletto, Brueghel the Elder, Cranach, and Velázquez, rare decorative arts dating from the 13th to 20th century, and an extensive military collection from the 16th to 18th century fill the rooms. The items offer a tangible look at family history.

The collection survived for centuries, including the Nazi and Communist eras.

### JEWISH QUARTER

The next day, on another optional tour, I visit the historic Jewish Quarter.

One of the most lasting images for me is the Pinkas Synagogue, where the names of nearly 80,000 Czech and Moravian Jews, Shoah concentration camp victims during the Nazi occupation, are painted on the walls. The deportation dates are added as the last information about the dead.

The synagogue, founded in 1479 by Rabbi Pinkas, now serves as a Holocaust memorial. The temple was converted into this moving tribute between 1955 and 1960 by painters Václav Boštík and Jiří John.

As emotional as the names are, children's drawings from Terezin concentration camp are just as moving. Imprisoned Jewish children tell of the persecution of Jews in the Czech lands between 1939 and 1945 with their art. The paintings illustrate the transports to Terezin, everyday life in the ghetto, and dreams of returning home.

Pinkas Synagogue is part of Prague's Jewish Museum. Three

other synagogues, the Old Jewish Cemetery, Ceremonial Hall, and Robert Gultmann Gallery documenting the Jewish history, are also part of the museum.

The Old Jewish Cemetery, one of the world's oldest Jewish burial grounds, dates from the 15th century to 1787. Tombstones are only inches apart. When there wasn't any more room for new burials, residents placed a layer of soil on top of existing graves. The tombstones from the under layers were erected on the top layer where the newly departed were buried. There are more than 12,000 tombstones in the cemetery representing 10 grave levels.

Although not part of the museum complex, Old-New Synagogue is a must-see. Visiting the oldest working synagogue in Europe and Prague's earliest Gothic buildings dating to 1270, is like time travel. To walk its small circumference and see its historical wealth on display offers a lasting memory. Worship here has continued for more than 700 years, interrupted only between 1941 and 1945 because of the Nazi occupation.

When my time in Prague ends, I board a bus to travel to the Elbe River and the Viking longboat. I only scratched the surface of what there is to explore in Prague. Still, the historical tours I took offered me a better understanding of the city, its citizens, and its amazing history.

I would love to return and explore again. There are certainly more treasures to discover. |

*For IF YOU GO information and additional photos, visit [www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/enchanting-prague](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/enchanting-prague)*



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# WALES: LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

by KATE ROBERTSON

“When you cross this bridge, you’ll be in England,” says Mike, our guide. We’re standing on the Welsh side of the Old Tramway, a walking bridge that spans the Wye River and has defined the border between the two countries since the eighth century. Many a battle has been waged over this border, but I’m not here to learn about the history.

This is a film tour, and this region of the Wye Valley is just one of the settings for *Sex Education*, the Netflix Anglo-American comedy. It’s this very bridge that socially awkward teenager, Otis Milburn, rides his bike across on the way to school.

As I walk across the bridge to England, just down the riverbank are the ruins of the 12th century Tintern Abbey. It’s hard not to wonder what the massive building might have been like before King Henry the VIII ordered the dissolution of all monasteries when he squelched Catholicism. The Abbey’s roof was sold, and it began its slow journey into today’s ruins, which still make for a spectacular film setting (remember Iron Maiden’s “Can I Play With Madness” video?).

The entire Wye Valley, this 72-kilometre stretch down the Wye River, with its stunning scenery and rolling woodlands has been a British tourism destination since as early as the 18th century and has been used as a location for scenes from blockbuster movies like *Harry Potter* and *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*.

But it’s not just this perfect countryside setting which has been used as a film setting in Wales. The entirety of the country is quickly turning into a goldmine for film location scouts the world over, recognizing that Wales offers varied mind-blowing backdrops – from the snow-capped mountains of Snowdonia in the north, to the amazing rugged Atlantic beaches that surround Wales on three sides, and the lush green countryside in-between. It’s not only the aesthetics that are attractive to film companies. Because Wales is small (just over half the size of Vancouver Island), travel distance between these regions is short, making it fiscally attractive as well.

