

# INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

DEC 21/JAN 22

POET AND AUTHOR  
LORNA CROZIER

STUMBLING UP  
THE STAIRWAY  
TO HEAVEN

REIGNITING  
AN OLD FLAME

REPLACEMENT &  
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**Cover** An Officer of the Order of Canada, LORNA CROZIER has been acknowledged for her contributions to Canadian literature, her teaching and her mentoring with five honorary doctorates. Her books have received numerous national awards. Photo: Kamil Bialous

## INSPIRED

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# THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



At a recent workshop, I was asked, “When were you the happiest?”

As I cast back over my life, up from my subconscious bubbled the surprising answer, “Now!”

As I’ve pondered that response, I realize that happiness has always lurked out of reach – something that either occurred fleetingly in my past, regarded with nostalgia and regret for its brevity, or something still in my future and not yet attainable, provoking a sharp yearning.

Rarely has it occurred to me that happiness was present and upon me in the moment in which I looked for it.

Some say happiness is an illusion; yet a great deal is made of its pursuit.

I realized through this exercise and reflection that I have spent a lifetime seeking permission to be happy.

When I’m in another person’s presence, I automatically take the temperature of their mood, gauging to what degree happiness is present and then I adjust my own emotions accordingly.

I recognize the process as a need to feel safe. If I feel someone could be disappointed or intimidated by my happiness, I squelch it.

Unhappiness is the shield behind which I hide to appear smaller, to avoid uncomfortable scrutiny.

Happy emotions feel like points of vulnerability: places and moments where I could be exposed to attack.

My inner dialogue, if turned into sentences would mirror these sentiments:

- “Don’t be too happy or bad things will happen.”
- “If you’re happy and things don’t turn out well, won’t you look stupid?”
- “Who are you to be happy when others are suffering?”

With my acknowledgement that I am happy now, my happiness martyrdom is over.

As I come to the end of 2021 and look forward to emerging from a pandemic that has caused immense global upheaval, the navigation of life has given me an insightful look at who I am and how I want to show up in the future. At times it’s been a painful uncovering and releasing of beliefs that no longer serve me.

In the aftermath I, as a human/spirit being, am emerging, changed. I feel I am more patient and compassionate with myself and others, more peaceful, more balanced, and – yes, happier.

Circumstances are what they are. They come and go. Up and down. Helpful and unhelpful. For me, navigating through life’s challenges with a sense of peace and calm, equates to happiness.

If I get thrown off kilter by some situation, I feel I have a larger repertoire of self-care tools to help me get through the experience until I find my balance again.

In a recent televised interview given after six years of self-imposed exile from the public spotlight, singer/songwriter Adele was asked to reveal her No. 1 desire. She replied, “Peace of mind.”

While that answer may have sounded pedestrian to some, it spoke to me of someone who has drilled to the depths to find the treasure within.

After a lifetime of holding happiness at bay, it’s not easy to make bedfellows with it. Each day is a step closer.

For those who feel triggered by the word “happy,” “peace of mind” holds similar energy, without the baggage.

I often substitute words like content, ease, flow, serenity, balance, harmony that help me say “happy” in a softer way.

This is the time to rise as individuals to be our best selves, and to rise as a collective, to surround and uplift each other.

Whatever situation you may be navigating in your life, may happiness find you. And may difficult circumstances be soothed by relief and support.

I wish each of you a peace-filled closure to 2021 and gracious blessings for 2022. |

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Photo: Angie Abdou

# LORNA CROZIER: THERE'S A POEM INSIDE MY HEAD

by JOHN THOMSON

Lorna Crozier answers the telephone. “It’s just so beautiful. I’m sitting in my study which has a sliding glass door which leads to a deck which surrounds a pond. The turtles are out right now sunning on a rock, and I can see an orange ribbon of fish that lie underneath the water lilies which have just started opening up.” Lorna uses her words to paint a vivid picture of a property I cannot see. But then she is a poet. “The wisteria is in full bloom. It’s very strongly scented and it’s wafting through my screen door.”

Lorna talks lovingly of the home and garden, particularly the garden, she shared with her partner and fellow poet Patrick Lane. The garden figures prominently in Lorna’s story, a place and a time she celebrates in her 2020 memoir

*Through the Garden: A Love Story (with cats)*. Today, she’s working on a follow-up and in a departure of sorts, collaborating with BC musician Barney Bentall. And why not? Switching genres has always come easily to Canada’s most prolific poet, the author of 21 poetry books, six anthologies, three non-fiction books and three books for children. In 1992, she won the Governor-General’s Award in literature and in 2011 she became an Officer of the Order of Canada.

She’s driven, she says, by something Earl Birney said.

“Earl Birney described the writing of a poem as like having an interior itch that you had to scratch, and that’s what takes me to writing a poem,” she says. “I know there’s something that’s stirring inside me.”



Stirring and often dormant until a walk along the Sidney waterfront or puttering in her garden releases a burst of creativity.

"I find walking will often get a poem going in the head," she says. Mind you, there are days when she's not writing at all. "I read every day, but I don't write every day," she says. And when she does write, she's not entirely sure of the outcome. "I just face a blank page when I'm writing with no idea about what I'm going to do with it or whether words will come or skip away from me that morning."

She's arguably Canada's most popular poet, largely because her poems are so easy to read. They've been called "accessible."

"I'm not quite sure how accessible they are," she says humbly. "Wherever they fall on that scale is not a decision I consciously made."

Nevertheless, the public has responded. Her poems are personal, observant and not weighed down with a lot of metaphors. Take for instance, this excerpt from *Blizzard*:

*Walking into the wind, I lean into  
my mother's muskrat coat,  
around the cuffs her wristbones  
have worn away the fur.*

*If we stood still we'd disappear.  
There's no up or down,  
No houses with their windows lit.  
The only noise is wind.*

*and what's inside us. When we get  
home my father  
Will be there or not. No one ever  
looks for us.*

"I like to use words with clarity," she says. "I very much think that language doesn't have to obfuscate. On one level, I'd like the poem to be clear, but I'd like it to be open and the more you think about it or the more you read it, the complexity is not obscured in any kind of excessive vocabulary."

One reviewer called them poems about nothing.

"I seem to delight in what's common in the common object," she laughs. "I find it so fascinating to look closely at nothing and find something that is there. I think that's what poets try to do – show us more than we can see. I believe that's the task I've given to myself."

She agrees with the Chinese saying, poetry is like being alive twice.

"Definitely. I don't know if there's anything better than

when creativity washes over you and you know you're on a roll. It's not forced. It's almost as if you're channeling. I just find that journey is the most exhilarating thing I can do."

When I ask her what sparks an idea, she replies "resistance."

"Resistance is often the place that poetry begins," she says. "It might be a dark energy but an energy nonetheless that can really propel a piece of writing and so that's a place I try not to refuse to go to."

Resistance certainly plays a major part in her story – resistance to the status quo, to conventionality, and to what was expected of her.

Lorna grew up on a farm outside Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

"They were very bright, but they were not learned," she says of her parents. "There were very, very few books in the house. But I always had an over-developed sense of curiosity, of wanting to know how things worked in the world and I had a desire to express that wonder."

She married and became a high school English teacher. It was a prescribed life. She liked her job, but she wanted more.

"I was writing for myself. I wasn't sending it out. I wasn't workshopping it with anybody. I was just bumbling along. Less than two years after my vows, I yearned to be free and dangerous and on the run. I just knew I wanted to live more the life of an artist and live with another artist."

A summer poetry workshop in the Qu'Appelle Valley, 57 kilometres west of Regina, sparked the transition.

One of the instructors, Patrick Lane, was already an accomplished poet, a major figure on the creative scene. Fuelled by passion and a mutual love of writing, they started an affair. He asked her to leave her marriage. He left his.

"I wanted him. I wanted the craziness of what we'd create together. Even if we didn't last, I didn't care who got hurt."

She had indeed become free, dangerous and on the run.

"We really had this astounding partnership. It just felt good to be so finely matched," Lorna says of their relationship. She and Patrick shared an idyllic life on Vancouver Island, looking after their two cats Basho and Po Chu, their garden, and their long-term communal project cleaning up Coles Bay Park across the street.



# Snapshot

## with Lorna Crozier



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

*"To believe in myself and to have less fear about inadequacies. I had no faith that I would become a writer. It would have been lovely to have less concern and less worry and just say 'you know what? I'm going to make it.'"*

Who or what has influenced you the most and why?

