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55+ lifestyle magazine

NOV / DEC 2023

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55+ PODCAST

Retired broadcasters Michael Forbes & Lisa Marshall bring you a fun, fresh take on inspired people featured in the magazine. Check it out at www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast

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Cover DAVID SINCLAIR

Volunteer extraordinaire, retired veteran and advocate for affordable housing for seniors, Dave Sinclair is an inspiration to us all.

Photo: J. Abram Photography

INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

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THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO, PUBLISHER



I believe it's important to maintain a balance of caring for yourself and others.

This issue of *INSPIRED* is all about charitable work and how we can aid others and support worthy causes. I heartily endorse every charity you see mentioned in these pages and hope you will take the time to support them with a donation.

At the same time, we can't forget about self-care – ensuring that you have what you need to feel cared for and complete.

It doesn't matter what the circumstances are – a busy career, caring for family, recovering from an illness or a loss of some kind – it's easy to neglect yourself while caring for others or dealing with challenging situations. I've been there.

If you recognize that you could use some TLC to get yourself back into balance and start caring for yourself a little more, I'd like to invite you to apply to be one of our three candidates receiving a makeover at our upcoming 55+ Lifestyle Show on March 19, 2024.

The makeover includes hair styling, makeup, clothes fitting, a facial and a manicure.

If you would like to restart your self-care process, please send me an email with your reasons for wanting the makeover, along with a current photo. You must be 55+, have shoulder length hair or longer, and be willing to put yourself totally in the hands of our makeover stylists.

We will pamper you over several days, and you will appear in front of our 55+ Lifestyle Show audience in March. You will be featured in the magazine with a write-up and photos.

We can only choose three candidates, so get your application in ASAP to publisher@seniorlivingmag.com

OTHER NEWS...

This month, *INSPIRED Magazine* will begin publishing every second month. This change will provide more time to put together content and give the magazine a longer shelf life.

Also, this month, we are launching a podcast. Retired radio personalities Michael Forbes and Lisa Marshall are collaborating with *INSPIRED* to bring some of our feature articles to life. The first podcast kicks off with an interview with Dave Sinclair, a beloved community figure, retired veteran and tireless advocate of affordable senior housing. If you enjoy the article about Dave in this issue, you'll love listening as Michael and Lisa engage him in conversation. Check it out at www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast

As I bring 2023 to a close with this final issue, I want to say how blessed I have been to have shared 20 years of my life's work with you. I hope 2024 will continue to build upon the foundation that has been laid and that we will find new and better ways to connect and be there for one another. |



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David Sinclair is a Canadian Forces decorated vet and a volunteer extraordinaire.
Photos: J. Abram Photography

DAVID SINCLAIR: HOOKED ON HELPING

by JANE MUNDY

When it comes to volunteering, David Sinclair can't say no. Since retiring in 1994, he has raised money for numerous causes, secured housing for seniors, helped fellow veterans transition to civilian life, and he sits on several boards. If that's not enough, over the past 32 years, he has voluntarily coached baseball, ranging from five-year-old mini-minors to 17-year-old Babe Ruth players.

"I can't say no, I just say yes to everything," says Dave, laughing.

His tireless work has not gone unnoticed. In 2007, Dave was named "Citizen of the Year" for Greater Victoria in recognition of his outstanding citizenship and public service contributions.

"I knew I had been nominated for something when my wife, Anne, and I were invited to the ceremony at the Empress and a professional photographer came to the house and took my picture," says Dave.

"We sat at a table with the Mayor of Victoria, and I still

didn't figure it out. Then my name was called, and I was flabbergasted."

Of course, Dave didn't have a speech prepared, so when the emcee from CFX radio called him to the stage, Dave says he rambled on for a few minutes about his work with the Legion and "Spinoza Bear," who was a therapy bear for sick children, and how the legion gave Spinoza to needy children throughout BC. He also had the opportunity to talk about how the Legion is involved with seniors' housing.

