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content

OCTOBER 2023

- 4 Don Guthro: Today's Special: Help and Hope
by John Thomson
- 8 Camino Sisters
by Melanie Dorchester
- 10 London's Favourite Haunts
by Jane Cassie
- 12 Cycling the Continents at 70
by Tom Perlmutter
- 16 Legendary Guatemala
by Marilyn Jones



- THRIVE BEYOND 55 2
- FOREVER FIT 15
- HOW WE MET 18
- MARKETPLACE 19
- LIVING ON PURPOSE 20

resources

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Cover CHEF DON GUTHRO

When a devastating knee injury ended his ballet career, Chef Guthro danced his way into the kitchen, where he could still express his creativity – and now mentor others.

Photo: Tom Gould

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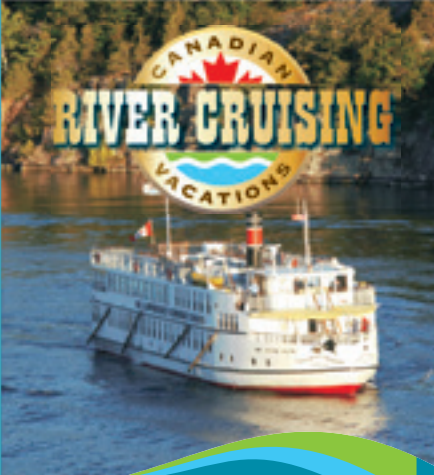
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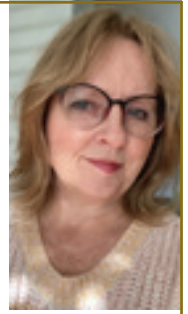
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THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



Each month, we ask our featured cover person what they would tell their 20-year-old self. Without fail, it's sage advice. Something they couldn't have envisioned in their youth; something which has become clear only with the passage of time.

For the most part, I find mature people are often more contemplative and generous, and less reactive in their viewpoints than younger people.

As we move through the experiences of living, we encounter differences of opinion. It makes us think, evaluate and, sometimes, it moves our viewpoint a few degrees in one direction or another.

Lately, I've been noticing that it's not so much about shifting my viewpoint, as it is enlarging it. Instead of taking a solid position at one point or another along the spectrum of options, I am expanding my position to include more than one viewpoint. Instead of "either/or," it becomes "yes/and."

Paradoxes don't always need to be viewed as incompatible. They can, in fact, hold some valuable insight when you consider the possibility that everything isn't black or white, but a combination of the two, even black AND white.

I find fewer and fewer things in life are absolute. There's often room for more than one meaning or a variety of options, instead of just one.

As a young person, I was more apt to choose belongings and interests based on brand rather than performance. We were often influenced to choose friends, partners and careers based on the narrow criteria handed to us by teachers, pastors, family members and society, rather than for their individual merits.

This is right, that is wrong. It's like this,

not like that. Which often led to assumptions like, "I am right. You are wrong."

When we begin questioning these assumptions, it can feel like the sand is shifting beneath our feet.

Comparison is a wonderful tool for evaluating and assessing. When it is used as an inclusive, considering tool, it opens our minds to perspectives that can be enlarging and encompassing of a much greater truth.

When it is used to judge and exclude, however, it becomes a tool with which we can bludgeon those who hold dissimilar opinions.

I like the idea of being a sage, of growing wiser with age. It's one of the gifts that life bestows upon us.

I'm reminded of a commonly told Zen teaching in which an old farmer experiences a series of reversals in fortune. His neighbours respond with sorrow in the unfortunate times, and celebration in the favoured times. The farmer expresses equanimity throughout. Neither sorrow nor celebration. Simply accepting what is without naming it. In the end, as one circumstance becomes the catalyst for the next, we see how life continues to unfold and what holds great grief or austerity in one instance can be what brings about joy and abundance in the next.

As sages, we greet life not as if any moment is forever, but simply a transition point to another moment that may be totally opposite in its inflection.

May we hold all the circumstances of life lightly, knowing their transiency, and knowing that the polarity of the universe will swing in the opposite direction soon enough.

To the degree there is uncertainty in this, there's also a degree of comfort. And there again is the paradox. |

As we celebrate our 20th year of publication, we are grateful for the many "sages" who have graced our covers. Here's just a few:





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Who is conducting the study?

Study Sponsor: Qu Biologics, which is receiving funding from the National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program, to support the study.

Qu Biologics is a clinical stage biotechnology company located in Burnaby, British Columbia, which is developing the immunomodulatory platform called Site-Specific Immunomodulators (SSIs.)

Principal Investigator: Dr. Theodore Steiner

Dr. Steiner is a Professor of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He is also an Infectious Diseases Specialist at Vancouver General Hospital, a Research Scientist at BC Children's Hospital Research Institute, and the Chief Medical Officer for Infectious Diseases at Qu Biologics.



Chef Don Guthro relaxing after a busy lunch shift at his restaurant D.I.C.E.D. Photos: Tom Gould

CHEF DON GUTHRO

TODAY'S SPECIAL: HELP AND HOPE

by JOHN THOMSON

D.I.C.E.D is nothing fancy. The humble, indoor-outdoor eatery minutes away from Vancouver's Jericho Beach features a rustic grass enclosure where hungry diners feast at weather-beaten picnic tables. Inside, you'll find conventional booths and cheerful, young servers delivering generous portions of familiar crowd-pleasing comfort food at budget prices. All the classics are on tap: burgers, fries, nachos and soups. And there are surprises, too. Breakfast pizza topped with bacon, sausage and two poached eggs is a Sunday brunch favourite at this unpretentious oasis.

"It's a calming environment, just the way I like it," says owner and chef Don Guthro, a 40-year veteran of multiple high-end dining establishments both here and abroad.

D.I.C.E.D. is not only the name of the restaurant, but also a movement – short for Diverse Innovation in Culinary Educational Development – Don's overall vision for revolutionizing the food service industry from within.

He uses profits from the restaurant, and other food-related endeavours, like his food truck, his catering business, and his line of high-end kitchen knives to fund a culinary school for disadvantaged youth. His aim is to help those who may want to pursue a culinary career but feel stymied or, as he says, "stuck" because of costs or missed opportunities. His low tuition fees make it possible for hopefuls to chase the dream.

"We know what happens to people when they get stuck," says Don. "Sometimes, the younger population doesn't get those opportunities and that's why I started the program."