*"I think the earth, I think the sky, all the animals, and the garden. It's both a real place where I spend hours weeding, but it's also a place of meditation, longing and connectiveness. I do feel the tactility of [Patrick] still here."*

What are you grateful for?

*"I'm grateful that I can still walk and see and hear. I'm grateful for meeting my husband 40 years ago and having the life I had with him. I'm grateful for his two sons whom I'm close to and the gift of being able to be a grandmother not having children of my own."*

What does success mean to you?

*"It doesn't mean prizes and it certainly doesn't mean making money. I guess it means being able to keep on going and to take delight in the things I do best."*

ABOVE | Photo: University of Victoria photo services.

"We phoned [the Capital Regional District] and said you've got a real ivy problem (choking the trees) and they said, 'yeah, we know but we don't have the staff to do anything about it.'

So, we took it on our own shoulders rather than letting it go. It was a huge task.

It took us at least three years of working two to three days a week, but we did it. Both Patrick and I thought it was one of the best things we've ever done. It was our own, small contribution to saving the environment."

Although they were both poets, they pursued different paths. Patrick drew upon his past experiences; Lorna reacted to the here and now. They helped each other with their poetry. Sure, they argued a lot over technique, vocabulary and syntax, but there was never any competition or jealousy over the other's success.

"We kind of lived with the cliché 'don't go to bed angry with each other.' Neither of us held things inside for very long or allowed resentments to build up. We both grew, but we grew differently," Lorna continues. "We were each other's best friend, editors, gardening partners, lovers, yet we challenged each other, and I think made each other better people than we would have been on our own."

Academia called them a literary power couple.

"We both felt it was heart-warming to be referred to as a pair. It didn't lessen either of us as individuals or dilute our singularity."

Then in January 2017, a subtle change.

It began as an irritation. Patrick felt his neck and shoulders stiffen and his upper body freeze. He would appear to get better but then another ailment would take over. His right leg ballooned. He lost his appetite. He couldn't sleep. Doctors couldn't determine what the problem was.

"I swore I wouldn't play the dutiful

wife," Lorna says mindful of her first marriage. Yet, Patrick was often in pain, incapacitated and unable to perform simple mechanical tasks. Lorna fought to keep herself and her husband on an even keel. Keeping up with lecture schedules (Lorna even took over some of Patrick's commitments), maintaining the house and taking her husband in and out of hospital led to bouts of fatigue, irritation and depression.

"I don't know if there's anything more debilitating than watching someone you love fade away, watching someone who is very strong and physical hardly being able to get his legs off the mattress onto the floor," she says. "It was a constant challenge not to think. I had to keep my head above water to help him so I couldn't show I was depressed all the time."

Patrick passed in 2019. His death released a torrent of emotions, which Lorna articulated in her book *Through the Garden*. It is a thoughtful, loving, and poignant account of their time together. Now she's coming to terms with being a survivor.

"*Through the Garden* was about the grief of watching someone you love diminish and the worry of them not getting better. Now I'm working on poems and perhaps some prose about what it's like to have to redefine yourself as a solitary human being after having been with someone for 40 years. I've started writing about a different kind of grief, the grief of being left alone."

Meantime the ivy has returned to Coles Bay Park.

"So now on the anniversary of his death, I go out with the six grandkids and his two sons, and their wives and we have a day of ivy work, including the little six-year-old working beside me this year and saying 'Grandma, we do this so the trees can breathe, right?'"

Yes, the trees can breathe, but for Lorna, clearing the ivy is a connection to a shared life. So too is maintaining the garden in her Island home.

"It's both a real place where I spend hours weeding – my hands are chapped, and I can't get the dirt from under my



fingernails – but it’s also a place of meditation and longing and connectiveness. He shaped the garden. He touched every stone in our yard, he deadheaded every plant, so I do feel the tactility of him still here.”

Life is quieter now, a result of Patrick’s passing and COVID-19. Prior to the lockdown, Lorna used to go to the gym every day, but the pandemic forced her to work out in its parking lot instead, taking walks in the neighbourhood, and doing yoga by Zoom.

She also used to lead two workshops a year, one in Honeymoon Bay on Vancouver Island and the other in Kingston, but because of COVID she chose not to teach online.

“One-on-one is just such a more pleasant way to gather and to teach than seeing a flat, one-dimensional face online. I’ve always loved the face-to-face, warm connection with people.”

She intends to resume the workshops in early 2022.

Settled and reflective, she says poetry is about attentiveness and no, the advancing years haven’t dulled her capabilities.

“I think I’m really lucky to be a writer because, for some of us, our brains remain sharp, although there’s no guarantee they will, but I think I’ll be able to write until I’m in my hospital bed. Thank God my art is writing and not dance or music. If I have any concerns, it’s that I don’t want to start repeating myself. I want to be able to move forward and surprise myself. Can I remain as engaged with the world as I need to be?”

She’s still enthralled by nature, by life and the human condition. Driven, as always, by the need to scratch that itch. Writing, she re-affirms, is the most exhilarating thing she can do.

“I still wake up in the morning and find some small beauty. It’s a small beauty I’d like to polish and find words for.” |

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# STUMBLING UP THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

by HANSTAMMEMAGI

Okay, I'm an old guy, so what the dickens am I doing with my toes perched on a five-centimetre-wide ledge, my fingers clutching a small rock protrusion and my heart beating so furiously it might start an avalanche? I am stuck to a cliff that falls vertically for more than 100 feet onto a scrabble of boulders. And yes, I am frightened and, well, confused. In my 70s, I wonder what I am doing here in this precarious position.

I am climbing a Via Ferrata. Via Ferrata, you ask? The words are Italian for "iron road," which traverses mountain sides using emplaced rungs, footholds and, most importantly, a safety cable. It's specially designed so amateurs, and even geezers like me, can safely climb cliffs otherwise only tackled by experts. Via Ferratas are popular in Europe but are a recent phenomenon in North America.

I'm lucky, for this one at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort near Golden, BC, opened in 2015 and is considered the best in Canada. At 2,450-metre elevation, it offers hair-raising adventure and – should you be able to relax – spectacular views of jagged peaks, folded and convoluted, stretching to the horizon. It's also bringing me face to face with my age.

To calm my nerves, I rest my cheek against the sandstone cliff. In the silence, a temporary calm descends, and I feel a connection with the mountain, can sense the mighty forces that created this vast mountain range. I also feel pretty silly.

An hour earlier, stepping off the gondola that brought me to the summit, I was overwhelmed by the snow-capped peaks arrayed all around. In spite of that, I felt nervous and weak. What prompted me to do this?

Nick, the guide, gathers our small group together – I am by far the oldest – and explains how we are going to climb the Ascension Route up the north face of Terminator Peak. He hands us helmets and safety harnesses and leads a practice session getting us accustomed to the equipment and how to grip rungs and metal handholds. Nick seems oblivious to my shaking and casually mentions, "Two years ago, a guy even

older than you came along. He did really well."

We pass along a sharp, narrow ridge to the start. With mountain heather and small pine trees framed against spectacular peaks, it is like hiking in heaven. Well, to me it's more like stumbling in paradise.

"Time to rope up and have our first test," announces Nick, pointing to what looks like two tiny strands of wire holding a two-and-a-half-centimetre board walkway, all hanging ever so daintily across a menacing gully. "That's Hanging Glory Suspension Bridge," he says. "It's 60 metres long and sways a bit, but don't worry, it's perfectly safe." Easy for him to say.

I clip my harness onto the safety cable and my heart is in my throat as I am pushed onto the bridge. And Nick was right, it sways. A lot.

Finally, I am across and start climbing, clinging to a sheer cliff as I work up the north face. My adrenaline is racing, and it feels like I am Sir Edmund Hillary, but was he quaking like this on Everest? Numerous iron rungs, pegs, and handholds help me manage the climb. I give thanks to the harness, which connects me to a cable anchored to the rock along the entire route. Grudgingly, I admit it is perfectly safe, thank goodness.

Most of the time my nose is inches from the gritty sandstone, and I can see the individual quartz crystals glistening in the sunshine. Or are they laughing at me? Occasionally, I lift my head and am greeted by the crenellated mountains of the Dogtooth Range. Whenever I rest – which is often – I feel humble, ever so insignificant amongst these vast summits, the western margin of our grand country. We climb in silence – my quivering is noiseless. I pray a lot, for it is like being in a majestic cathedral.