"Most people don't know that the Legion has the most affordable housing in the province with over 7,500 suites all run by Legion members. Then I remembered to thank everyone for nominating me," quips Dave.

"When Dave won the award, I was so proud, it was the high point of my life," says Anne, Dave's wife since 1957. "With Mayor Art Lowe, we went into the Bengal lounge in the hotel and celebrated with a few drinks..."

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Dave is most proud of his work with affordable housing, and rightly so.

In 1984, he joined the Royal Canadian Legion and, 12 years later, became President of the BC/Yukon Command.

“During my term as President, I became very interested in seniors’ affordable housing and I’m still on their development committee,” says Dave.

At the same time, he was President of the BC Seniors Living Association for three years and he spent eight years on board of the Greater Victoria Eldercare Foundation.

“I am very committed to ensuring our seniors have safe, quality housing to enjoy in their twilight years.”

There’s more! For the past 18 years, Dave was President of the South Vancouver Island Housing Society (SVIHS)—a non-profit society operated by members from the seven branches of the Royal Canadian Legion in Greater Victoria, which in turn owns and operates the Legion Manor Victoria.

The Legion Manor offers independent, supported and assisted living suites for seniors on five acres of beautifully landscaped grounds on the Saanich Peninsula.

“One of my duties as a board member of SVIHS was to see if and how we can help,” Dave reminisces. And he certainly helped: With the Legion behind him, Dave was instrumental in raising over \$14 million to build a 68-suite assisted living building that was added to its 78 existing cottages for independent living.

The SVIHS five-year plan in Victoria is to create additional buildings so that any senior (civilian or veteran) will have a “clean, secure place so they can enjoy a good quality of life in their ‘golden years,’” says Dave.

When Dave first got involved with the Housing Society, he mainly listened and learned. He soon became passionate about providing affordable housing for seniors and veterans. Two years later, he was president.

“I noticed that we had an awful lot of wasted space – five acres to be precise – so I started a campaign to build assisted living, borrowed \$14 million and got a contractor,” Dave says, nonchalantly.

It’s not that easy for a non-profit to get a loan for any amount, and particularly difficult for a “seniors only” development.

“If not for Dave going the commercial route and obtaining a loan from Coast Capital, the assisted living for seniors project would likely not have happened,” says Rod Hughes, the current SVIHS president. “He is the driving force behind everything. With this financing, we were able to build three storeys of assisted living for seniors, and it’s been full ever since.”

“I met Dave when I was in the Navy,” adds Rod. “As President of the Legion, he came to the base to talk to the Admiral. I soon learned that the smaller the community, the bigger the impact of the Legion. And I also learned that not much gets by Dave. He is a force of nature and I’m honoured to follow in his footsteps, particularly when it comes to building.”

Affordable housing has long wait lists and Dave’s goal is to

eliminate the need for wait lists. He was on a team for a recent build in Vancouver.

Dave joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1953 and for 25 years he served on numerous ships, mainly in the Pacific and a short stint in Pearl Harbour at a naval communication facility, which led to a post with Communications Canada as a Radio Inspector. He also became the senior radio inspector for deep sea shipping on Vancouver Island, which included all foreign freighters, passenger ships and drill ships.

During the last six years of his career, Dave was promoted to Operations Manager for Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. He also became District Manager of Yukon and Northern BC for Communications Canada for a period of two years before returning to Victoria permanently.

RETIREMENT

Dave retired in 1994, just in time to be the supervisor of all 675 vehicles at the Commonwealth Games.

“I volunteered to be a driver, figuring I could relax for a few weeks but, in four days, I was promoted to run the operation,” says Dave. “I never worked so hard in my life, and my payment was a sandwich per day. I never even got to see the Games.”

And so, his volunteer career began.

“Anne told me I needed to find something to do so I wouldn’t be ‘underfoot’ when I retired,” says Dave. “So, when she asks me why I am doing all this, I say ‘You told me to.’”