Don speaks from experience. He remembers growing up as the middle child in a family of five in St Mary's, Ontario, a farming community 20 kilometres southwest of Stratford. It was a challenging time for his siblings and his single mother.

"We didn't have a lot," he recalls. "You had to make the best of what you had."

Times were tough but Don has pleasant memories, too.

"We'd go hunting, we'd go fishing. Living in the country and having those things accessible to us was a lot more simplistic. It really taught me to appreciate what we have around us, the acceptance of what you have and where you are in life."

He was an athletic kid back then, part of the high school track team, so perhaps it wasn't a surprise that he was asked to dance in the school play *Guys and Dolls*. He complied, mostly out of curiosity, he says, when suddenly, the National Ballet of Canada came knocking.

"Someone from the National saw me dance," he says. "They offered me a scholarship and I left. I'm a kid from the country. What do I know about ballet?"

Not much, he says. Not that it mattered.

"I think that farm kid, that athletic kid side of me helped," he confesses. He moved to Toronto but, ever practical, pursued ballet in the day while taking cooking lessons at a technical school at night.

"As an athlete, I knew the body starts to shut down around 36, 38 years old, and you need something else that's going to be working for you. I was still a kid, but I knew this wasn't going to be long term."

He was right. A horrific knee injury he sustained during rehearsal three years later ended his dance career.

"I was doing a jump. My quadricep locked and when I came down my knee buckled the wrong way and that was it. It was, 'okay, what can I do next?' I just had to figure out what it was that I truly wanted to do."

"Being a chef is artistic, as well, so why not get involved

Snapshot

with Chef Don Guthro

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

"Be patient. Enjoy what's around you and be patient. Everything has its own path. If I hadn't started the school, something else would have happened. Another door would have opened. Be patient and enjoy the ride."

Who or what influenced you the most? And why?

"I think it would be my mother. She was a single mom and she dealt with all of us trying to survive. She made me aware that it doesn't matter how difficult it is, there will always be an opportunity or a positive from it."

What are you grateful for?

"I'm grateful for being able to do the things I do. I'm grateful that I can make a living, support the people around me and support others around the country."

What does success mean to you?

"For me, success is seeing the success people are achieving through the program. Having this is just a tool to be able to do that. I mean monetary stuff doesn't have the same connection for me as with other people." |



in that? I went home to St. Mary's for about a week and then I took off overseas to London and worked at the Savoy Hotel right away," he says.

The kid from the farm travelled the world, working his way through Austria, Germany, Malaysia, Italy and India, learning the trade and refining his skills. He returned to Canada as an executive chef, landing in BC in the late 1990s because "I just decided this is where I want to be." One of his positions took him to Lookout, a North Vancouver shelter feeding the homeless and running a small cooking school from its kitchen.

"We fed the homeless within the shelter from the food we were creating from the lesson plans, but I realized that as we expanded, we needed to make more revenue to actually expand the program."

It was a eureka moment, the realization that marrying art with commerce was the way to go. It was a simple game plan: drive people to your restaurant with good quality food and low prices and use that money to build a self-supporting cooking school.

Make no mistake, D.I.C.E.D is a business and students pay a fee, albeit a low one, to learn from the master. Don remembers another Vancouver restaurant tried to do the same thing decades ago, but it failed, he says, because as a non-profit it was dependent on government funding, and it couldn't support itself.

"Non-profits don't look at it like a business model. They don't look at longevity. They just look at 'where can I get the money from?' When you focus on funding and that money goes away, you run into a problem and that's pretty much what happened to them."

"We've been running our programs for almost 15 years, and we've never taken any outside funding whatsoever. We're not chasing the money; we're looking at what we can do with the money we generate. For me, it's about how we can make an impact around us, either in the community or in education."

Don moved from North Vancouver to

his present beach location in 2009. Originally, he trained future cooks himself in the D.I.C.E.D. kitchen. Today, the program is delivered online as an interactive 44-week course consisting of lectures, demonstrations and "homework" – dishes the student prepares at their location wherever they are. Their work is filmed, evaluated by on-site mentors and sent to Don and his team for evaluation.

The program takes in about 200 students a year. There are no caveats save one: potential students must already be working in an established restaurant, in any capacity, to prove they have an understanding of the business. He fears too many wannabees are unaware of the long hours and the low starting wages and are easily misled by the celebrity status of TV chefs like Jamie Oliver and Gordon Ramsey.

"We set up contracts between the employer and our school and between the student and the school. It's like a co-op," says Don. "The school is training the employee to a higher standard, and the employer gets the benefit of having a trained employee because everyone's struggling to get trained staff right now."

Students start with the fundamentals, health regulations and equipment, and progress into cooking vegetables, proteins and seafood. There are lessons on making sausages, elemental baking and pastry and, finally, plating and presentation. They end up with Level 1 and 2 certifications, which prepares them for the ultimate in culinary proficiency, the Red Seal, should they decide to pursue advancement on their own.

Students pay around \$1,000 for the course, compared to \$17,000 to \$47,000 charged elsewhere.

"We're trying to keep it under \$1,000, so it's affordable for everyone," says Don. He fears the more expensive schools discourage people entering the profession because students, especially the disadvantaged, can't afford to pay back their loans. The starting wages aren't high enough.

D.I.C.E.D. graduates, on the other hand, are already employed and can move up the ladder or move elsewhere into salaried positions in hotels, bistros and restaurants.

"Almost everything I know right now in the kitchen, all my skills, came from the program," says 27-year-old Jeremy Javier, now employed full-time in the D.I.C.E.D.

kitchen. Jeremy was already working as a baker at a Vancouver donut shop when he joined the program five years ago.

"I remember honing my knife skills," says Jeremy, "We cut carrots for a day," he laughs. He did well. Jeremy's going to manage Don's second D.I.C.E.D. location in downtown Vancouver this winter. Seemingly oblivious to the hazards of expansion, Don admits it's a risky proposition.

"The economy is not the best, but I'm always the guy looking at opportunities and things you normally wouldn't look at."

Ergo, his other culinary enterprises, the food truck, his catering business, and especially his knife manufacturing business. He imports the steel from Germany, cuts it and adds artisanal handles in a metal fabrication and woodworking warehouse in suburban Coquitlam.

"I can build you a car if you want," he says, but right now, it's knives.

They're works of art, and expensive, which benefits his game plan since 40 per cent of the net from all his enterprises goes back into offsetting the culinary school's operating costs.