ABOVE | Increasingly gutsy, the author goes hands-free.

RIGHT | The guide, Nick, fearlessly leads from a peak. Photos: Hans Tammemagi



At one point, we tight-rope across the “gut” bridge, a seven-metre-long single cable. It is exposed and scary, but my fingers clench with all their might onto another cable at shoulder height. Yes, I am also clipped onto it.

Almost two hours pass, but it feels like minutes. Tiredness is setting in; after all, we’ve climbed about 200 metres vertically. Reaching up to a rung and grasping firmly, then searching and finding an iron foothold, I clamber up onto a flat area. “Congratulations,” says Nick, “You’ve conquered the Terminator.” I collapse in a heap.



We hike back to the gondola silently, savouring the misty mountains receding to the horizon. Isolated on the high, narrow ridge, and with the adventure behind me, I slowly start to recover, feeling proud, and also an integral part of this enchanting alpine kingdom.

Descending in the gondola, I am exhausted but exhilarated. Far below lies the Golden area and the Kicking Horse River. Far in the distance, I see a tiny paraglider riding the thermals, the bright red sail lit up like a lantern. Below us, mountain bikers, outfitted in helmets and padding like gladiators, careen down sinuously curving trails.

I’m elated. Not only have I had a good workout, but I’ve also experienced, up close and personal, some of the best views in our majestic nation. More importantly, I’ve learned that age isn’t a barrier in seeking out new adventures. Nothing could have been more spiritual and thrilling than climbing the Via Ferrata. |

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# LEADING ON THE WORLD STAGE

by LESLEY TAYLOR

Margaret Page didn't set out to become the president of the world's largest public speaking organization. In fact, prior to joining Toastmasters, she was terrified of public speaking.

"When I was a young businessperson or a young mother, I would not raise my hand to volunteer if there was a speaking component. I was willing to do the work, but if the role involved speaking in front of groups, I always seemed to find ways to work my way out of that."

"The defining moment came when I was asked to share my team's success to a group of 1,700 people. I couldn't do it. I was their leader and didn't have the courage to share their story. I had let them down and I couldn't let that happen again. I was so ashamed."

That sudden insight led Margaret on a journey that would eventually lead to becoming a member of Toastmasters International. Since that time, Margaret has held several high-profile leadership positions and obtained the Distinguished Toastmaster designation – the highest level of achievement in the organization. Today, she is president of Toastmasters International.

"Each leadership journey is like a train ride," says Margaret. "There are hills to climb and beautiful vistas to look out at along the way. Sometimes you don't know what's around the next corner. As long as you believe in the vision or the final destination, you keep going – learning every step of the way."

Margaret is one of only seven female presidents in the organization's 98-year history and the second Canadian woman to hold the top position.

"Every problem presents a challenge for us to overcome, and small changes can have a great impact on the world," she says.

Margaret says her mother had a big impact on her as she was growing up. "My mother taught me about hard work and about giving to others. Contribution, looking out for others, and seeing how you can make a difference. Leading on the world stage means being a role model to others. To bring my best self forward to inspire others to do the same."

Public speaking, sure, but what motivated Margaret to run for office of president? "I felt I had an eye for the future – a larger view of what was possible for Toastmasters Interna-



Toastmasters  
International  
President  
Margaret Page.  
Photo: Erin Dyer

tional, and I wanted to see if I could be part of making that grander picture a reality. What we do makes a difference in so many people's lives."

"The world is changing, and people need public speaking now more than ever," says Margaret.

Toastmasters is more than learning public speaking skills. It's about communication in general: Whether you want to give a toast at your daughter's wedding, share your family story, create a TikTok or YouTube video or start a project in your community, Toastmasters can help you learn the skills to succeed.

Over the past 18 months, Margaret has witnessed the digital transformation that has occurred at Toastmasters. Prior to the pandemic all Toastmasters meetings were held live in person. But as soon as the lockdown began, the Toastmasters organization and individual clubs around the world quickly moved to online meetings using the ZOOM platform. Now Toastmasters is experimenting with Virtual Reality (VR) meetings.

As I watched Margaret confidently and eloquently deliver her acceptance speech to thousands of people worldwide at the 2021 virtual convention, I thought of the young girl who had transformed her life and was now in the position to help transform the lives of many others.

"Sometimes I'm asked why such high goals? Why are you striving for this or that? And my response is if you only set the bar at six inches, that's all you will strive to achieve," says Margaret. "Do you remember Erma Bombeck? She said, when she got to the end of her life and stood before God, she wanted to be able to say 'I have no talent left. I used everything you gave me.'"

"That's the way I would like to go as well!" |



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# REIGNITING AN OLD FLAME: RETURNING TO SCHOOL IN YOUR SIXTIES

by J. KATHLEEN THOMPSON

Have you ever caught yourself wanting to relive that excitement of enrolling in classes and stepping onto campus that first day to plunge into the depths of a subject you are passionate about? And then you come to your senses when you consider the realities of showing up as a senior to school.

Will you be the only senior student on campus? Will you be able to keep up? Will you be able to get up to speed with the technology used? Would you be able to handle the stress of deadlines and exams now? All those uncertainties talk you out of pursuing what might be the greatest pleasure available to us all: life-long learning.

It needn't be like that. I, for one, did not let those doubting voices deter me from rekindling that long-ago love affair with the ivory tower. I knew I could expect a few changes in the intervening years, but preliminary investigations suggested that apart from the online nature of everything now – from signing up for courses, campus wifi, student card, bus pass and bike locker – the time-honoured traditions of lecture and seminar, textbooks and exams, and students eagerly in line for September's start, are still very much a part of the learning landscape. I dove in, but only so far as to make myself available as a rogue 'unclassified' student for four months. While I had lost my head to this love the first time, this time I was going to play it coy.

Pleased that I had survived the first challenges of re-enrolling at my alma mater (UBC) – online registration – trepidation set in as the first day of class grew near. I remember that January day well. It arrived in classic Vancouver style: cold, blustery, sheets of sideways rain. As I waited for the bus, I was keenly aware that the man huddled in the shop doorway behind me rearranging his fort of cardboard piled against the wind, was even colder than I. The mood on the bus was more convivial; people making room for those with strollers and walkers and shopping carts at the front of the bus, the bus driver calling out frequently to "mind your step," or "hold on," and passengers throwing "thank you" to the bus driver as they left.

When the bus pulled up to the campus stop, I took my position amongst those patiently waiting to disembark, and then merged with the streams of students striding towards their classes on the university's main boulevard. By rehearsing my schedule the day before – locating the lecture halls and measuring fastest route between classes, with or without a bathroom break – I had taken precautions to minimize the



The author ventures  
back to school in her 60s.  
Photo: Ken Flagel

chance that I would appear anything other than a perfectly capable twenty-year-old strolling through campus. The ruse seemed to be working.

The lecture hall for my first class – Islamic History – was couched in the pharmaceutical science building – vaulted ceilings with flared chrome buttresses, geodesic cubes doubling as entrances to lecture halls. I could just make out a young man at the front of the hall beneath the giant screen. He was dressed in a black turtleneck with corduroy blazer and jeans and was queuing up his computer, glancing frequently at his watch to time his 'entrance'. After a brief welcome, he rolled out the course syllabus and what would be expected of us in the next four months. As he unravelled the course, and described the places we'd go, the more unfamiliar the topography was, the more in love, all over again, I felt.

The scenario repeated itself in the other two classes: spacious halls with sound systems at senior-friendly levels, and young, keen and approachable professors spelling out the fantastic voyages ahead. Students beside me were silent, alternatively focused on the professor or their phone screens. The rustling of books and backpacks to signal "I need time to get to my next class" would begin before class officially ended. I could see that if there was going to be anything to make me conspicuous in this crowd, it was going to be my unschooled enthusiasm.

In addition to the edge-of-your-seat lectures, I was besotted with just about everything else about being back at school. For one, there was a beautiful sense of familiarity; the campus 'village' perched at the edge of the sea, a flurry of buildings and boulevards and 'malls' all exuding an air of importance or mystery. For another, it was the new zeitgeist that pervaded the city. Courtesy and kindness ruled the day, in interactions on the streets, in shops, on transit, and on the busy bike lanes and greenways. On campus, student safety and inclusivity were now enshrined in university policy. Kiosks to access emergency services scattered across the campus? Academic dispensations for those students experiencing personal distress? A dazzling new world.