Little did Anne know that Dave’s tireless volunteer work would comprise 40-50 hours a week (these days it’s only 15 hours). He made Anne tired just telling her what he was doing.

“He’s never home, and that’s a good thing, even when we plan on doing something together and something more important with the Legion comes up,” says Anne.

She also joined the Legion and helps Dave, serving lunches and helping seniors with their grocery shopping.

And once a year there’s the big Legion’s Poppy Fund.

“I do piddly stuff compared to Dave; I don’t know how he does it, how he makes time for everyone. But I do know that life with Dave is never dull.”

Dave was a Board Member of the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors for a three-year term. This was a non-partisan council formed by Premier Campbell to advise the government on future policy regarding seniors.

“During the time I was on the BC/Yukon command of the Legion, we travelled around the province to see what was needed,” says Dave.

But he didn’t stop there.

In his role with the Legion, Dave went to a trade show for affordable housing in Vancouver and was asked to join the board of the BC Senior’s Living Association (BCSLA). BCSLA has 153 members of senior housing communities providing independent living, assisted living and complex care.

It involved his passion – senior assisted living – so he signed up. Two years later, in 2012, he was elected President for a two-year term. He is still a member of the association.

There’s even more!

Snapshot

with David Sinclair

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

"The same advice I gave my son and daughter and my grandsons. When you find what interests you, take the time to learn all you can that will help you in whatever endeavour you wish to follow. My most rewarding moments are when something I'm working on comes together and it helps make the community a better place."

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

"I think my wife, Anne, has had the most influence on me. She taught me responsibility and hard work just by watching her. Something I have carried all my life."

What are you most grateful for?

"I have been blessed by having a loving family and surrounding myself with like-minded, hard-working people who all want the same goal - to make this a better place."

What do you do to stay grounded?

"It always goes back to family. I enjoy our get-togethers, especially now with my great grandchildren. I hope it doesn't sound corny, but I really believe it."



Dave sat on the Duke of Edinburgh Board of Directors for eight years, until 2013. During that time, he started a program that involved an award for youth who excel in their community.

WORKING WITH VETERANS

Dave is proud of the contributions he and the Legion have made to help veterans.

He was instrumental in launching "The Canadian Military & Veterans Transition Program" that established clinics to help serving and retired military members, as well as their families with stress.

"When a member was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) they were discharged from the service more often than not," Dave explains.

They had families to support and mortgages and often a lot of stress. Fortunately, some veterans knew about the Legion's programs to help them cope. They found Dave mainly by attending one of the Legion's programs called Second Career Assistance Network Seminars.

"I talk about how I transitioned from military to civilian life and advise what to do before getting out of the military – it kind of sounds like jail," says Dave with a chuckle.

While Dave wants everyone to know that the Legion is not just for veterans, veterans are definitely looked after under Dave's watchful eye. The Legion has donated millions of dollars from their poppy fund to hundreds of veterans over 15 years – and they are still being supported.

For instance, they sent some vets, some

of whom were in their 30s with families and mortgages, to a ranch in Kamloops to spend a week with their peers. They were taught how to cope and how to control their issues.

"Luckily, the military has recently understood the wisdom in helping people and they now understand that PTSD sometimes comes with other issues like booze and drugs," says Dave.

Despite an enormous workload, Dave regularly visits residents at Broadmead Lodge (a long-term care home for veterans).

And if that isn't enough, he initiated "Wellness Seminars" for aging veterans, which has expanded province-wide. The program started in the late 1990s and included a few vets from WWII and Korea. In the last few years, vets from Afghanistan and peacekeepers have attended.

"In BC alone, we helped 350 veterans suffering from PTSD. I, too, had some issues. You can't spend 25 years in the military without it affecting you," he says.