It's an exhausting job, which demands his attention seven days a week, 365 days a year. Others have called him a workaholic; Don says he's just doing his job. His day starts at five in the morning when he reads emails and his to-do list.

"I get two-and-a-half hours of just my time to focus on the things I need to focus on," he says. "It's almost like meditation but it's paperwork."

The day starts slowly before he kicks into overdrive.

"I try not to work past six or seven o'clock, and I turn everything off at eight. I don't focus on very many things after eight o'clock. I try not to take it home."

He admits his schedule makes it hard to maintain relationships, and he spends whatever personal time he has painting and drawing.

"I do a lot of sketching. I've got a book at home that I pick up if I see something and I'll just sketch it. For me, it's trying to balance everything without being stressed out. I try to be at peace. That's what's important for me – simplicity. There's no spinning of wheels. I try to avoid that."

Driven and deliberate, he's clear on future steps. He'd like to build brick-and-mortar kitchen hubs throughout the country to make it easier for his students to film their dishes. He'd also love to partner with corporations like the Compass Group, Canada's largest food service and hospitality company, to help them train future chefs in-house.

"I want to see our industry develop individuals from within," he says, to make it easier and more affordable for youth or anyone else to enter the profession.

"That's my job, to reach out to at least three different organizations or people every day about what we do. I have a mission and I want to complete it and it's going to take some time. I'm using my own funds, my own revenue, so it does take a little bit longer than normal. I'm driven to make change and support the industry. That's the focus and will always be the focus." |

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CAMINO SISTERS

by MELANIE DORCHESTER

Neighbours sparked my initial interest in Camino de Santiago. They enthusiastically described walking parts of pilgrimage routes through towns in France, Spain and Portugal. All routes eventually led to the shrine of the apostle St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

Several years later, my 70-year-old friend, Beverly, trained to walk with her friend for seven days in Spain. Her tenacity, perseverance and excitement impelled a library search, but the detailed maps and information overwhelmed me. Instead, I found that I was inspired by personal stories written by people who had done Caminos. Their humour and struggles intrigued me.

Motivated to do one now? Definitely! But I couldn't find anyone to join me, and I wasn't ready to go solo. After a Celebration of Life planning visit to Hope for our older brother, Dan, I shared my dilemma with my sister, Lisa. Dan passed away in March 2020 in extended care at the tender age of 66. Perhaps it was coming to terms with so much loss, first our parents, and now our brother, but when I spoke of this desire to walk a Camino, Lisa responded enthusiastically, "I'll go with you!"

Soon after we made this sisterly pact, I joined the Canadian Company of Pilgrims, where I would learn about footwear, routes, accommodation, starting points and basically everything related to Caminos.

Memories of shivering one night as a backpacking 19-year-old undoubtedly influenced trip planning discussions with my sister. Neither of us wanted to show up in a new town with no place to sleep, or to walk wearing a full-sized backpack. It was an easy decision to pay an agency to arrange our accommodation and luggage transfers. Not so easy was deciding which route to take.

Luckily, the agency also offered self-guided Camino tours, and we chose the last 100 kilometres of the Camino Frances, from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela. As our departure date grew nearer, a flurry of texts, emails and phone calls helped us narrow down final details.

EXCITEMENT, EXHILARATION, EXHAUSTION

In Europe, many people start their Camino from home. Our version of that involved Lisa and I rolling our tiny suitcases via bus and SkyTrain to the Vancouver airport, then again in Madrid using buses and trains, and finally walking up the long ancient hill to the first hostel of our itinerary in Sarria, Spain. After tearing open a package of maps and other treasures from the tour company, Lisa promptly fell into a long, deep sleep.

My empty tank was fueled by the excitement of noisy, cheerful diners who were seated with heaping plates of food, bread and wine outside our hostel. It reminded me of the Camino stories I had read. Not typically an extrovert, I invited myself to join a table of women I'd seen earlier in the day on the train. There was an immediate connection with these fellow pilgrims as we shared our plans. My sister eventually joined us. I couldn't wait to experience this same sense of freedom, each day, as we ventured into the unknown.

DAY ONE - SARRIA TO PORTOMARIN, 22KM

When I travelled in the late '70s, cell phones didn't exist. I relied on maps, guidebooks and people, the latter being the

ABOVE | The author (*right*) and her sister, Lisa (*left*), on the path to Santiago.
Photo: Melanie Dorchester

least likely to be accurate with their tendency to say, “just over the next hill.”

In Sarria, Lisa and I were given five detailed maps, one for each day of travel. We studied the route distances and elevation at the beginning and end of each day. On the actual path, however, we relied on the blue and yellow signposts, giving particular attention to the distance, which showed us how much further there was to go until we reached Santiago de Compostela.

Those signs kept us oriented, but I admit to also relying on Lisa’s phone and navigational skills. We had been given a Camino passport and were required to stamp it at least twice a day at churches, accommodations, cafés or anywhere else that offered a stamp if we intended to collect the Credencial in Santiago.

Our first opportunity for a stamp was on a steep path in the woods, along with water, bananas and a donation bowl. “Buen Camino!” said the gentle entrepreneur, as we sweated and panted up the hill.

DAYS TWO, THREE, FOUR AND FIVE

Our walking followed a similar pattern. We dressed for the expected weather, packed and delivered our suitcases to the assigned drop off location, ate breakfast, then with day packs full of snacks, water, band-aids and painkillers, we embraced another day of walking.

The air always seemed so cool, fresh and invigorating at this point in the day. We developed a sense of timing. Typically, we’d hope to walk for two hours, take a café latté break, walk again, eat lunch, then hit the final stretch. Delightful tiny churches, graveyards, photo ops, cobblestones, endlessly steep ascents and descents, stunningly green vistas, sheep, cows on the road, sleeping German Shepherds and granaries were everywhere.

If one of us complained too much about painful blisters or knees, the other would ask if a taxi was needed, but neither of us was willing to give up the challenge. Foolish or not, we were both determined to find our way to Santiago on foot.

Excitement and exhaustion grew as we approached the ancient city. We were so grateful to see cathedral spires far in the distance grow closer and closer, until finally we heard bagpipes playing on the last stretch to the giant courtyard. Exhausted pilgrims lay on the ground or perched with their packs on rock walls in front of the 11th century church. My dear husband was waiting there to envelop us in a giant congratulatory hug.