Yet, academic rigour at the university remained gloriously unchanged. The courses were challenging, and the roster of day-to-day expectations demanded the singular attention I was



delighted to give. I loved that I got to be part of a coterie of inquisitive minds, to be lectured to each day, and inspired to explore the readings curated by the instructors. Overhearing students who had skipped classes to ski or were still drafting ideas for an assignment that was due tomorrow, I realized that, at my age, I had no time for complacency. Youth is not wasted on the old.

And to make sure that my new ability to adapt to any challenge passed muster, the universe threw in a world-changing event in the middle of my come-back year: a pandemic. The brisk daily routine of pedalling to campus was replaced by the more quotidian task of turning on the computer and welcoming our professors into the living room, their polished lectures interrupted by distracted wanderings to refill our coffee and check on the laundry. We somehow managed, summoning the discipline needed to finish final papers and exams. And remain hopeful we would be back in live lecture theatres in the fall.

In the end, pandemic aside, my brief flirtation with an old love did end as fate would have it; with a relationship re-nited. And, judging by the presence of other senior academic explorers in my classes, I was not the only one exhilarated by this opportunity to continue learning and engaging meaningfully in this world. And I suspect that our gratitude for the privilege of revisiting a favourite pursuit (and, in some cases, with complementary tuition for those of us aged 65+!) and the preciousness of time to enjoy it, made the journey back all the more rewarding! |



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# CAUTION: ARTIST AT WORK

by ROBERT L. RAMSAY



Holiday-makers wave to friends from a cruise ship's deck. A father and his two daughters gaze longingly at playground equipment. Gulls swoop joyfully over a sandcastle. These are a few of the scenes White Rock artist Elizabeth Hollick painted in preparation for her October 2021 show at the Landmark Pop-Up Gallery.

A closer look at each canvas reveals that everything is not quite as it seems. The cruise ship is an under-construction apartment building. The decks are concrete slabs; the railings are plywood and two-by-four safety fences.

The playground the little girls are eyeing is another construction site. Steel-braced forms, webbed rebar towers, and giant wooden spools of electrical conduit are the enticements to play.

The sandcastle, over which the gulls are swooping, is another high-rise in the making. A woman stands on the balcony of a nearby building, enjoying her sea view that may soon be obliterated by the new tower.

While some residents of White Rock scowl at the many signs reading, Caution: Construction Ahead, Elizabeth finds the rising towers inspiring. She often takes her sketch pad and chair to a building site to record the scene, or more comfortably, parks her van nearby.

"I like seeing buildings before they are finished," she says. "During construction, I can see all the little bits going on inside. Each floor is at a different stage of completion."

She enjoys the challenge of getting details correct, like

the way the rebar is bent and tied together with cross pieces. If she didn't get it just right, she's confident that someone would pronounce the building incapable of standing.

The people she includes in her paintings are often relatives, friends or pedestrians who pass by the construction site while she is sketching. Passersby don't give her enough time to draw them, so she may snap a photograph to be consulted later in her studio.

Being an artist was not the pathway Elizabeth's family expected her to follow when she was growing up during the post-war years in London, England.

"I took a secretarial course, but shorthand wasn't my strong point. I'd sometimes guess at words," Elizabeth chuckles, "and that wasn't the way to impress the boss."

While she earned money at various secretarial jobs, art had been calling her since school days. Her elementary school teacher required students to keep a journal. Elizabeth filled hers with drawings.

As a young adult, she inquired about taking night classes at the Croydon College of Art, located not too far from her home in South London. The principal suggested she attend full time, so she did.

ABOVE | Elizabeth Hollick's "Finders Keepers."

RIGHT | Artist Elizabeth Hollick in front of her piece "The Friend Ship."

Photos: Robert Ramsay



"I immediately felt at home," says Elizabeth. "We were required to go into the city for full days of sketching. What could be more pleasant than spending a day with like-minded pals?"

Besides life drawing and painting, Elizabeth studied pottery and sculpture. The latter led to a sudden change in direction. "My father called my modern sculptures junk," she says, "which led to an explosion of minds." As a result, Elizabeth hopped on a bus and went to join the navy. While serving for two years, she designed posters for special events and backdrops for theatre productions.



After marriage, she moved with her family to Canada. Her husband was supportive of her efforts, and she found time to paint while her three daughters were at school.

Besides the large canvases Elizabeth creates using acrylics, she is well-known for her murals. "That began after I served as a facilitator for a BC Festival of the Arts workshop in Grand Forks," she says. "Everyone was challenged to do something in their community to promote the arts. I decided to paint a mural in White Rock."

She approached the owner of The Pirate Restaurant on Marine Drive. He agreed to let her paint a mural on the side of his building if she included him in the picture. Other residents and

business owners admired the mural and invited her to paint for them.

From that beginning, Elizabeth's work has appeared on many buildings in Vancouver and White Rock. Some murals resulted when she was approached by a company charged with cleaning graffiti off buildings. It was found that graffiti artists were less likely to tag buildings if the walls were decorated with lively scenes.

One of Elizabeth's larger murals is a nine by eighteen metre scene entitled "The Wonderful Year We Fell in Love" on the side of White Rock's Playhouse Theatre. She consulted black and white

photos from the theatre's archive so she could include a host of locally known actors and directors in the scene. In the bottom right corner, her grandson peeks from behind the curtain.

To paint such a large mural, she drew the design on paper, divided it into squares, then painted each square larger on the brick wall. The project took three months of work on sturdy scaffolding covered by a tarpaulin to shield her from the sun. Today, one can enjoy a tour of White Rock by strolling past her numerous murals.

Elizabeth volunteers at the theatre, painting backdrops for productions. She enjoys working with other artists, carpenters, and prop women. They trade stories and have fun putting together everything that's needed for a successful production.

"I want people to enjoy my work," says Elizabeth. "So many people, especially adults, just walk past something like a building site. They don't really see it. I hope my work will inspire them to take notice of their surroundings, and perhaps see them in a different way."

Gazing at the people lining The Friend Ship's railing on Elizabeth's canvas, one cannot help but be amused. The bright colours and smiling faces are a true reflection of the artist's own personality. |

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# BERMUDA: A NORTH ATLANTIC PARADISE

by MARILYN JONES

Imagine an expanse of teal and sapphire water framing a rich, green landscape dotted by pastel-coloured houses with distinctive white roofs. Imagine red, pink, yellow, and orange hibiscus blossoms lining narrow roadways. Imagine a European history dating to 1609. Imagine Bermuda, a fairy tale destination in the North Atlantic.

After customs at the airport, I travel by small bus to Hamilton and my home for the next week: *Viking Orion*. As I board the ship, I am immediately impressed. This ship has a different feel than other cruise ships I've sailed on: warm wood and understated decor, melodic background music, and a spacious stateroom. Of course, every stateroom has a veranda, a signature feature of Viking ocean-going ships. The crew is friendly and helpful as I settle in.

Bermuda, named for explorer Juan Bermúdez, who discovered the cluster of 123 islands possibly as early as 1503, was founded in 1609. One hundred and fifty English travelers en route to Jamestown, Virginia were blown off course by a hurricane and shipwrecked at Bermuda.

Located 600 miles east of North Carolina and first administered by the Virginia Company, the colony became governed by the crown in 1684. The colonial capital was transferred from St. George to Hamilton in 1815.

*Viking Orion*, docked at the edge of Front Street, making it easy for passengers to walk off the ship and be in the capital city in a few minutes.

After a rainstorm cancels my walking tour the first day, I set out on my own with my bright red Viking umbrella and an attitude of discovery. The businesses and government buildings painted pastel colours line city streets. I find several souvenir shops and enjoy the morning visiting with locals and taking photos in between raindrops.

In the afternoon, I take a bus tour of the immediate area with 14 other passengers. I can walk Horseshoe Bay beach, gaze out over the islands from Gibbs Hill Lighthouse, and see the famous 56-cm-wide drawbridge said to be the world's smallest.

Our first sea day takes the ship from Hamilton to Kings Wharf, where I will learn another chapter in Bermuda's history.

From my veranda, I can see the National Museum of Bermuda. Here I learn even more about this isolated island colony.

ABOVE | Horseshoe Bay beach.