"It's little things, like not sitting down in a public place unless your back is to the wall. And a car backfiring will set you off. Think about it: These people were in a war zone one day and walking the streets of Vancouver or Victoria the next day."

Thankfully, the military has stepped up over the years, and Dave says they are doing a good job supporting those with PTSD.

Dave's military career involved moving from Victoria or Aldergrove (because he was an experienced west coast sailor) to Halifax every two years, which was hard on the kids. Family life was one upheaval after another.

Today, Dave does take some time off to be with family.

"After the kids grew up and moved out, we took a few big trips, like a month in China. A 22-day cruise from Miami to Victoria was our last big hurrah," says Anne. "But Dave can't completely relax, worrying about what he should be doing. He can't even go to Vegas or Reno for a few days to play poker without people calling."

These days Dave and Anne are happy to stay home – they love Victoria.

And so many people in Victoria love Dave. |

Long-time broadcasters Michael Forbes and Lisa Marshall, known as "Forbes and Marshall," combine their love of broadcasting and helping older adults with their real estate needs in a **new podcast**, in collaboration with **INSPIRED Magazine**.

Check out this month's interview with Dave Sinclair at www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast





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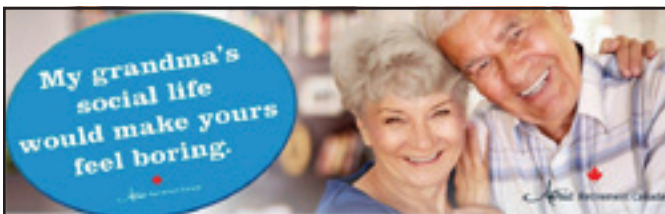
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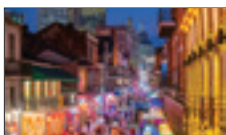


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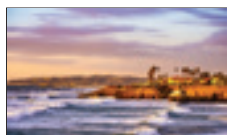
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WEAVING THROUGH HISTORY AT COLOSSAL CAVE MOUNTAIN PARK

by Jane Cassie

The fit spelunkers suit up with hard hats and headlamps. They're told to remove cumbersome backpacks that may hamper their maneuverability through claustrophobically confined spaces. "Does anyone feel uncomfortable crawling through dark narrow tunnels?" the guide inquires. Although sticking like glue to the neighbouring group of scaredy cats, my heart does a flip-flop for those heading off on this Wild Cave Tour.

The Colossal Cave Mountain Park in the Tucson valley near Vail, Arizona is just an hour's drive from our refined refuge, the Arizona Inn. And, although they both share historical happenings, this jaunt to 'down under' also adds an element of excitement.

While the agile explorers lunge into unlit passageways, our group chooses the road more travelled, where paving stones weave through illuminated limestone tunnels. Our unexpected entrance generates the flutter from at least two sets of wings, and before we can focus, they're gone from our sight.

"You're lucky," Mickey, our guide, declares with enthusiasm. "Not everyone is privy to bat sightings." In spite of our good fortune, I realize that my body chill has nothing to do with a drop in temperature, as this subterranean grotto remains at a constant 70 degrees Fahrenheit year-round.

Home to almost half the bat species in Arizona, this cavernous cocoon is also a regular hangout for foxes, badgers and legends of the past. "In the 1800s, these craggy interiors were a favourite hideaway for train robbers and bandits,"

says Mickey. "And over 1,000 years ago, they were used by the Hohokam Indians for shelter."

We check out the well-preserved artifacts that bore ritual significance to the Hohokam tribe: prayer sticks, known as Pahos, small-scale bows, and reed cigarettes that once produced symbolic smoke formations.

We come to a glossy limestone protrusion that goes by the name of Old Baldy and are advised to rub it for good luck. "It's a protective measure," jests Mickey. "After all, you wouldn't want to fall into the bottomless pit or lose any body parts!" It's obvious that most visitors have abided by this ritualistic task, as the head of the prominence is smoother than a crystal ball.