Less than an hour away is Wales’ capital city. Cardiff has long been the film location for the quirky *Dr. Who* and its spin-off series, *Torchwood*. More recently, however, Cardiff has morphed into a favourite setting for many other films, as well as being a stand-in for London locations. With a population of less than 400,000 versus London’s nine million, it’s much easier (and cheaper) to shut down the streets in Cardiff to shoot a scene.



The National Museum Cardiff is a popular setting (including as the fictitious London National Antiquities Museum in *Sherlock Holmes* “The Blind Banker” episode). Here, it’s hard not to be side-tracked by the impressive collection of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings, from greats like Monet and Van Gogh and, my favourite, Renoir’s *La Parisienne*. This is the largest collection outside of Paris thanks to the Davies sisters, daughters of a local industrial tycoon, who took a hankering to collecting European art from those periods.

“Who was your favourite Dr. Who,” asks Dean, a guide for the film location tour at Cardiff Castle. David Tennant for me, but others in the group have their own idea, and almost all 13 actors who have played the role since 1963 are mentioned.

As Dean points out the scene settings (Moriarty stole the crown jewels in *Sherlock Holmes* here, and the ornately gilded Arab room was used for a scene from *Dr. Who*’s “Heaven Sent” episode, just to name a few) in the medieval castle, he also gives us the inside scoop: he gave President Obama a tour and Steven Seagal once “popped by.”

Heading north up the coast is Freshwater West Beach in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Not only is it a stunning beach, but it was here that the shell cottage (from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*) was built on site. Overlooking the sea, one can feel the collective sadness of mourners who have left socks and epitaph stones on the sand dune where Dobby the House Elf died. Fighting scenes from Russell Crowe’s *Robin Hood* were also filmed here, as well as scenes from *Their Finest*, where the beach doubled as the beaches at Dunkirk.

At the quiet village of Laugharne (some literary experts say this is Llareggub, the village from Dylan Thomas’ *Under Milk*

ABOVE | Cardiff Castle and Principality Stadium in the background.  
TOC | Tintern Abbey. Photo: Kate Robertson

Wood) beautiful with its stone cottages, cobbled streets and 12th century castle, after a quick pint at Brown's Hotel, where purportedly Thomas quaffed many a beer, I visit the cliff-top boathouse where Thomas lived for a period. The rooms remain essentially as they were when he left, and in the attic filled with memorabilia, the audio of Thomas reading his works ("rage, rage against the dying of the light"), gives me goosebumps.

Scenes from the popular Thomas film, *Edge of Love*, starring Keira Knightly and local Matthew Rhys, were filmed in nearby New Quay, and Lower Fishguard is the setting for the 1972 film *Under Milk Wood* starring Richard Burton, which looks much today like it did then.

Next stop is Portmeirion, located on the edge of Snowdonia National Park. A popular family vacation destination, many Welsh will tell you this place holds their most nostalgic childhood memories, and from my first step through the ornate arches, I'm in love with its over-the-top wackiness.

This quirky, surreal "village," built between 1925 and 1973 atop the steep cliffs overlooking a sandy estuary on the River Dwyrd, was the brainchild of eccentric Welsh architect, Clough Williams-Ellis. The architecture spans the stylistic spectrum, including the grand classical Palladian style, and bright colours and palm trees give the village a Mediterranean atmosphere. Delightful surprises (Williams-Ellis' face is on one of the gargoyles) and optical illusions, like faux gabling, are everywhere.

Portmeirion attracts celebrities (George Harrison celebrated his 50th birthday here, and Noel Coward wrote *Blythe Spirit* in one of the suites), and it has been used for filming and photo shoots since its opening in 1926, including the 1960s cult classic, *The Prisoner*. Liam Neeson's *Under Suspicion* and Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* both shot scenes here as well.