Later, a tour guide explained several versions of the incredible story of Saint James, his connection to the Santiago area, and how his remains were brought from Jerusalem and buried there. Spiritual quest, pilgrimage or simply a very special experience, there’s no denying that the story continues to inspire people like me and Lisa. |

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LONDON'S FAVOURITE HAUNTS

by JANE CASSIE



He's dressed from head to toe in raven black and melds seamlessly into the pitch-dark night. In one hand is an umbrella that doubles as a cane. In the other, a flashlight, waiting to come to life. Timing is everything, and when the nearby bell of St. Andrew's begins to toll, he goes into action.

"It's the bell from Gabrielle, who sends your soul to heaven or hell..." The cue has been perfectly timed with our guide's performance and following the lyrics, he sheds light on another spooky tale.

For several years, Shaughan has led the way on Original London Walks, and during our jaunt, we are captivated by his haunting vignettes. The slap stick is creatively infused with song and presents more like a Shakespearean play than a ghost hunt.

While weaving around London's dimly-lit alleys, we hear about ruthless royals, cruel slayings and returning spirits. Men who were boiled alive in 1305 have come back to deal with their executioners. Chained prisoners who were gruesomely disemboweled have been heard clanking over rooftops. There's been weird whistling in bell towers, mysterious cries within walls, and phantom galloping over cobblestones. Throw in a few bodiless heads and headless bodies and you have one haunting heyday! But despite historical reports, it's all in good fun, and we will snooze well beneath London's full moon tonight.

Although we have our fill of spooks after this stroll, two evenings later, we're lured like werewolves to the Richmond district where more eeriness waits.

Ham House is the perfect place for specters. The isolated Stuart mansion hugs up to the River Thames, and when night-

time falls, its tudor silhouette takes on an ominous glow.

John Mills, our burly guide, turns out to be another ghoulish guru. We gather in the Grand Hall, once a party place for the royally rich, where he provides a Coles Notes version of the history. "The house was built in 1610 for Sir Thomas Vavasour," Mills explains, "then was gifted to his best friend, William Murray, aka Earl of Dysart."

Generous guy, I'm thinking. But, as we soon discover, money doesn't always breed nice people. The Earl's daughter, a spendthrift and an unfriendly gal, inherits the haven. She goes through a couple of husbands, makes some poor financial choices and her entire domain goes belly up. Ham House becomes a time capsule after her death in 1698, yet in spite of its vacancy, a few spirits continue to linger.

We discover that the resident Chaplain, Gilbert Spink, was quite enamored by the daunting duchess. "When the apparition of this lady returns, dressed in black, the spirit of Spink is following close behind," Mills shares, "and so is the resident pooch, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel."

ABOVE | The author stands in the garden of Henry VIII's Hampton Court Palace. INSET | Ghost Walk guide, Shaughan, delivers a haunting tale. Photos: Brent Cassie

We ogle over the canine's skeletal remains, well-preserved under glass, and check out this glum looking trio whose images are portrayed on canvas. Sticking close to Mill's shadow, we mosey through the fine interiors decked out in period décor, then head to the chilly outdoors.

Just beyond the canopied arboretum is the celebrated Cherry Garden, an orangery and, yes, more ghostly sightings. After hearing about returning love-crushed servants and World War I heroes, we've had our fill of phantom fun – at least until the following day.

Further up the Thames is Hampton Court Palace – 24 lush hectares, colossal citadel – the whole bastion bit. Initially, the fortress was built for Henry VIII, the big-bellied king who had a reputation for killing off wives. While being led through his palatial quarters by costumed guides, we're given the rundown of these hapless women who have made a comeback to haunt these halls.

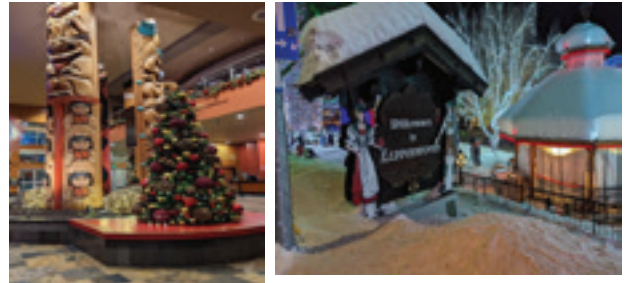
His third wife, Jane Seymour, has been seen wandering the Clock Court. His fifth fair maiden, Catherine Howard, has been heard shrieking in the Haunted Gallery and his second in line, Anne Boleyn, seems to be here, there and everywhere. As well as around Hampton Court, we discover that her presence is predominantly felt at the acclaimed Tower of London, another popular niche for the incorporeal crowd and another London haunt where history literally comes to life! |

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CYCLING THE CONTINENTS AT 70

by TOM PERLMUTTER

Last year, a week before Christmas I biked the final 100 km to Punta Chame, a fishing village and windsurfing mecca at the end of a long thin peninsula dotted with shrimp farms, mangroves and golden beaches. What began nearly six months before on the shores of the Arctic Ocean came to its conclusion at the Pacific by the entrance to the Panama Canal.

We celebrated at a beach bar with Prosecco and tapas. In the distance, I could see dozens of massive container ships waiting to enter the Canal and beyond them, sparkling in the sun, the rising towers of Panama City. A couple of hours later, tipsy with excitement and alcohol, we waded into the Pacific to clamber into the rickety motor launches that would take us and our bikes across the bay to the city.

As we skimmed across the water to Panama City, I felt a mix of emotions: elation, pride and, unexpectedly, a vein of melancholy. I couldn't quite believe that this was it, that I had come to the end of the road.

What had it all been for? What had impelled me to leave the comforts of home, family and friends? For six months I woke at dawn, cycled for hours, camped, then did it again. Day in, day out. For thousands of kilometres.

I'd come to biking late and by accident. Four years earlier, a friend, who was experiencing marital difficulties, called me up. He said he had signed up for a seven-day bike tour in Patagonia. I figured his romantic problems were driving him to extremes. "You don't know anything about biking," I said. "You're coming with me," he replied. "I know less about biking than you," I said.

A couple of hours into the ride and I'd had it. We were climbing an isolated mountain road on the Argentinian border with Chile. My tires spun uselessly digging deep grooves in the gravel. I was hot, frustrated and miserable. I swore, never again. Then after lunch something happened. I was picking up speed on the descent when out of nowhere I was overcome by a giddy elation. My perennial internal cloud of anxiety was sucked out of me into the thin Patagonian air replaced by a never-before known lightness of spirit.