As we plod through the labyrinth of tunnels that spans six storeys, our imaginations are stimulated by geological formations: a kingdom of elves, a ruling king and a rock 'n' roll room featuring Kermit the frog. Icicle-shaped stalagmites suspend from the cathedral room's heaven-bound ceiling and, like cave bells, create acoustics that are supposedly three times more effective than most recording studios. If all were to come to life, it would be volume overload. Instead, the rocky formations, glazed over by crystals and iron oxide deposits, emit a silence that's golden.

We discover that most caverns are formed by rainwater, but

ABOVE | Icicle-shaped stalagmites suspend high above our heads in the Kingdom of the Elves. Photo: Compliments of Arizona Tourism

not so with Colossal Cave. Hot sulfur-laden brine has percolated from below and hollowed out the passageways of this underground wonderland. Instead of burrowing deep, the tunnels recede into the mountain and are always at a comfortable temperature. The cave stopped being formed about 4,000 years ago and for the past 70 has been as dry as a bone.

The enchantment continues, and like rats following the Pied Piper, we are led through more of the maze. "The cave has 38 fractures and one major fault line," says Mickey, "which we are standing on now." We can clearly see the crevice that severs the rugged foundation. And feeling a sense of uncertainty we plod on.

Shimmering with splendour is the crystal forest and silent waterfall, where a dazzling display of flowstone has been frozen in time. We pass by the cave's largest stalactite that weighs two-and-a-half tonnes and appropriately goes by the name of Fang. We shimmy around Bone Crusher, a stalagmite that attempts to block our path, and we veer into the bottomless pit without letting our curiosity get the best of us.

The Living Room is 21 metres below the parking lot and is the lowest point in Colossal Cave. According to legend, it's also the location where the bandits set up camp when taking refuge. "It may be a dream home for fugitives, Fodor and even Disney's Seven Dwarfs," my husband mocks, "but it's sure not the Arizona Inn!" |

For IF YOU GO information, visit www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/colossal-cave-mountain-park

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PENDER'S FIRED-UP VOLUNTEERS

by JOHN THOMSON

The smoke is clearing as 18-year-old Ben Shugar emerges from the live fire training facility on Pender Island. He's tired but energized.

"Live fire, yeah, I'm really into it," he says. "I love the feeling. There's so much adrenaline but you also have to take deep breaths and calm your mind so you can think clearly."

Ben and his buddies have just tackled a simulated house fire, coming to grips with heat, smoke and working in a confined space. This is no ordinary after-school activity, and this is no ordinary camp.

Created 18 years ago as a six-day introduction to fire suppression and search and rescue, the Gulf Islands Fire Rescue Cadet Camp is held every two years during March Spring Break at Fire Hall No. 1 on Pender Island halfway between the Mainland and Vancouver Island.

Activities include, among other things, putting out fires, rappelling down walls, applying CPR and strapping casualties into baskets for extraction by helicopter. Students get valuable work-experience credit – their school pays their way – but the hope is they'll move on after graduation and pursue a career as first responders and assist their local fire departments in a real emergency.

Pender Island Fire Chief Mike Dine, who runs the program, says volunteer help is crucial to the camp's success – it would cost the organizers three times as much without it, he says – and Pender's older generation always steps up.

"I have more volunteers than I can take. I can't feed them all," he laughs.

Volunteers like 62-year-old Ian Elliott. Semi-retired after a career in construction and management, Ian has been involved with the camp since it began. He drives the shuttle bus, fills the oxygen bottles with air for the breathing packs, helps prepare the breakfast buffet and makes sandwiches for lunch in the camp kitchen. As a former Pender Island firefighter and camp trainer, himself, he knows what he's talking about.

"We may not have the physicality of what we did in our thirties and forties," he says, "but we do have the knowledge, the ability and the time to assist and help the next generation."