I can't wait to re-watch these films so I can say, "I was there!" Netflix, here I come. |

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# ADAPTING TO EARLY RETIREMENT

by MELANIE DORCHESTER

The decision to retire was not simple. A quick survey of friends and family showed diverse attitudes towards retirement. For those who deeply enjoyed their work, or whose finances dictated the necessity of working longer, it was a difficult decision. My 80-year-old aunt still enjoys volunteer and paid professional work in statistics, while her 74-year-old ‘baby’ brother thrives on work in education. One friend was ready long before she retired, and another believes she should have left five years earlier.

As a primary school teacher, recess was a time to quickly consume coffee and healthy snacks (while eyeing the constant supply of sugary treats), consult with colleagues, and catch up on our home lives. Chat themes varied, depending on their status as single, married, with or without children, the age of their children, their own ages, and length of career.

One teacher complained about feeling old. Although I had noticed my creative energy dipping, I still loved teaching little learners. When I brought my bike to school on the sky train and stored it in class, it provided many learning opportunities for students on topics such as safety, active hobbies, the environment, and energy. After a challenging day, I cycled home via city bike routes, through Stanley Park and over the Lion’s Gate Bridge, until I arrived home physically exhausted, yet rejuvenated.

To aid in decision-making, I attended workshops offered by my employer on financial planning and emotional readiness. This, and knowing I could always return as a Teacher on Call, helped me make the decision to retire. The last weeks were exciting and heartbreaking, especially when one tiny child threw her arms around me and cried, “Don’t go!”

My husband and I had booked a week-long trip to stay with friends in Stockholm, Sweden, followed by our first-ever Baltic Sea cruise. That summer was filled with fun activities, but I knew I would miss the excitement of a new school year. So, always a planner, a cycle tour to Sooke via Victoria kept me happily distracted. Friends, hubby and I followed the Lochside, E & N, and Galloping Goose Trails to the Arbutus Cove Bed & Breakfast. It was only after that trip that the TRUE test began.

Local community centres offer many leisure options. One area of interest I had never pursued was woodworking. Though my daughters had learned how to make treasures with wood in high school, I had been discouraged from such ‘dangerous’ activities by my father. While I was grateful for the sewing, cooking, and typing skills learned in the ’70s, I decided to look back at earlier interests to fuel my fire.



My local community centre offered a beginner’s course with all the basics. It seemed perfect, but there was one problem: it was only offered to 55+ individuals at the Senior’s Centre.

I had a serious dialogue with my ego:  
“You’re over 55, right?”  
“Yes, but...!”  
“You want to learn the basic skills of woodworking, right?”  
“Yes, but I’m not a senior!”  
“What is a senior anyway?”

Fast forward to Day 1 of class. Toting eye goggles and a dust mask, I passed by stuffed knitted bunnies and quilts, the busy registration desk, cappuccino bar, and a fully occupied pool room. It was only 8:45 a.m. and the place was humming!

Still feeling hesitant, the sound of power tools drew me to the last room. At several stations, people were focused on cutting, sanding, and gluing their projects. I joined the others who seemed to be waiting.

“Hello!” shouted Jim, the volunteer instructor, over the roar of machines. “Are you here for the beginner’s class?” I nodded over the din.

Lesson No. 1, safety. Jim repeatedly emphasized the importance of safety. He regaled us with tales from his days teaching high school and adults in woodwork shops: foolish mistakes, pieces of wood flying, body parts missing. I had already heard my daughter’s story of having to turn off the machine for a classmate in an emergency, and really didn’t want to hear any more. There were so many distractions from non-classmates who were working on personal projects.... But then I noticed one of my new classmates was wearing flip flops! She looked down at her feet, shrugged, and said “Oops.”