Within a year I bought my first touring bike, a bright orange Salsa Marrakesh, and signed up to pedal Africa, from Cairo to Cape Town. My friends and family thought I was crazy. What was I doing at my age, 70, setting off on such a daunting and arduous undertaking; I whose only real experience of biking was tootling around the city on a 20-year-old Norco?

Cycling past the pyramids of Giza, at the start of that journey, I shivered – more from awe than the surprisingly chilly January morning. And apprehension. A small niggling voice whispered I still had time to quit this foolhardy venture. Over the days and weeks that followed, I learned that I, more inclined to books than athletics, could do it. I could cycle day in, day out for six or more hours in the saddle. I could arrive at our destination and set up camp still exhilarated, still full of energy and curiosity.

ABOVE | The author makes it to Punta Chame, Panama.

TOC | Pushing through in the Rockies. Photos: Tom Perlmutter

In Addis Ababa, I had to return to Montreal for a week. My mother was celebrating her 100th birthday. I couldn't miss it. Mom was in top form. A survivor of Auschwitz, she barrelled through life with grit, determination and willpower. She received congratulatory letters from the Queen, the Prime Minister, and the mayor. The local CBC news came out. When the reporter asked how she felt, my mother said, "I feel..." and here she paused for dramatic effect before continuing with a sly grin, "...young and restless." That was her joke, the title of her favourite soap opera.

I rejoined the tour in Nairobi. In the weeks that followed, I wound my way through dense jungles and grasslands rippling like waves, into villages with bustling markets, across the mysterious Namibian desert and the rich agricultural lands of South Africa. Along the way, baboons eyed us from the roadside and elephants and giraffes wandered past as casually as a cat on my city street. Biking into Cape Town, amazed that I had made it, I wondered if perhaps I had more of my mother in me than I had imagined.

I came back addicted to the spell of the road. If Africa, why not other continents? But within months of my return from Cape Town, the world stopped. Pandemic. Isolation. The end of travel. As the world slowly opened again, I made plans for another, more ambitious, expedition: cycling 14,000 km down the mountainous spine of North America. But I was three years older now. Shouldn't I be easing up rather than pushing my luck? I was soon put to the test.

I packed up my tent in the pre-dawn light of the midnight sun. I took a last look at the Arctic Ocean before clipping in and rolling south through the Inuit hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk. In the distance I spotted pingos, the distinctive ice-cored hills which once served as navigation aids for the Inuit. I felt elated and strong, but within an hour I was crippled with severe knee pain. Had the nay-sayers been right? Had my body, after all, reached its limit? I had a bad couple of hours until I realized that it wasn't a question of age. I'd messed up the adjustments on my biking shoes. Fixed, I was golden.

A few days later, cruising along the Dempster Highway – the 742-km gravel road that connects Inuvik to Dawson City, I took a bad fall when speeding down a hill when the road shifted to deep, loose gravel. My left thigh was badly bruised. My right shoulder hurt like hell. I swabbed my wounds with the small first aid kit I carried with me and checked out my bike. It had survived better than me. I clambered back on the saddle and pedaled the 20 km to camp.

That night my muscles stiffened, and the aches throbbed fiercely. My throat was scratchy. It had to be the tonne of dust I swallowed on the Dempster. As a precaution I decided to take a COVID-19 rapid test convinced that it would show up negative. Wrong. I was positive.

Bang. Bang. Bang. One disaster on top of another. Was the universe sending me a message? I was confronted in the starkest way at the outset of the tour with questions about my physical capabilities for such a demanding endeavour.

My COVID symptoms were mild. I spent a week in isola-



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tion in a motel in Dawson City, which gave my bruises a chance to heal and my spirit to recover. Not disasters, I told myself, mishaps. So it turned out to be. I suffered no more misfortunes over the coming months.

There followed days of splendour when I felt as if I were biking on air. They were extraordinary days of riding amid the glistening lakes and pine forests of the north, by the glaciers and snow-capped mountains of the Rockies, on the cowboy trail of southern Alberta and Montana, into the badlands of the American southwest where dinosaurs once roamed, by the red sandstone cliffs along the Colorado River, on the rim of the staggering immensity of the Grand Canyon, across fields where giant cacti stood like beings from another planet, and in verdant mountains surrounded by smoking volcanos.

I cycled lonesome highways, the main street of small-town USA, lined with the Stars and Stripes, into a Navajo community parading their high school homecoming, through Mexican towns festooned for Day of the Dead celebrations, on the cobblestoned streets of ancient Mayan villages and in cities anchored by their Spanish colonial past.

There were hard days. The weather inclement, the head winds fierce, the roads rough, the climbs steep, the facilities basic and everyone, regardless of age, tired from the relentless daily pace. There were many mornings, waking at 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. in the dark to decamp when all I wanted to do was stay curled up in my sleeping bag. I took it all in. Those days were like seasoning, adding spice to our journey.

Everywhere we went the bicycle opened the door to conversations and connections.

Fran is a Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in who is immersing herself in ancient wisdom and modern science of plant lore. Hers is an ongoing quest to reconnect with so much that had been lost or buried with the advent of white settlers and the residential schools.

Amam, a young Sikh, runs a convenience store in northern BC. He tells me he came to Canada straight out of high school. I ask if he finds it lonely to be so far from home and community. He smiles shyly and nods his head.

Luis works at a hotel in Santiago Atitlan. I ask him where he learned his English. He tells me his story. He lived in the States for nine years in Oklahoma, Mississippi and Tennessee. He had a good job, married, had a son. But he was an illegal. One day on a routine traffic stop he was picked up and deported. It's been five years now. He's optimistic that he will find his way back. He is one of the many refugees and migrants we encounter who are marching north, determined and optimistic.

There are many others. Their names and faces swirl around me. Through their stories I voyage to lands well beyond the road I am on.

Then it was done. I had arrived at journey's end. I took a few days in Panama to adjust to "civilian life" expecting at any moment to be back on the bike, on the road again.

Age had not been the impediment so many feared. A friend, more cynical, said, "At our age, we're in a game of Russian roulette. Every year your body is pointing a gun at your head

and pressing the trigger. You hope it's a blank."

Maybe he had a point. I had been a runner for many years going out three or four times a week. Then a few years ago I noticed I couldn't run the hills in the way I had been used to. My breathing was more laboured. I had to walk sometimes. I was referred to a cardiologist. He took one look at me, heard my story and dismissed my concerns. There's nothing wrong with your heart, he said, you're getting older. This knocked me for a loop. I would rather have had a treatable disease than incurable age.