Sixty-three-year-old volunteer Linda Simpson also helps. She moved to Pender Island in 2008 after a career in the forestry sector, the RCMP and then the Coast Guard and joined the camp the moment she arrived. She volunteers her time as the "parade marshal," or, as she puts it, "ensuring that the clock ticks properly," making sure everyone adheres to the schedule and reports to their activity. She's a familiar fixture wandering the premises with clipboard in hand and, although she blushes at the moniker, she's the camp's unofficial Mom.

"Sometimes the kids need someone to talk to and they have me as a sounding board," she says. "So, anything they need assistance with, I'll do my best to resolve it. I just keep the wheels turning."

ABOVE | Pender Island fire cadets tackle a car fire while in training.

TOC | Volunteer Brigitte Prochaska and daughter Morgan. Photos: John Thomson

Sixty students from the neighbouring islands applied for a position this year; 16 were selected. Broken down into four teams of four, each unit rotates through a series of activities or stations. And yes, it is co-ed.

"It's really rewarding to see what your work is doing," says 17-year-old Maeve Junker after helping to peel back the roof of a wreck with hydraulic tools. Maeve's interested in a career in Emergency Services, and she can do whatever her male counterparts can do.

"You don't have to bench press 350 pounds to be a first responder," says Fire Chief Mike. "Everyone's experiencing the same level of danger, stress and strength."

Students not only learn firefighting skills but teamwork and co-operation. Sure, they may be nervous entering the program on Day One, says Ian, but working together breeds success and "by the end of the week, they're positively glowing with self-confidence."

Pender resident Brigitte Prochaska has been with the camp since its inception. She's the Southern Gulf Islands Emergency Program Co-ordinator but she's also been a volunteer firefighter with Pender Island Fire Rescue for the past 20 years. During camp drills, Brigitte runs the pump panel on the fire truck feeding water to the hoses. She introduced her daughter, Morgan, to the camp 12 years ago. Morgan not only continued her training to become a first responder with the View Royal Fire Department but often returns to the camp to help others.

"I'm so proud," says Brigitte. "I've been to every camp there is. After the first camp, I was just so energized watching what was happening to these kids as they went through the process. How they come in and how they leave. It's amazing."

Amazing is the keyword. Planning is about to begin for the next camp two years down the road, and you can bet Brigitte, Ian, Linda, and the others will be on hand to help when training resumes. |

For more information about Pender Island Fire Cadet Camp, visit www.facebook.com/FIRECADETS

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UNSTOPPABLE

by SAM MARGOLIS

At 65, and blind, Victoria's Doris Belusic does not allow the lack of sight to serve as an obstacle to a full and meaningful life. She is a poet, non-fiction writer, children's book author, magazine editor, recent university graduate and, together with her husband, the builder of several houses around the city, including a sevenplex.

All the while, Doris keeps an active social calendar, plays the guitar and ukulele, travels and, according to everyone who has sampled her cuisine, cooks phenomenal meals.

In her early 20s, Doris was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a degenerative eye disorder of the retina, the inner back layer of the eye which has the visual cells that send images to the brain. When retina cells get damaged, it frequently leads to blindness.

"Often during this long progression of many years, in my case, from sight to blindness, your central tunnel vision can still be fairly clear, until it, too, fades out," explains Doris. "Today, seeing anything depends on lighting, the direction of it, glare and so on. Mostly I see light, shapes, blur and sometimes things with strong light-dark contrast."

"I use a long white cane to get around," she adds. "It makes all the difference to independence and safety."

Doris, who spent her professional career in public health, started work as an operating room aide at a local hospital when she was fresh out of high school. She later moved on to being a unit clerk in orthopedics.

In 2006, as she approached 50, the literary bug bit, and Doris began dabbling in poetry. "I can't say why I started to write poetry, but I was inspired many years earlier as a teen when I heard BBC personality, Pam Ayres, read her humorous poem



Writer and editor Doris Belusic.
Photo: Daryl Jones

on a Victoria radio station. I bought her book," says Doris. "Since then, I've written all sorts of poems."