ABOVE | The author’s friend, Cornelia, starts a new retirement venture making garden trellises. Photo: Cornelia Unger

Monday was woodwork day, and I began to look forward to starting my week learning new skills and meeting new people. There wasn't much time to chat but, eventually, I learned that several of the other similarly-aged women were also recently retired. It was apparent that two of them had a lot of woodwork knowledge; they followed instructions quickly then stood around waiting for the next steps. I was embarrassed to often be one of the last to finish, but a helpful norm developed where fast-finishers helped others, so they could also move on. Once or twice, I was even able to help others!

Some of us began to meet for coffee after class. We came from completely different careers and life circumstances, but our bond was wood. After we finished our little stool and corner table, where would it lead us? Who would sign up for the carving class? Women's' Only Class? Intermediate?

Sadly, one woman had to withdraw from class; she had fallen off a ladder at home and broken her collar bone, returning only once for a GENTLE hug and to tell her story.

Like so many other plans, the pandemic altered everyone's priorities. We lost contact as woodwork goals changed to knitting, recovering from surgery and home renovations. Cornelia and I began to volunteer at a food bank; we still enjoy exchanging stories about growing veggies in wooden planters, and her entrepreneurial ventures.

As for me, these days, I avoid noisy power tools, and have a new passion for transforming wood back to its former beauty. At first, I wasn't too sure about retirement. Now I am. |



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### If a Will is changed at the last minute:

You may decide to challenge a Will based on undue influence or lack of mental capacity. For example, if a child convinces their parent to change their Will on their deathbed to provide them with a higher percentage of the assets, the Will may be found to be invalid.

### If a parent leaves everything to one child and nothing to another

Typically, individuals are obligated to provide for their spouse and children. A child who receives nothing in their parent's Will may bring a Court action to have the assets redistributed. Talk to a lawyer about the prospect for success and possible outcomes.

### If an adopted child or stepchild is left out of the Will:

Generally, children (including adopted children) are to be provided for in a Will; however, the law doesn't require that an individual provide for their stepchildren or grandchildren in the same way.

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# HAWAIIAN-STYLE GREEN ISLAND LIVING

by RICK & CHRIS MILLIKAN

Two Hawaiian adventures advance our understanding of the Big Island's ecological alternatives. The first takes us from Kona's sunny beaches to the opposite rainy coast.

We board a van touring the Waipio Valley. Descending a steep, pot-holed public road, we view the lofty basalt cliffs hemming in this lush green valley. "Those few utility poles you see reflect the fact that only five of Waipio's 50 homes receive electrical and phone service," our driver-guide Gregg smiles. "No worry! Neighbours share landline phones. Solar panels, wind turbines and gas generators provide their electricity...."

Numerous taro patches line a muddy serpentine river. "After backbreaking planting and harvesting, valley farmers serve taro leaves as greens and pounded purple roots as poi. Taro remains the nutritious heart of Hawaiian meals," Gregg explains. "Trucking excess crops, taro is processed into chips, ingredients for baked goodies and poi." Winding onward, Gregg points out indistinct acres of densely growing ferns. He mentions how tasty fiddleheads are also eaten and popularly marketed.

Little cottages sporadically appear. Fences enclose yards filled with banana plants, papaya, coconut, orange, avocado trees and vegetable gardens. "Everything thrives on our island's rich volcanic soil," Gregg says. "Folks here also hunt abundant feral pigs, adding pork to their diets."

Bumping further into the verdant valley and fording two tributaries, we realize most of the Waipio Valley remains untamed. Suddenly wild ponies emerge from the rainforest. "There're more horses around here than motorists!" Gregg quips, "I call these ponies the road gang."

Small bays and pintos stick curious noses into van windows. Gregg feeds this sweet foursome their customary alfalfa biscuits. Once treated, they gradually drift back into the tumultuous greenery. We learn 60 wild horses live in the Waipio Valley.