At every turn I seemed to be confronted by the fact of my age from my recalcitrant body to various dispensations or exceptions accorded to folks who pass over some symbolic line in the sand. To join the tour, I had to sign a special waver replete with scary language absolving them of any responsibility for my well-being simply because I had crossed their line (over 69 years).

In the mirror I am always shocked to see a man with grizzled features and a white fringe around a bald dome.

In the mind's mirror I see a blurred, indistinct figure, constantly morphing, one second a five-year old sitting under a tree lost in a book; in another a confused adolescent; then yet again a single parent perplexing his way through fatherhood. I am all my ages in a shifting, simultaneous kaleidoscope. How could I then be this thing defined by one single number?

I can't set the clock back, but the clock is not immutable. We do not live in a fixed time that moves us from present moment to present moment on a one-way street to the future. We live in multi-dimensional space-time; there is no denying aging, but it does not fix us like a butterfly in formaldehyde.

Panama City was ablaze with Christmas lights. How fortuitous, it seemed to me, to arrive at this time of year, at the winter solstice, at that turning point of death and renewal, a life here, a life beyond. It came to me that the meaning of my voyage was not in the arrival or even the achievement.

Each day on the road is a rebirth. You are here alive in this moment. Your being is inscribed in, as you are inscribed by the haunting, stark, relentless, transient beauty of the world about you: the hills and valleys, the searing desert and the fertile plains, the forests, lakes and rivers, the bears, stags, bison, bighorn sheep and cranes, hawks and eagles, the sagebrush, cacti and bougainvillea. Life spills its abundance about; you are an integral part of it. You touch the lives of others as they touch you: Inuit trappers, Dene healers, American RV nomads, Bajan innkeepers, Jalisco tequila makers, Mayan farmers, Nicaraguan tale spinners, Haitian refugees, and in your heart those you have, temporarily, left behind.

My mind drifts away from my grandchildren whooping around me. There is a road out there calling me. It's siren song hypnotic and powerful. Next year, all being well, I'll cycle South America along the Andes from Cartagena to Ushuaia. |

Tom Perlmutter is a writer, documentary filmmaker and the former head of the National Film Board of Canada. His blogs about his African (<https://tomstda.com>) and North American tours (<https://continentalcyclist.substack.com/p/the-continental-cyclist>) have attracted a devoted following. He rides the tours organized by Toronto-based TDA Global Cycling.

FOREVER FIT

by EVE LEES

CARB CYCLING



Carb Cycling is a diet that strategically alternates your carbohydrate (carb) intake over days, weeks or months.

Advocates say the diet helps with fat loss and improves athletic performance. That's where Carb Cycling originated: Competitive bodybuilders use it to achieve low body fat to enhance muscle definition (getting that "cut" or "ripped" look). Carb Cycling soon became popular among dieters unsure about following either a low- or high-carb diet. So why not combine the two by 'cycling' your carbs?

To its credit, Carb Cycling doesn't omit any food or food group like many other diets. Restricting diversity in your diet limits the diversity of vital nutrients. Instead, this diet only dictates the amount of carbohydrates on certain days. And it can help with weight loss if you maintain a calorie deficit (which is why you lose weight on this or any diet). But research shows there isn't much difference in weight loss when comparing diets that restrict any macronutrient (carbs, protein or fat).

Carb Cycling requires meal planning, record keeping and counting calories and carbohydrate grams. For those who enjoy record keeping, there may be long-term adherence to the diet. But for others, this time-consuming, meticulous practice will confuse and make the diet challenging to maintain.

While Carb Cycling may be an effective plan for competitive athletes short-term, a strict, high-maintenance way to eat isn't necessary for those only wanting to lose a little fat.

Very little research exists on the health benefits of Carb Cycling for athletes and dieters, therefore, caution is advised. Any adverse consequences to long-term adherence are unknown: Are the diet's effects long-lasting, and can it negatively affect our metabolism's efficiency with age?

Many believe carbs are "bad" and create chaos with insulin and blood sugar. Carb Cycling, with its focus on carbs may unwittingly encourage this misguided belief.

Carbs are not "bad." It's what we do to them that creates problems. We would have very few health issues if we had never altered our carb-rich foods. In their ultra-processed (changed) form, carbs have lost many vital nutrients and are digested too quickly, negatively affecting insulin response.

In contrast, complex carbs, in their whole form, largely retain their nutrients. They are slowly digested and absorbed, and rarely contribute to excessive insulin and blood sugar fluctuations (unless eaten in large amounts, especially by those with certain health conditions).

Use common sense with serving sizes. And those who have diabetes or pre-diabetes should tailor their carb intake. In ad-

dition, in their whole form, carbohydrate-rich foods contribute many properties – especially fibre – that encourage a healthy balance of gut microbiota. Ongoing research finds a balanced microbiome ensures good health.

Prioritize the complex, slowly digested whole carbs: Cooked whole grains and 'starches' like squash, root vegetables and legumes. Minimize the breads, crackers or other flour-containing foods (highly refined foods can be 'addictive' to some people, and few realize that flour is highly processed, which may be why bread is so addictive for some of us!).

Processed carbohydrates constitute a large part of the average diet. They can negatively impact blood sugar regulation and alter hormone levels. When hormones like insulin, leptin and ghrelin are out of balance, weight loss is difficult.

Whether you follow this diet or any other, focus on minimally processed, high-fibre foods and naturally occurring sugars (fresh fruit). Tip: Your food choice should closely resemble how it looked when created in nature.

Instead of Carb Cycling, here are some less meticulous strategies to easily keep carbohydrates balanced in your diet:

1. Have a healthy, complex carb at each main meal: about the size of your fist. Foods like brown rice and sweet potatoes are nutritious, long-lasting carbs that provide the energy needed to get you through the day or a workout.

2. At each meal, fill half your plate with vegetables, one-third with protein and healthy fats, and slightly less than one-quarter with starches, grains or fruit.

3. Eat a little more carbs or add an extra carb-rich snack before and/or after an intense workout – ditto for days when you are much more physically active.

Carb Cycling is probably a better choice than other "fad" diets since no food or food group is omitted. However, this diet may be unnecessarily tedious for your needs. Instead, eat sensible amounts of a wide variety of whole, "unchanged" foods – including carbohydrates. You'll reach your fat-loss goals while maintaining good health. |

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



LEGENDARY GUATEMALA

by MARILYN JONES

Guatemala has many narratives. This remarkable country and welcoming citizens invite you to discover its beauty and mystery, from fascinating Mayan culture and Spanish colonial cities to active volcanos and an abundance of wildlife.