PAGE 18 | St. Peter's Church is a popular stop for tourists visiting St. George.

Photos: Marilyn Jones



The museum, located within the fortress, The Keep, of the former Royal Naval Dockyard, was established in 1974.

After the English colonies in North America had established their independence, Bermuda was developed as a significant British naval base to control the sea lanes to North America. The Dockyard construction started in 1809. The work was done initially by slaves, later by convicts, prisoners, and labourers imported from the West Indies. They used local limestone to build the impressive Keep. The dockyard closed in the late 1950s. Now the buildings house an excellent series of exhibits and displays outlining the colony's history.

Of course, a trip to Bermuda wouldn't be complete without swimming, snorkeling, or beachcombing. Boarding a catamaran, I sail with about 30 other adventurous souls to a lovely cove. I am not a strong swimmer, but I was determined to get in the warm waters. I put on a life jacket, jump in over my head, and spent the entire time enjoying the experience.

On the last day at Kings Wharf, I take a trolley tour of the area, enjoying the slow pace and interesting narrative. At the end of the tour, the guide drops me off at the "clock mall," a collection of locally owned souvenir shops with friendly shopkeepers and excellent selections of take-home treasures.

The next day is another sea day filled with swimming in the ship's main pool and infinity pool, sunbathing, afternoon tea, and interesting lectures.

Let me interject here the many restaurants and the variety of excellent food choices, starting with room service. I began each day with breakfast – and not just the usual cold cereal and pastry. The breakfast room service menu included fried eggs, omelets, oatmeal, fruit platters, plus the usual offerings mentioned above.

For those who want to leave their stateroom, breakfast is available as early as 6:30 and as late as 11 a.m., including the World Cafe offering breakfast, lunch, and dinner buffet style with crew members serving guests their choices.



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Back in Hamilton, I take a tour to the eastern end of Bermuda and St. George.

St. George, settled in 1612, is the first permanent English settlement on the islands of Bermuda. It is the third permanent British settlement in the Americas, after Jamestown (1607) and Cupids, Newfoundland (1610).

Our stop in St. George follows a lengthy van tour of other areas, including Fort Catherine, a lighthouse, and drive-byes of the islands' many resorts and golf courses.

I choose to visit St. Peter's Church during the time allotted.

Established in 1612, it is the oldest Anglican Church outside the British Isles and the oldest Protestant church in continuous use in the New World. The church is part of the St. George UNESCO World Heritage Site.


Inside I find the original altar, an 18th-century throne salvaged from a shipwreck, and communion silver from the 1600s.

After touring the church's interior, I walk around the grave markers dating back to the beginning of the church's centuries-old history.


Back on the ship, I spend a relaxing afternoon and evening. Then, finally, it is time to say goodbye to my stewards, Raphael and Ranger, the new friends I made while onboard, the many helpful crew members, and the beautiful *Viking Orion*, which has a lovely personality of relaxation, peace, and elegance all its own. |

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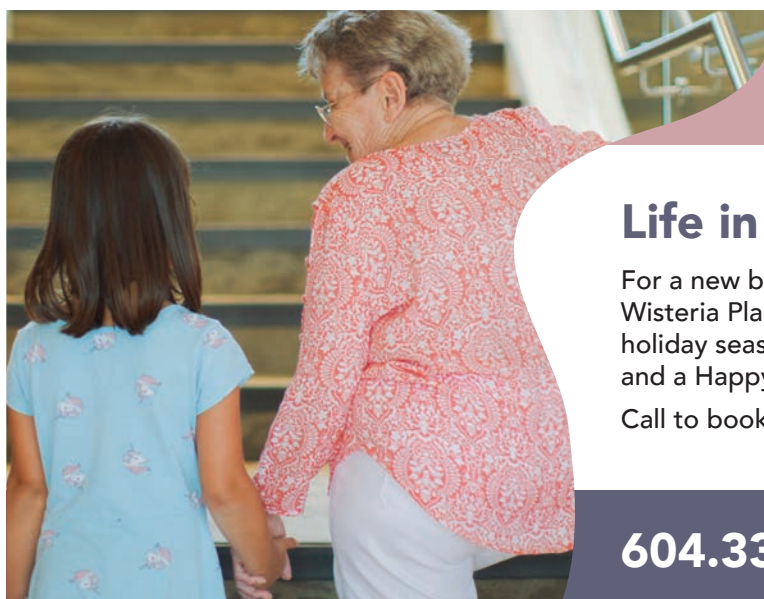
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# REPLACEMENT AND REVISION SURGERIES: MOVING AHEAD

by JOAN BOXALL

I trace the timeline of my hip-replacements to the revised me of present time. The new-and-improved me offers some tips on how I got here.

“I have OA? Old age? What, at 30?” I asked my physician. “Osteo-arthritis,” he replied.

Doing ‘fun-runs’ and playing field hockey had been my sports-of-choice when I was a physical education student, teacher and coach. After a foot fracture in the 1980s, I over-compensated. A ‘domino effect’ of injuries impacted musculoskeletal movement. Five years later, in training for a half marathon, a sports-medicine doctor counseled me:

“Imagine your hip-cartilage injury like a golf divot,” he said. “Bone grows into the gap. Over time, the joint erodes.”

Hips and knees are weight-bearing (or load-bearing) joints. During activity, they tolerate a force greater than our body weight. A brisk walk places a hip-joint load at just under five times the body’s weight (jogging, at six times). Healthy joints (and joint replacements) withstand ‘load.’ High-impact sports (especially on hard surfaces) put more stress on joints. I put a halt to jogging and stop-and-go sports to postpone surgery.

I learned that an active life was possible post-running. From early triathlon participation (swim-bike-run), I re-focused on the swim-bike. From hiking to ocean kayaking. ‘In-the-tracks’ cross-country skiing is a low-impact, lifetime sport (as is downhill skiing, skating, doubles tennis, rowing, Pilates and many more). Weekly Iyengar Yoga sessions, with a pile of props, an experienced instructor’s guidance, and my own body-barometer, were possible pre-and-post op.

“Find your healthy edge,” my yoga instructors have always said.

Physiotherapist Dawn Siegel says, “The more variety, the better. Life is meant to be lived fully and a joint replacement can help to return you to a full and active lifestyle.”

My first total hip replacement came at the age of 40 – the other one at 46. Twenty years ago, this major surgery required several days in hospital and weeks off-the-feet for an uncemented prosthesis. The surgery then, as now, replaces the damaged joint: both the head of the femur, or ball, along with its stem (the prosthesis) and the socket. Between the metal ball and socket is a plastic liner, which is now made of more resilient materials.

Joint replacement patients receive an exercise booklet. A skilled physiotherapist’s guidance is essential, especially at the three, six and nine-week intervals.



The author after her 2km open swim at the Kelowna Across the Lake Swim.  
Photo: Ken Boxall

Listen to an expert like Dawn: “The goal of physiotherapy is to motivate and guide the patient to achieve their full post-operative potential... Patients that get the most benefit from their surgery are those that are diligent with their exercises, follow the guidelines from their surgeon, and work closely with their physiotherapist to set goals for their recovery.”

She continues. “Over the many years of treating joint replacements, I have been impressed by the positive changes this surgical procedure has made in the lives of my patients. Not only does a new knee, hip or shoulder take away their pain, but it gives the recipient a chance to regain their fitness and return to an active lifestyle and sporting activities. With the modern joint replacements available, there is very little downtime post operatively and a return to most activities of daily living is possible in just a few weeks after surgery.”

The pre-2000 plastic liner of my first hip replacement might have lasted 15 years, if not for my transition to low-impact activities. I lost function after 26 years. New liners may last up to 30 years.

“Joint replacement patients will commonly have many years of pain and de-conditioning prior to getting their new joint and many will be surprised at the opportunities for sport that are possible post-op,” says Dawn. “Often they need to be inspired and encouraged as they return to activities that they once abandoned due to pain... even to try some new ones. Building and maintaining bone as we age will help protect us from the effects of osteoporosis.”

My 2021 revision surgery saw the liner and the ball replaced without implicating the metal parts. My surgeon, Dr. M. Neufeld, endorsed weight-bearing with assists.

For the first month, steps were tentative with two-wheel walker, crutch and cane support: gel packs at the ready.