Visitors can also glean roadside treasures. Gregg gathers perfumed gardenia flowers for the ladies and avocados for the gents. Before grinding back up the steep road, he pauses again pointing at a private road. "I sometimes drop passengers off here. They'll walk down to Waipo's beautiful black sand beach, where locals catch fish to enjoy with their poi." Living simply, valley folks make small environmental footprints.

Our second day trip involves the futuristic structures just beyond Kona's International Airport. A sign announces Hawaii Ocean Science and Technology Park. Two huge solar roof panels identify the reception centre. Inside, a docent checks off our names as participants. Being early, there's time to peruse table displays and leaflets expounding innovative approaches to the future.

Several pamphlets report on Hawaii's clean energy, now supplying 40 per cent of this island's electricity. Two island wind farms churn over 30 megawatts. As one megawatt powers about 1,000 homes, these turbines produce electricity for 30,000 houses. Hilo's Wailuku River facility generates another 11 megawatts. And until Mauna Kea's 2018 eruption, Puna geothermal wells created steam for generators creating 38 megawatts.

Other brochures describe solar panels topping public buildings, businesses and resorts like ours. An amazing 16,000 homeowners have solar panels supplying their residential needs.

To avoid costly imported gasoline, islanders increasingly drive electric cars; the county leads the way in using e-vehicles. Their popularity has resulted in 16 island charging stations. And by refining biomass of local eucalyptus and sorghum, biofuel is replacing diesel fuel.

ABOVE | Waipio Valley. TOC | Waipio wild horse. Photo: Rick and Chris Millikan



We ask a volunteer about the reception area's energy efficient design. "Our ecological efficiencies begin with the outside solar panels. And naturally our huge glass walls provide year-round lighting," she smiles. "Under this floor, air is passing over coils filled with cold seawater. Meanwhile our roof chimney vents the hot air. This draws up the cooled air... and results in zero-cost air conditioning! As a bonus, condensation from the under-floor coils creates pure water. It's then used for flushing toilets and irrigating surrounding gardens."

Seated with others, Natural Energy Labs of Hawaiian Authority's startling research is introduced. "Our facility was funded to create electricity by OTEC, ocean thermal energy conversion. You can understand its principle using this small glass apparatus," the presenter explains. "When you hold the bottom glass chamber of red ammonia liquid, you see your body temperature gradually boiling the liquid. Converted into gas, it rises and flows through its glass tube into the higher chamber. On a larger scale, such circulation could power turbines."

Screening a picture of OTEC's tower of colourful pipes, she continues, "One pipe circulates warm water to boil the liquid ammonia into gases. Another circulates the extremely cold deep water to condense the ammonia back into liquid."

"To accomplish the most effective water temperature difference, OTEC's experimental operations were located here." A screened topographic map of Hawaii Island shows us how this particular Kona site provides maximum ocean drop off. This

site allows a water pipe to plunge 900 metres vertically downward. Using capillary action, this pipe draws up the extremely deep cold water, while another draws shallow warm water to activate circulation.

"Although having limited economic success in power production, OTEC research experiments continue to be refined. Yet our work has produced a spectacular byproduct: untainted deep seawater. Our property now encloses over 22 industries immensely benefitting from this unique pristine water," she smiles. "Desalinized, it's sold to island breweries, a vodka distillery and bottled for Japanese consumers. The salt is successfully sold as deep-sea salt. The most profitable facet is how this seawater nurtures sea creatures' rapid growth."

Returning to our cars, we head to a parking lot near OTEC's elevated piping. This proves a short walk to Kampachi Farms, our destination. A marine biologist introduces their enterprise.

"An aquaculture revolution has begun. In the last few decades, fish farmers have successfully raised trout in ponds, salmon and tilapia in pens," he smiles. "Licensed to grow many fish varieties, we've discovered Kampachi, a type of yellowtail tuna, flourishes in these giant segregated tanks. Immersed in pure OTEC deep-water and nourished by healthy soya diets, they grow 33 per cent faster than kindred ocean dwelling tuna."