I travelled to Guatemala with Bella Guatemala, a tour company specializing in the uniqueness of this Central American country.

Antigua, south of Guatemala City, is an excellent place to begin your exploration. During the Spanish colonial era, the city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, served as Guatemala's capital.

Mammoth volcanic peaks and coffee-covered slopes serve as a backdrop for the remnants of the city. Its pastel streetscapes, beautifully restored buildings and haunting ruins add to its charm.

I strolled past churches and government buildings. The city's central square serves as a meeting place for locals. It features trees, shaded walkways, iron benches and the 1737 Mermaid Fountain.

Over the centuries of Spanish occupation, the city suffered earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions. Each natural disaster took a toll on the capital until it was all but abandoned. However, it has re-emerged from its slumber to become the No. 1 tourist destination in the country in recent decades. The city hosts thousands of tourists seeking history and the city's incredible culinary and nightlife scene.

Just outside the city is Café Azoteca Coffee Estate, which has been in business since 1883. I started my visit in the coffee museum, which helps explain worldwide coffee production before focusing on local history, processes and traditions.

Guatemalan coffee is grown under a dense canopy of shade trees. Harvested by hand, the ripe red beans are wet milled, sun-dried and dry milled. We walked among the growing area and learned about its ecological growing practices. Azotea is a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm.

You'll also want to tour the plantation's music museum, featuring Guatemalan musical instruments and the country's musical history and a textile museum featuring Mayan designs.

Southern Guatemala is dominated by a string of 37 volcanoes extending for about 290 kms between Mexico and El Salvador. Currently, seven are active, continually shifting and changing the landscape.

Pacaya, one of the active volcanos, is considered safe and easy to hike. Depending on your fitness level, the hike can take between one and three hours. You can also rent a horse to take

ABOVE | Mayans occupied Tikal for more than 16 centuries.

TOC | Pristine government buildings remain in Antigua. Photos: Marilyn Jones

you to the top for about \$40, plus entrance and guide fees.

At the top, I had a spectacular view of the volcano and valley below. Vast fields of wildflowers grow out of the ash left from lava flows.

Panajachel is a city of 15,000 in the southwestern highlands. Known for its restaurants, galleries, lively bars and accommodation, the main street captured my attention.

All along the way, women in traditional clothing offer woven blankets and shawls. At the same time, children sell everything from hammocks to greeting cards. It's a chaotic, festive and colourful experience, especially in the evening.

Tourists flock to the city because of its proximity to Lake Atitlan, considered one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. You can hire a boat to take you on a scenic cruise in the shadow of three volcanos (Atitlan, San Pedro, and Toliman). Mayan villages and towns are scattered along the shoreline.

One of the towns, San Juan La Laguna, is home to several cooperatives offering work for Mayan women to make a living as weavers and artisans. The community of 10,000 comprises 90 per cent Tz'utujil Mayans and 10 per cent Americans and Europeans; ex-pats are drawn to the area for its natural beauty and low cost of living.

The main street is lined with tiny shops and gardeners selling medicinal plants and produce. Visitors are welcome to learn from co-op members how they make their blankets and shawls. First, they buy locally grown cotton, remove the seeds, and then beat the cotton with sticks, making them adhere and spin it into yarn. I watched in amazement as a young woman explained the natural materials to dye the wool. Charcoal, insects, and flowers are mixed with banana oil, a natural fixer for the stain, before dipping the yarn into the boiling mixture.

Many Mayan women use a back-strap loom to weave and are often seen working on cloth alongside the town's narrow lanes in front of small shops where they sell their wares. Women are the keepers of custom, culture and history, and dress traditionally. Guatemalan fabrics tell the stories of the wearer's community and beliefs.

If you are in Guatemala on November 1, visit Sumpango Cemetery. Here locals celebrate the All Saints' Day Big Kite Festival in celebration of Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a 3,000-year-old tradition. The city is located about 40 minutes west of Guatemala City.

Arrive early in the day and enjoy the festivities as you walk along the road to the cemetery. Vendors offer kites, noisemakers, handcrafted ornaments and woven blankets.

In the cemetery, graves are decorated with flowers. Gifts and food are left for

the departed. Small kites fly overhead, sending messages to family members in heaven along the kite string. Crowds of people stand and sit everywhere in the cemetery as they celebrate lives and the continuation of this life in death.

Throughout the day, several giant kites are erected around the circumference of the cemetery. Guatemala is the only country to celebrate Dia de Los Muertos by flying vibrantly coloured kites, which are believed to both communicate with, and honour lost loved ones. Giant kite designs are cloth and paper with bamboo frames that depict religious or folkloric themes. It takes an average of 40 days to construct kites more than 12 metres in diameter.

The giant kites are brought to the cemetery all day. Medium-sized kites don't take to the skies until dusk, when people have finished tending to the graves, and the sun begins to set.

Toward evening, do not separate from your group for any reason. The crush of the crowd is intense.

Northern Guatemala offers its own Mayan treasure, including Tikal National Park and – lesser known but just as impressive – Yaxhá Nakum Naranjo National Park.

Tikal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was the state's capital that became a powerful ancient Maya kingdom. Today it is one of the most well-known archaeological sites in Central America.

Hidden until the 19th century, Tikal is a monumental site with towering pyramids looming out of the thick jungle. The Mayans began building Tikal around 600 BC. They completed



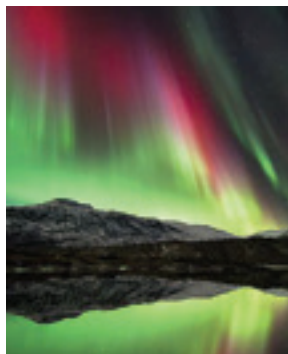
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3,000 structures, including palaces, temples, plazas, ceremonial platforms, ball courts, terraces, avenues and steam baths.

You will have glimpsed Tikal in the movie *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) as the planet Yavin IV. Here, the rebels had their base to organize the big battle against the Empire. George Lucas shot the scene from the top of Temple IV. You can climb this pyramid safely by using a modern wooden stairway.

Mayans occupied Tikal for more than 16 centuries, which is a fantastic testament to this jungle civilization's cultural and artistic accomplishments.

Tikal is popular, so be prepared for crowds, especially in the morning.