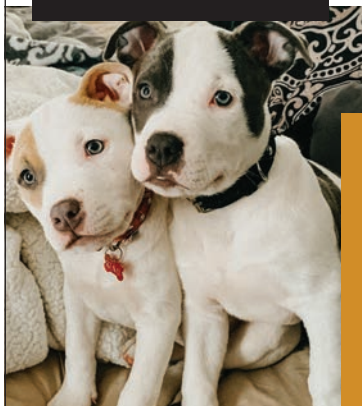
At the six-week mark, Dr. Neufeld said, “The reason you are doing so well is that, yes, the hip replacements were done very well, but just as, and if not more important, that you kept active, which increased your range of motion and kept your muscles



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Joan Boxall is the author of *DrawBridge: Drawing Alongside My Brother's Schizophrenia* (Caitlin Press, 2019).



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# LOOKING BACK & DREAMING FORWARD

by LYNDA MONK

The end of the year and the beginning of the new year are great times to use journalling for both reflection and planning. Every December, I book two dates in my schedule. One to do a year in review process, the other to do my goal setting for the coming year. I usually schedule a couple of hours for each of these intentional journalling times. I've noticed that looking back helps me to dream forward!

Journalling is a creative way of using self-expression, writing, stories and language to help us constantly re-invent ourselves and stay connected to limitless possibilities.

## Tips for Looking Back & Dreaming Forward Journalling:

Schedule your creative journalling looking back and dreaming forward dates. Booking this time makes it real and honours the time you will devote to this activity.

Arrive to your journalling time with mindful, present moment awareness. When the body becomes still, the mind can also become quieter. This stillness invites us into greater creative potential within ourselves.

I always begin by getting grounded and centered with a few intentional mindful moments. My favourite mindfulness exercise involves noticing my breath as it enters and leaves my body – giving me life. During this time, I also draw my attention to my feet against the floor beneath me to get grounded and present before I write.

Journalling helps us be fully present in the moment, which helps us access our deep inner wisdom in our lives.

Now you're ready to engage in your reflective journalling!

## Look Back Over the Last Year

Below are some prompts to help you look back. There are many creative ways to journal, so answer these prompts in any way that appeals to you.

- What are five things you want to remember?
- What were your peak experiences this year?
- What successes or accomplishments do you want to celebrate and acknowledge?
- What is one of your biggest lessons learned?

## Dream Forward into the Coming Year

Respond to the journal prompts below in any creative way that seems right to you.

- How do you want to feel in the year ahead? What helps you feel that way?
- What core values do you want to honour most in your daily life?
- In what ways will you live aligned with your highest sense of purpose?
- What do you absolutely need to stop doing to live your best year ever?
- What do you absolutely need to start doing to live your best year ever?

One great way to wrap-up this “Looking Back and Dreaming Forward” journalling exercise is to find five quotes that you want to inspire you in the coming year. Type them up, paint them, pen them in calligraphy, add photos, and turn them into art journal entries or vision boards for your wall or desktop background.

As you explore and record the five quotes, allow yourself to be deeply touched by the words.

“Words unravel every emotion.” John Koenig

## Final Thoughts

What creative rituals and routines would you like to commit to in the year ahead? When do you feel most alive? How can you do more of that in the new year?

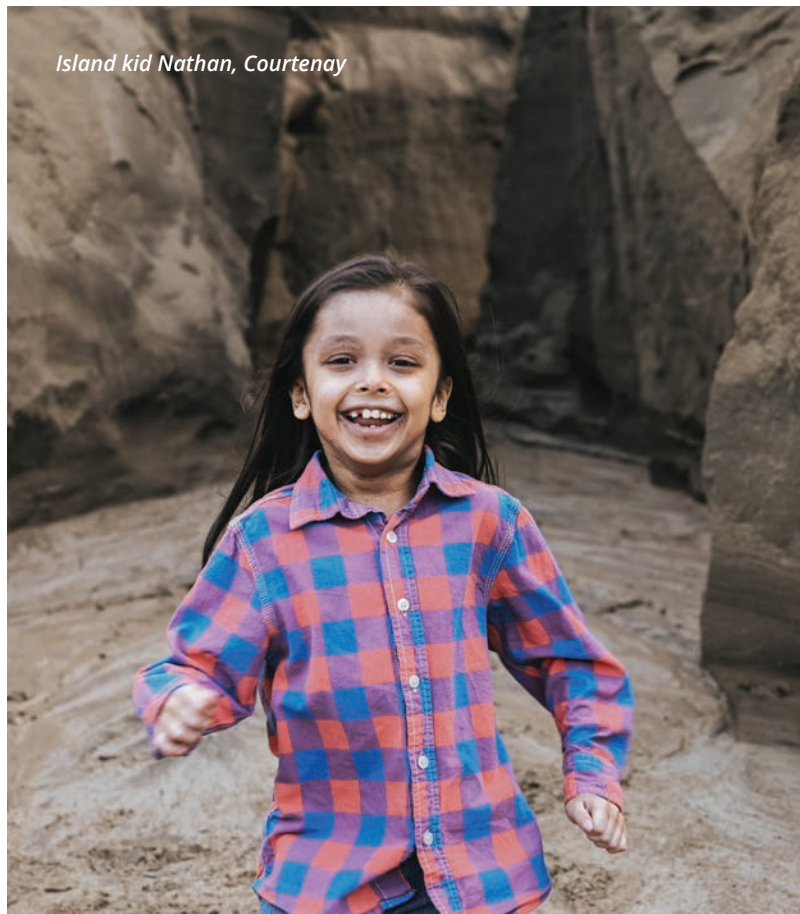
Journalling can help you tap into greater feelings of clarity, calm, inspiration, and well-being. Simply allow your emotions, thoughts, and creative self-expression to take over and see where they might lead you.

I hope journalling can support you to manifest your biggest dreams for the coming year! |

**Lynda Monk, MSW, RSW, CPCC** is the Director of the International Association for Journal Writing (IAJW.org) and the co-author and co-editor of books on the transformational power of journalling.



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# PASSION REKINDLED DURING PANDEMIC

by CHRISTINE BLANCHETTE

Rosalie Knogler is a testimonial to others that it is never too late to follow your passion. Indeed, the Canadian author just penned her first children's book, *My Little Owl*, with more to come. In a Zoom interview, the Victoria resident was vibrant, gracious and had a contagious laugh.

Before our interview, I complimented her background staging. Behind her hung one of her quilts that had owls on it. Rosalie, who leads an active lifestyle, talked about her writing background, the launch of her new book, what's next for her, and shared some writing tips.

With a gift for writing, Rosalie started writing stories and poems in elementary school. In high school, her English teacher recognized her talent and encouraged her to enter a writing contest. She won.

Rosalie grew up in Hanley, Saskatchewan 40 miles south of Saskatoon in a large family of 10 children.

"We're a family of storytellers," she says. "We get together, and one story flows into another, and we laugh so much. It's just great fun."

Rosalie followed in her mother's footsteps to get back into writing as she had put it aside.

"You're a career girl, you're a wife and a mother of two, plus volunteering – life is busy. And so, it got put on the back burner until the pandemic hit, and then I thought, I've got all this time and most of my activities are curtailed, I'm going to try it. My mom wrote her memoirs when she was 70, which is the age I am now, and that inspired me to start writing more."

In fact, Rosalie's mother had said to her daughter, "Before you lose your memory, start writing things down."

Rosalie's inspiration to write her first poem when growing up was while sitting under a silver maple tree in their backyard.

When the pandemic hit, Rosalie decided to write her first book, *My Little Owl*, a children's photo book.

"The inspiration for *My Little Owl* was hearing an owl early one January morning," she says. "It seemed like my dad had come to visit (he's been gone 12 years now). I made a felted owl and took pictures of it doing everyday things like hiking, biking, gardening and visiting a little library. Soon after writing the book, we learned we'd be grandparents."

Rosalie hopes *My Little Owl* is a fun read for children, parents and grandparents, with cute photos and rhymes.

Rosalie has several other projects: one a children's photo book about robins to dedicate to her mother, who is 95 now. She is also working on a novel about a woman who loses 10 years of her memories.

"I got the idea last year when I fell and bumped my head badly," she says. "We were chopping wood at the farm, and I tripped and smacked my head on the metal trailer and knocked myself out briefly."

"I'm also writing a book of historical fiction called *Maggie's Boy*. It's about my grandfather, who was a young orphan in England, and a Home Child sent to Canada at age 13. In his 20s, he homesteaded in Saskatchewan. The book spans 100 years, including history of the Spanish flu pandemic and two World Wars."