A fellow scientist tells us about edible seaweed research and shows several thriving varieties in shallow troughs filled with deep seawater. She says three of them are ready for marketing.

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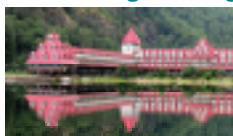
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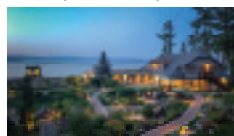
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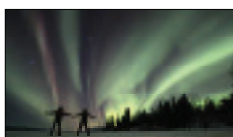


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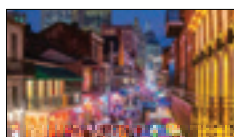
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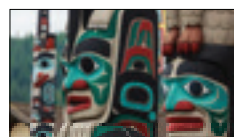
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troughs of prized Ezo abalone and the seaweeds grown to feed them. At a shallow aquarium, he turns four of these unique seasnails upside down. Extending ventral feet, these critters smartly flip themselves over. After this entertainment, they become grilled delicacies for us to sample. Like other OTEC seafood, they ship millions of their abalone from the nearby airport, flying them fresh to worldwide markets.

Leaving the tour, we head to Kona Cold Lobsters. Under a corrugated tin roof, Atlantic lobsters scamper in clear pools. Other NELHA seafood is available here; we ask for two 10-pound lobsters. A fellow puts them in our pail. Paying, we say “Mahalo!” Gesturing a Shaka, he conveys no worry.

Two other NELHA’s research facilities may provide another year’s info-tainment. Kanaloa Octopus Farm helps visitors understand their brilliant eight-armed cephalopods. Ocean Rider Seahorse Farm educates folks about their colourful arrays of fascinating seahorses and sea dragons.

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**NOTE:** At the time of publication, restrictions around travel to the US were still in effect due to COVID-19. Check with your travel agent before booking a trip to Hawaii or any other US state.

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## LYNN & MO

Lynn and Mo began their lifelong friendship when Mo met the Long Island Train from Manhattan in the summer of 1969. In their twenties, they had each just relocated to New York City – from Toronto and San Francisco, respectively – with their spouses.

“Our husbands worked for the same company, which had rented a large house in Hampton Bay for its executives and families to escape to on summer weekends.”

When Mo arrived at the train to greet weekend guests, Lynn was the first to disembark, her fresh white linen attire covered in diesel train ash. Mo recalls saying to her, “Well, that’s the last time you’ll wear white on a commuter train!” Both still chuckle about that first meeting, which set off their friendship.

They soon realized they were not only pregnant but that they had, independently of each other, landed at the same posh Park Avenue Ob-Gyn, who went on to deliver Lynn’s daughter and Mo’s son some months later.

In the 1970s, both families left New York, but they stayed in touch through the communication media of the times: celebratory greeting

cards. “When we didn’t see each other, we heard about each other,” adds Lynn.

It wasn’t until 1983 that the moms, both now divorced, reunited in Calgary where Lynn was living with her children, and Mo was stopping over on a cross-Canada rail trip. A fun day at the Calgary Stampede reconnected them and their kids.

In the 1990s, when they had each landed in Vancouver, Lynn and Mo were both working on their master’s degrees at UBC, while holding down full-time educator professions. “That experience really bonded us,” they say. “We were each other’s social life and sole companion during that year-and-a-half of hard work.”

Now in their 70s and well into retirement, the two live half a block from each other in Vancouver. “Only our mechanic is between us,” says Lynn, referring to his business address between their homes.

Mo and Lynn regularly see each other and continue to share good times: exchanging books, hosting social events, and helping their neighbours.

“It’s just so much fun the way it all started,” laughs Mo, as they both giggle at the memory of Lynn arriving in such a state, 52 years ago. |



## SHOULD WE STOP EATING FISH?

Eating fish is good for us, right? Well, that depends who you ask – or your source.