To the east is Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo. Unlike Tikal, the excavated and unexcavated palaces, temples and marketplaces are so close together that it makes it easy to imagine life centuries ago when this sophisticated society prospered.

Yaxhá was the third-largest city in the region and experienced its maximum power between AD 250 to 600. Other settlements preceded it, dating to 1000 BC.

The city was located on a ridge overlooking Lake Yaxhá. The Yaxhá kingdom is estimated to have covered 238 square kms and had a peak population of 42,000. The city survived until AD 900 and was entirely abandoned by 1525.

The ruins include more than 500 structures, with several major archaeological sites linked by causeways. Because it is void of many tourists, wildlife is abundant, including toucans and the national bird, Quetzal, spider monkeys scampering along treetops, and howler monkeys calling out from above.

Guatemala projects a welcoming spirit to anyone interested in discovering the country. A feeling of pride in the Mayan culture is beautifully framed in natural splendour. Come and learn; this country has much to offer. |

For *IF YOU GO* information, visit www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/legendary-guatemala



VIRGINIA & ANNE

After retiring from her career as Director of Early Childhood Services for the Nova Scotia Department of Education & Early Childhood Development in 2014, Virginia moved from Halifax to Vancouver to join her sons and grandchildren on the west coast.

She was ready to make new friends, but she had no idea she'd run into some old ones, too.

"I knew I could be very comfortable on either coast," she says, looking forward to her grandmother's role. "I made new friends right away, with other grandparents."

"I'm also a walker, so my new home – within easy walking distance of everything near Broadway and Cambie – helped me settle into Vancouver very quickly.

It was one of her new grandmother friends who, in 2018, invited a few of their group to Vancouver's Point Grey Brock House for lunch one day.

"I didn't know what Brock House was but once I found out that it was an engaging Senior Centre, I immediately joined and became involved," says Virginia.

As a member of the centre's fun Social Events Committee, Virginia served others at Special Event sit-down occasions.

While she was serving at the Robert Burns lunch in 2019, she spotted a

member wearing a Nova Scotian tartan. When the two women exchanged words about the tartan, they quickly realized they were both from Halifax.

A few words into their conversation, they blurted out "Anne" and "Ginny," on recognizing each other, some 50+ years after they had last seen each other in their hometown.

"I felt surprised, maybe even a little shocked, yet excited to think that after all these years it was possible to reconnect with someone with whom I had shared experiences from a much earlier time in our lives."

The gals had been close childhood friends, had attended Sunday School together and were both part of the Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT), a non-denominational organization for girls in Grades 7-12 that focused on leadership skills, self-care and social responsibility. They also had family and friends in common but had lost touch over the years.

"Now we talk about our lives in Halifax, and about all the people we used to know in those days," says Virginia. "We continue to see each other and stay in touch."

"It was a truly happy, delightful and special moment to see Anne again and the memories just started to flow," recalls Virginia (Ginny).

"Amazing, right?" echoes Anne. |

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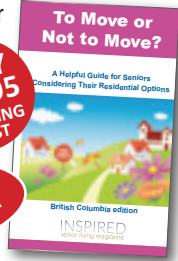
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OCTOBER TO-DO LISTS

Living
on purpose

by LAURIE MUELLER

October delivers bounty and beauty as the last of the fruit and vegetables are harvested, and pumpkins become abundant and found on so many front entrances. Corn mazes and pumpkin spice lattes are a thing!

Thanksgiving beginning the month and Halloween closing it out highlight our calendars. Winter clothes are unpacked. Summer tires are exchanged for snow tires (just in case). Flower gardens are cleaned out and shut down for the winter. Spring bulbs are planted.

It can be a celebratory month for some and a melancholy month for others. Here are a couple of lists for those who want to focus on the positives of the autumn month.

TEN WAYS TO SHOW GRATITUDE IN THIS MONTH OF THANKSGIVING:

1. Start the month by making a list of 31 things you are grateful for in your life.
2. Invite new friends over for a turkey dinner. Do this separate from your family Thanksgiving tradition.
3. Start your meals by saying aloud what you are grateful for today.
4. Go through your winter clothing and donate some good condition winter items to a thrift store or homeless shelter. Why not include a few new pairs of socks?
5. Drop off canned goods to a food bank in your area.
6. Create your own set of seasonal thank you cards by using photographs you have taken. Autumn colours make pretty cards.
7. Send these cards to people who make a difference in your life.
8. Make a pumpkin pie or cheesecake and invite someone special to enjoy it with you.

9. Say thank you to your neighbours for something they have done to enhance your 'hood.

10. Look in the mirror and thank yourself for all that you are and can be.

TEN WAYS TO CELEBRATE HALLOWEEN:

1. Make sure your Will is up to date.
2. Put a pumpkin on your front step (or a pumpkin decoration on your door).
3. If you get trick-or-treaters at your home, find a suitable costume to wear when you open the door.
4. Write your own obit – I teach a course on this and call it “Be Your Own Rockstar.” Use that thought as you write yours, so others don’t overlook the good things you want to be remembered for. You can find instructions on how to do that in my book listed at the bottom of this column.
5. If you haven’t already, read up on Mexico’s Day of the Dead Celebrations. The Aztec people believed in celebrating, not mourning, the lives of those who had passed.
6. Take 15 minutes every day in October to jot down thoughts that can go into the memoir you will write one day.
7. Host a Halloween costume party. Play games.
8. Visit a corn maze. Take some little ones with you.
9. Ask a friend to suggest a cozy (or spooky) October read.
10. Make pumpkin soup.

And if none of those interest you, here are some bonus ideas: Sip apple cider, go apple picking, get pumpkins and gourds from your local market and make a fall display for your table or front door. Go to a football game. Take a hike in nature and snap lots of photographs. Roast pumpkin seeds.

Being in a positive frame of mind as we move from summer days into winter nights can make all the difference to your mental and physical health. |

Laurie Mueller, M.ED is retired and living in Victoria with her husband, Helmuth. Her book *The Ultimate Guide on What to do When Someone You Love Dies* is available on Amazon. More about Laurie can be found at www.lauriemconsulting.com or on Facebook.

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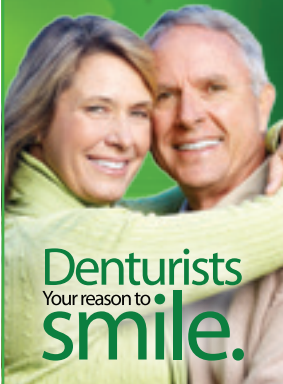
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