In 2013, Doris wondered how many more credits she needed to complete her BA degree, as she had spent several years in her early 20s at the University of Victoria and Camosun College.

When she checked into it, she learned she was half-way towards graduating. With some urging from a friend, she decided to finish her BA, which she completed in 2019 at age 61, by taking writing classes to hone her craft.

"I loved going to classes, learning and being amongst the students and professors. It was all very inspiring and fun. It opened my mind and taught me the skills to write well," she says. "Being a mature student was great. The students were very nice and treated me no differently. Most of them, in their 20s, impressed me by how intelligent they were."

Going to school, however, was not without its challenges as a blind student. "A friend put a carrot in front of my nose,

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A portrait of Sophie Pemberton, a woman with red hair, looking upwards. The portrait is framed by a large, green, geometric shape that resembles a stylized letter 'P' or a folded piece of paper. The background of the portrait is a floral pattern.

offering to drive me to classes the first year to make it easy,” recalls Doris. “Each year, she helped me learn the routes from the bus stop to the buildings and to the classrooms. This was crucial for me, so I could travel around and function independently in an unfamiliar setting.”

For the past 25 years, Doris has been a member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), an organization of blind people that works to improve the lives of blind Canadians through mentoring, advocacy and education. Among CFB’s core philosophical beliefs are that blindness is a characteristic – not a handicap – and that blindness is not what defines people, nor should it hold them back.

For over a decade, Doris has been the editor of the CFB’s publication, *The Blind Canadian*. Each issue of the magazine focuses on the lives of blind people around the country, on their accomplishments and on advocacy for the breaking down of barriers to the blind wherever they may exist.

“Through CFB I have learned most of what I know about blindness and the abilities of blind people,” she says. “CFB has had some super role models and mentors over the years. The organization holds a positive philosophy on blindness and knows that with equality and opportunity blind people can live the lives they want.”

Earlier this year, Doris completed a Grade 3-6 children’s book, *I Am Blind* (Beech Street Books, 2024).

“It’s a lived experience book,” she says about the project. “I am hoping it may be of interest to those who are thinking about buying books for the little people in their lives. This nonfiction children’s book is full of messages that I have been sharing in my advocacy role with the CFB.”

Next up on Doris’s to-do list is publishing a book of poetry. “It’s a dream of mine,” she says.

No doubt she’ll make it a reality. |

To learn more about the Canadian Federation of the Blind, visit cfb.ca or email info@cfb.ca

Doris’s book is available for pre-order at: <https://www.saundersbook.ca> through Indigo or your local bookstore. Link to the series: <https://www.saundersbook.ca/series/WBEE0068>

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VANCOUVERISM: CREATING A LIVEABLE CITY

by J. KATHLEEN THOMPSON

From my second-floor apartment in downtown Vancouver, I see a particular dog and its owner on the street every day. The man is in charge of the dog's stuffie, and the dog is eagerly straining on his leash, oblivious to the wheelchair tethered to his back legs. It is when the dog attempts to break into a gallop upon seeing the dog park ahead that he remembers his limitations.

The tail doesn't stop wagging, however, until they enter the park's holy gates, and his owner throws the stuffie, willing his dog to chase it as he has always done. A chorus of barking ensues and soon the stuffie is buried under a scrum of wagging tails and playful snarls. The owners are drawn in, laughing as they try to untangle the melee.

Living next to a dog park in Vancouver has awakened me not only to the more endearing qualities of dogs, but to the more delightful features of living in the dense urban core of BC's largest city. Neighbourhoods that were once colourless blocks of high-rises and congested streets are now enlivened by oases of green and pedestrian-and bike-friendly gathering places.

Sidewalks brim with children eager to get to school, dogs keen to get to their favourite meet-up places, and every age and ethnicity stopping to linger at the many benches and garden plots that now dot the streets. Physical landscapes have been transformed into social ones, integrating live, work and play spaces into compact walkable neighbourhoods.