*Maggie's Boy* may help educate people about Home Children and their struggles. Another book of historical fiction is about a French ancestor, a fille du roi (King's daughter), in the 1600s."

For people interested in writing, Rosalie says, "Just do it. Get it all down and edit later. I keep a notepad by my bed as I sometimes dream about my characters."



Her favorite writing spot is in their family room looking out at the water for a dose of writing inspiration.

Rosalie follows an active lifestyle by hiking, biking, singing in a choir and making quilts.

"I belong to the Cordova Bay Hikers, and they've been going strong for probably 30 years. I joined more than 20 years ago now, and we hike weekly. The hikes that I lead are about an hour and a half to two hours long."

"It's so important to stay physically active. I like to hike and bike, but any exercise is good. Stay creative too – my quilting, writing and singing are fun. And keep up your social connections, especially in these difficult times." |

My Little Owl is available from the author at [knogler@shaw.ca](mailto:knogler@shaw.ca) or in Victoria at The Country Gift Shoppe (at Mattick's Farm), Timeless Toys (both Broadmead and Oak Bay locations) and Indigo (at Mayfair Mall).



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# FOREVER FIT

by EVE LEES



## GLYCEMIC INDEX IS UNRELIABLE

The Glycemic Index was designed for people with diabetes to determine their insulin response to various foods. Those with Type 2 diabetes can avoid foods that may drastically affect their blood sugar level. And, of course, because many are desperate to lose weight, The Glycemic Index also became a popular diet.

To determine a food's glycemic index, test subjects are given whatever amount of food is needed to supply 50 grams of carbohydrate (carbs). Then, every two hours, their blood sugar levels are measured as it rises then lowers. This determines the glycemic index of that particular food: it receives a 'rating' of low glycemic, intermediate glycemic, or high glycemic.

The Glycemic index has been found to be inconsistent. The problem is that 50 grams of carbs in one food might be less or more in quantity than in other foods – and often much more or much less than would be typically eaten. Therefore, in many cases, a high glycemic food can still be safely eaten without blood sugar spikes. In addition, Glycemic index charts were confusing: they seemed to vary widely on each food's "rating." There was no consistency in the values listed among different charts.

Researchers at Tufts University found the glycemic index of a given food varied widely among 63 study participants. (This randomized, controlled, repeated test on 63 participants far exceeded the 10 people originally and typically used in the glycemic index methodology.)

Deviations of an average of 15 points in either direction placed a food like white bread, for example, in all three glycemic index categories. White bread was a low glycemic index food (average values of 35 to 55) for 22 of the volunteers, an intermediate glycemic food (57 to 67) for 23 volunteers, and high glycemic (70 to 103) for 18 volunteers. Even for the same individual, glycemic index values could differ by more than 60 points at each trial.

The Glycemic Index does not suggest that a high glycemic index food is unhealthy or that a low glycemic index is healthy (or vice versa). Both glycemic index and glycemic load – a value that adjusts glycemic index to serving size –

reflect only food containing carbohydrates. No one eats any of the macronutrients (carbs, protein, fat) in isolation. In a mixed meal, a high-glycemic food's effect on blood sugar is buffered by any protein or fat in the meal.

The high glycemic index and glycemic load variability reveal limitations, making them unreliable in clinical or private use. There is also the risk of many choosing to avoid healthy foods because they had a high glycemic index and/or glycemic load. For example, ice cream (due to its fat content) has a lower glycemic index than carrots in some charts. It is troubling to think people may opt more often for ice cream over carrots.

The Glycemic Index has been promoted as a weight loss aid, although there is no evidence or sound theory it can consistently do that. People who have lost weight on the 'diet' are successful likely due to restricted food intake.

Many sources continue to promote the benefits of choosing foods with a low glycemic index and glycemic load value. However, the Tufts University data suggest those values will not be reliable in designing a daily food plan, especially for healthy individuals. Although it is not a perfect method of rating foods, it can still be used as a tool for people with diabetes as long as it is used sensibly, and its inaccuracy is understood.

Eat smart to maintain or achieve good health. Choose from a wide variety of whole, unrefined foods: vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts & seeds, and healthy choices of dairy, meats, and fish. It's wise to get as many nutrients as you can to sustain life – and a wide variety of foods (low glycemic or not) is the sensible way to achieve this. |

**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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# JAPAN'S JUXTAPOSITION

by JOSEPH BLAKE

It seems like a lifetime ago. November 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, my wife, Lynne, and I visited Japan during the island nation's vibrant fall colours. She was returning after 40 years. My first trip was with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 2016, such a great experience that I convinced her to join me on AGGV's 2019 tour.

Barry Till developed the Victoria Gallery's acclaimed Asian art collection over his 35-year career, and he is a wonderful, experienced travel guide once again, joined by Japanese national guide Toshi Kushiki.

Ten of the 20 art lovers on our tour bus were returnees from the 2016 tour, and it was a tight-knit, enthusiastic group.

Lynne organized a weeklong visit to traditional hotels (ryokan) with natural hot spring baths (onsen) the week before AGGV's guided tour began. We had our own English-speaking driver who took us up into the mountains and the tiny, family-run ryokan.



We flew from Vancouver to Tokyo to Osaka and took a train to a seaside ryokan in Beppu. We needed a good mineral bath soak after that, and our hotel's onsen was on the roof overlooking the inland sea, a natural dreamscape of hot spring bliss.

Multi-course traditional breakfasts and dinners were included with our tatami-floored, futon and quilt-furnished room.

ABOVE | Matsumoto. RIGHT | (top) The author (left) with his art gallery group. (bottom) The author's wife, Lynne Milnes, toasting with sake at okonomiyaki bar in Hiroshima. Photos: Joseph Blake

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I'd soak as the sun rose over the ocean, then wear the hotel's cotton yukata down to breakfast, and soak again after dinner beneath a starry sky. We even soaked mid-day at Beppu's famous, 1879-built, black sand bath, Takegawa Onsen.

After showering and wearing yukatas to a subterranean room, we stretched out in trenches dug by two young attendants. They buried us to our heads with steaming, black sand heated by one of Beppu's numerous hot springs.

After 15 minutes soaking up the heated sand's healing powers (and a little snooze), I showered again and joined the other guests hydrating and watching the national sumo wrestling championship on the onsen lobby's television.

We took a small train from Beppu and then a bus into the mountains above rice fields to the Usuki stone Buddhas, huge 12th century-carved National Treasures. We took another train to Yufuin and met our uniformed driver, who drove us on narrow roads further into the mountains. We hiked into view of a smoking, volcanic Mt. Aso and stayed at a pair of traditional ryokans where we had the finest meals I've ever enjoyed, dozens of courses of tiny, artful, regional delicacies.

We feasted, soaked, and slept with the windows open, listening to the little rivers below and breathing cold, sweet mountain air. One afternoon, while roaming around centuries-old temple grounds, the vision of deep purple petals from a venerable Camellia strewn artfully across a sun-seared carpet of golden Ginkgo leaves left me breathless with its beauty.

We joined our tour group in Fukuoka at a large hotel that had one floor outfitted for elegant, traditional weddings. We chanced upon sumo wrestlers working out in nearby temple grounds, visited the city's well-curated Asian Art Museum and sampled Fukuoka's famous street food before moving on to Hiroshima.

Visiting the Peace Memorial's ghostly remnants of the atomic bomb, I had another epiphany when we overheard a young choir performing outside the museum. Hiroshima was a heartbreaking experience, a gift of remembrance, darkness and light.

So much of our tour conjured images of darkness and light, ancient and modern, extreme contrasts. We'd spend the night in a 16th century mountain temple, sharing a scorching soak with monks in a well-worn wooden onsen and then bus down to Osaka's neon-lit bustle where we'd dine on 21st century street food and then skyscraper-elegant, pan-cultural fusion meals high above Japan's second city.

Barry and Toshi planned many of these mind-snapping juxtapositions and contrasts, but some, maybe most,



Tracy Merkley

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seemed to emerge from the country's essence. A Shibori tie-dye workshop was a trip into a traditional Kyoto family business and great fun, as was a soba noodle-making afternoon and meal at a miniscule mountain village near Iya Valley.