Fish are low in saturated fat and provide a rich source of omega 3s. This fatty acid is vital for brain health, controlling inflammation, giving us healthy skin, and a long list of other benefits and necessities for the proper functioning of our bodies. However, the pollution of our oceans and its effects on fish is a growing concern.

Does that mean we should stop eating fish and seafood? There are countless arguments and debates on this issue. It's difficult to know who to trust on the topic because many of those sources seem to be credible. Until we know more, you can choose to stop eating fish, or you can choose to benefit from the health properties in fish by applying common sense practices:

1. Eat fish less frequently. You can still reap the benefits of the omega-3 fatty acid and other health-benefiting properties, by consuming fish just two to three times weekly.

2. Have smaller amounts if you eat fish more than three times weekly (perhaps 2 oz servings instead of the standard 3 or 4 ounces).

3. More often, choose smaller fish like sardines and anchovies, not the larger fish like tuna or sturgeon. Smaller fish will offer less contaminants.

4. Choose sources with less mercury, like salmon, cod, pollock, sole, shrimp, mussels, scallops, and canned flaked tuna. The darker-coloured (and much cheaper) cans of light tuna made from skipjack, yellowfin and tongol tuna are smaller-sized, therefore have low levels of mercury. Canned albacore tuna (the whiter, more expensive tuna, which comes from large tuna) have higher mercury levels.

5. Eat fish higher in mercury less often. These include shark, swordfish, escolar, marlin, orange roughy, and albacore tuna. These options should be limited to once-a-week consumption. However, these high-mercury fish should be eaten only once a month by children and pregnant or nursing women.

6. Practice variety: Avoid always eating the same type of fish. Switch it up. This can help reduce the mercury and other heavy metals you might consume.

7. And, most importantly, eat lots of fibre-rich foods, like vegetables, root vegetables, legumes, seeds, and whole grains. Fibre may help keep mercury and other pollutants regularly moving out of your body.

Another concern is wild fish versus farmed fish: Which is best? Unfortunately, wild vs. farmed is a lengthy, complex topic that deserves a separate article. The sensible way to make an educated decision on any controversy is to research it yourself while keeping an open, unbiased mind. Consider both sides of the issue, putting aside your own opinions and strong beliefs – whether it's about eating fish (or not) or the 'wild vs. farmed' controversy.

TIP: Regarding the latter, online sources seem to mostly support eating wild fish. However, to be fair, include an internet search for "farmed fish myths."

Fish can provide many vital properties for humans – like all other food sources nature has provided us. And while anything can be harmful in large amounts, it is possible there can also be benefits with moderation and common sense. |

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-health-news.com](http://www.artnews-health-news.com)

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# OPTIMAL AGING

By WENDY JOHNSTONE

Do you want to know how to stop aging? Stop living!

Okay, maybe that's not exactly the truth. The best way to slow down aging is of course to LIVE. I think we can all list people we've known who chose to "stop living" and, as a result, aged rapidly.

Aging optimally starts by embracing age, on our own terms, and being active through healthy living and continuing to find meaning through activities, social connections and giving back to others regardless of the physical, emotional and social changes that come with age.

John Rowe and Robert Kahn's Model of Successful Aging from 1987 is a great foundation because it's simple and still applicable today:

- *Minimize risk of disease and disability:* in other words, self-manage those areas you can control through healthy living and behaviours, medications, if necessary, managing stress, etc.
- Continue engagement with life: mingle with others, stay connected socially, spiritually and with your community; do things that "feed your soul," try something new, adapt something that is no longer working for you.
- Maintain physical and cognitive connections: move and groove every day, keep your mind active and engaged, have interesting conversations, or learn something new.

Whether you are 89 or, in my case, 49, you get to choose your own adventure. Whether it's eating less meat or being fully vegan, practicing yoga, hiking, or swimming, minimizing your risk of disease and disability is at the core of optimal aging.