A day after that we took the jet ferry to Naoshima Island's very modern art House Project and Benesse House Resort's beautiful seaside design and elegant French/Japanese gourmet meals. Better yet was their euro-centric Modern Art Museum and large, mind-bending works by James Turrell and Kusama's gigantic, playful, polka-dot squash sculptures dotting the inland sea shoreline.

We took a fish boat on a choppy ride back to Takamatsu and bussed an hour to Naruto and another hotel onsen and dinner with a chef's dramatic, traditional tuna-cutting song while he sliced the big, fresh fish.

We visited Otsuka Museum and saw life-sized, all-ceramic recreations of the Sistine Chapel, van Gogh's sunflowers (including versions of a pair lost to history), Monet's water lilies on the museum roof overlooking the highway, and Giotto's 14th century paintings.

There were costume trunks for selfies while dressed like Mona Lisa and Girl with the Gold Earring, and other famous paintings. It sounds like tour group-kitsch, but if I had young kids, I'd take them here before their first trip to Europe and the crowds surrounding the real thing. They can walk through art history and touch everything!

Part of our tour was an introduction to Japanese food beyond sushi rolls. We ate around a grill at a 12-stool okonomiyaki bar as an omelette was stuffed with cabbage, scallions, sprouts, shrimp, squid and then fried on the grill oozing with secret sauce. In the heat and din of a half-century old, multi-floored co-op where dozens of okonomiyaki bars emptied into a chaotic street scene below fueled with cold beer and hot sake, a street fair featuring taiko drums and truck bed kabuki theatre in the glow of Christmas lights. Ancient and modern Japan clashed and dazzled, and I can't wait to go back! |



It was one of those cinematically inspired eyes-across-a-crowded-room meetings, in 1978, at an art gallery opening downtown.

He was in Vancouver on assignment for the European publication of which he was Bureau Chief in New York City, at the time. She was a creative entrepreneur, living back in her city after returning from working abroad for some years.

When Franco then crossed the large and crowded room to acknowledge the synchronistic experience they had just had, the eye-locking, Sylvie was smitten. She then invited him, first, to a restaurant dinner with her friends, and after, to a private party.

They spent the next days together as he continued to postpone his future assignments in San Francisco. They both knew then that theirs would be a lifelong connection.

Which it was – but not in a conventional way.

Forty-one years after their original encounter, Franco telephoned Sylvie from his deathbed to say goodbye and to remind her of that first meeting and of the great love between them – one

that had spanned oceans, continents and much of a lifetime.

Not that Sylvie needed reminding.

After the initial meeting, they had seen each other several more times, in his home city and in other cities, when he was on assignment, and sometimes in between. He suggested marriage several times, but she declined. The intensity of the emotion between them frightened her. But they continued, for a while, to meet whenever their paths crossed during their international travels. They couldn't not.

Eventually, they each created families and homes with other partners, in different cities, in different countries and on different continents. But they stayed in regular contact – initially by telegram, then through long-distance calling, and finally on WhatsApp.

They met each other's children and partners, and they respected these choices. There was never any further discussion about getting or being together.

But the initial connection never wavered. It was as strong in the end as it was in the beginning.

That it happened at all is the story. |



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– Jim, father of camper Jordan



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# ENERGY ZAPPERS BE GONE!

By WENDY JOHNSTONE

Margo is doing a lot: she's caring for her husband who is recovering from a stroke, and she's supporting her adult daughter with mental health challenges. She's still working part-time and is now faced with the added pressure of being solely responsible for the bills and household. Even though she has respite once a week for three hours, she finds herself feeling "zapped," "drained" and "not knowing what to do with her time."

Mental, physical and emotional drains have a big impact on us. Physically, we might feel drained due to a lack of quality sleep, joint pain and feeling in poorer health. Mental drain crops up when we feel there are incomplete tasks, clutter, decisions that need to be made, etc. Emotional drains include tension in relationships, the "shoulds" that show up in our life (and that little voice on our shoulder), grief and loss and managing our own and other's behaviour.

Energy zappers are a common challenge from caregivers. Especially in the winter season. Unfortunately, there isn't one simple solution. These three strategies, however, can help reduce feelings of being zapped: be curious, conserve energy, and refill your cup.

Margo and I spoke about her "energy zappers" and I asked her to be curious by listing what they were. She listed her top five: worry about her partner at home alone, lack of focused "me" time, lack of time to grieve changes, feeling overwhelmed by the tasks of managing the household, and not letting go of areas over which she has no control.

An analogy we use to describe energy conservation is a daily personal pie. Each of us only gets one pie a day. How we use (or eat!) our pie each day is often tied to conserving our energy by allocating our slices of pie to different areas.

For Margo, she understood that when she spent time focusing on things she couldn't control, it took away a big chunk of her daily pie. She also recognized and acknowledged that some days there wasn't going to be much of a "well-being slice" but a non-negotiable for her was a daily walk – between 15 and 60 minutes a day depending on that day.

Finally, Margo wrote out what refills her cup. The condition was not to place limiting factors on the list and not to over analyze. Margo knew she couldn't do everything on the list right now. When she looked at her list, two things jumped out: being in nature and drawing. She realized that during the days when she had respite, she could start to refill her cup rather than feel she "should be" running errands and managing the household.

A takeaway exercise: Make a list using the title, "My Energy Zappers" (visuals are helpful, so draw a few lightning bolts on your page!) Write down what zaps your energy. Some examples: "shoulds," your own or other people's behaviour, clutter, unmet personal needs, crossed boundaries, half-finished items, dead plants, unresolved issues or guilt, poor eating habits, being undecided about something, a relationship that is creating stress, sleep habits, etc. Now ask yourself, "How did it feel to write out my energy zappers?" and "What did I notice?" If you still feel the flow of contemplation and writing, consider asking yourself, "What's one step or action I want to take to change the items on my list?"

*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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# CHRISTMAS MAGIC

*Living*  
on purpose

by LAURIE MUELLER

Imagine this scene: it's evening in early December, the children are in bed, and Dad is out at the local rink playing hockey. Mom is sitting at the kitchen table writing her Christmas card letters to friends and family. Each card she writes brings a childhood memory she shares with the recipient. Tears of nostalgia trickle down her face.

Yes, that was me in the 1970s. The people I wrote to are now mostly just a warm memory.

Jump to the second decade of 2000. The seniors' residence was about to have their annual Christmas afternoon party. The lounge was filled with anticipation of Christmas music and a feast of sweets to follow. But no musicians had arrived. The worried activity director and the front desk staff were scrambling. What to do? My response to worried staff was to take the mic and ask for stories from the assembled residents.

I started with one of my own. A fancy gift: I was young, I had lost my engagement ring in a move. (Don't ask, long,

complicated and emotional explanation) and it was a few days before Christmas.

I was checking pockets before throwing clothes into the washing machine. There was a receipt in my husband's pocket for two diamond rings. Oh, goodie, he was replacing my lost ring! But wait, two? Oh no, I thought. He doesn't play hockey in the evenings; he has another woman! I was distraught.

Too afraid to approach him about it, I talked to his sisters instead. They laughed at me. But I could not imagine why he would have purchased two diamond rings. On the outside, I was my usual jovial self, preparing for a happy family Christmas, but inside, I was heart sick.

When Christmas morning arrived and I opened my present, there sat two diamond bands. I looked at them in disbelief as my husband explained that one was to replace the lost engagement ring and the second was to celebrate our wedding anniversaries. I can't remember how long I cried with joy, but my sisters-in-laws were right. Both rings were for me.

The residents got a chuckle out of my story, although I couldn't show them my rings. In the intervening years, I had moved on to husband No. 2.

Standing at the mic, I then asked for other memories of Christmas from the assembled group. Funny, sentimental, sad, memories of Christmases past were shared. The musical entertainment not showing up had opened a space for storytelling and getting to know each other on a deeper level. What an unexpected gift we had that year. Living in an area without snow, I was surprised to hear so many nostalgic memories of snowy scenes, as well as family and friends' gatherings.

Since retiring, I have had another kind of Christmas experience: barbecued rib dinner, outside with a tableful of old and new friends on the River Cuale in Mexico with musical entertainment and tequila.

I'd love for you to share your seasonal stories either online in the comments under my column or by emailing me directly: [Laurie@lauriemconsulting.com](mailto:Laurie@lauriemconsulting.com)

No matter how you celebrate the winter season, may it bring you joy, greater faith, and relief from cold weather. |



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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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