Staying engaged and having purpose takes many shapes – for some, it may be singing, writing, drawing, volunteering, gardening, and socializing with your community. Keep doing what makes you happy and adapt as required. All this gives life continued meaning and keeps our all-important neurons firing.

I may not move like I did in my 20s or 30s, but I try to push myself a little each day. Whether it's learning a new technology app, meeting new people, or stretching my fitness goals on my bike, I try to walk the walk of being a Gerontologist.

This also means a shift in seeing aging with a strength lens. Research shows the more we use our strengths daily, the better we handle undesirable emotions (stress, anger, worry, anxiety, frustrations) or pain. All emotions that can sometimes present themselves when we experience losses due to age or life transitions. Focusing on strengths leads to increased feelings of being resilient and purposeful.

Many of us may think we don't need to worry about aging until we hit our 70s or 80s. I disagree. We are all aging every day. What we do, how we act, and how we think about aging in our 40s, 50s, and 60s plays a crucial role in our more advanced years for remaining independent, connected, engaged and fulfilled. So, what are you doing today to successfully age on your terms?

*Family Caregivers of BC Column written by Wendy Johnstone, a Gerontologist & a consultant with Family Caregivers of British Columbia in Victoria, BC*



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# VALLARTA COOKING CLASS



*Living*  
on purpose

by LAURIE MUELLER

On a trip to Mexico, we took a cooking class. I hadn't been in a cooking class since high school. And, for teenaged me, it hadn't been a good experience, so I had a bit of trepidation signing up as an adult. I know that many cities offer a variety of cooking classes for visitors and locals alike. My stepson lives in New York, and he and his partner have taken classes with emphasis on pairing different wines with meals.

Five of us showed up for our lesson in Mexican cuisine. My sister-in-law, Marlene, had seen an advertisement in the airline's magazine and brought it to our attention the first night at our Airbnb. "This is a must-do!" she said.

Early the next morning, we were warmly greeted as we entered the restaurant and handed an apron and a cloth shopping bag. The first order of business was to walk through town, cross the river, and arrive at the market. At the riverbank, we stopped to pick up several large rocks that would be used in the cooking of stone soup. My husband, Helmuth, got to carry one around in his shopping bag. At the market, we listened to explanations of the various ingredients we would be buying for our cooking adventure: what to look for, where to look for

them, and, in the case of fresh fruits and vegetables, how to tell their ripeness.

Handy points we picked up included:

- Test a pineapple's ripeness by pulling out one of its sword-like leaves. If it is easy to pull, the pineapple is ready to eat.
- Chicken with yellow skin (including the fat just under the skin) is corn fed.
- Shrimp is plentiful in this area of Mexico because it is caught not too far from where we are in the Bay of Banderas.
- Red onions for raw dishes; white onions for cooking.

Our 15-member class took place on the rooftop patio of the restaurant, and we had a view of the Bay when we looked up from our preparations. Spectacular!

We set about cutting and squeezing limes, dicing onions, preparing avocados, and chopping chiles. Chef Julio showed us the correct way to do it, and then folks took over. There were two teenagers who learned a lot about cooking that day, but then so did we all!

We learned how to make Stone Soup – no stove required once the stones are heated to the right temperature in the fire (campfire or oven). We also watched the fine art of making dough for tortillas and participated in the process. These were yummy paired with chicken mole (pronounced moe-lay) that we also prepared. We learned to make chile rellenos and ceviche.

Each dish we made was followed by margaritas and eating. We met and chatted with other participants. I talked to a man that worked in Seattle with Google, where I find all my answers to life's burning questions. He told me it wasn't him that answered the questions. I was slightly disappointed.

I loved interacting with Chef Julio and hearing the excitement in his voice as he talked about the food, the culture, and his life. I liked hearing the local stories and getting to know something deeper about the area we visited. I enjoyed eating our creations, each time paired not with wine, as my stepson had learned, but with tequila.

Would I do it again? ;Oh si! |

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](http://www.lauriemconsulting.com) or on Facebook.

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