When did this radical makeover of Vancouver happen? Some say the empowering moment occurred when a grass-roots movement successfully blocked the extension of the freeway through Vancouver, saving the city from soulless swaths of asphalt and speeding cars. Others say it was the changes triggered by Expo '86, and how the transformation of a neglected industrial landscape into a dazzling waterfront village awakened people to the power of urban renewal.

Others will say it was the vision of one man: urban planner Larry Beasley, who, in 1990, could see that a peninsula with dense neighbourhood boroughs, no highways, and miles of waterfront, provided the perfect starting point for a dynamic new city plan. With its mix of homes, services and work-places, downtown Vancouver was already a convenient and functional '15-minute city' – merely enhancing that would be the next step in the city's development.

Under Beasley's direction, the unique urban planning

model that became known as “Vancouverism” was launched. Within that model, two design principles were non-negotiable: 1) views of the mountains and ocean could not be obstructed, and 2) the synchronous relationship of residential and commercial spaces must be retained.

To accommodate those principles, the towers built were tall and thin with maximum window space for residents and minimal obstruction within the view corridors, and mounted on three-to-five-storey podiums customized for commercial use.

In addition to the mixed-use tower and podium style of the high-rises erected, “Vancouverism” promoted development that prioritized sustainable, community-minded practices. One of these was listening to the residents and incorporating their ‘inside knowledge’ into the planning model.

Inclusive public spaces with a wide range of activities – basketball courts, dog parks, playgrounds and community gardens – were proposed, along with such ‘tactical’ ideas as pop-up plazas, art installations, laneway murals and outside yoga sessions to playfully nudge people towards imagining the interactive possibilities of shared spaces.

Another of these sustainable practices was ensuring equitable distribution of the city’s ‘green assets.’ Given that trees are sources of shade, beauty and air filtration of CO2, ‘leafy’ streets and public spaces are essential to every neighbourhood, not just the affluent ones.

Using the 3-30-300 rule developed by UBC urban forestry researcher, Cecil Konijnendijk, city planners aimed to ensure that every resident was able to see at least three mature trees from their home, live in a neighbourhood with at least 30 per cent tree canopy cover, and be within 300 metres of a public green space. The myth of the city as a concrete jungle was being dismantled, tree, by planted tree.

Today, strolling through streets filled with maple trees and rhododendrons in the most densely populated area of the city – the West End – I peer through the gauze of green to the towering high-rises, each a small city unto themselves, and marvel at the tranquility around me.

I follow the street through becalmed traffic areas, bicycle-only accesses, and a greenway that funnels pedestrians, cyclists and rollers into a pop-up plaza with terraced outdoor seating and a busy Mobi bike-rental station. A bagpiper stands at one corner of the plaza, strains of “Mairi’s Wedding” filling the square. People carefully instruct their dogs as they pass by him, stopping to drop coins into his open instrument case.

From paved parks and forgotten spaces to colourful alleyways and plazas, Vancouverism’s formula for vibrant and liveable communities has captured the world’s attention. Cities are taking up its challenge; in Dubai, for instance, you’ll find a copy of the Yaletown waterfront, complete with a False Creek (truly – it was once a desert!), a seawall and stand of tower and podium buildings.

And even though Beasley is not one to rest on his laurels, asserting that affordability, inequity and the climate crisis are issues that need addressing now, I think we can be grateful for this unexpected haven for happy dogs, impromptu socials, and a city that, on this sunny afternoon, is working like a charm. |

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THE SANCTUARY OF NOSTALGIA

by JOCELYN GARWOOD

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed looking at daily news reports. The onslaught of death, despair, destruction and corruption I see on a regular basis is often more than I can bear.

I'm frequently overcome with anger, frustration, sadness and an overall sense of helplessness. I can't fix the world, even though I'd like to. I'm just one tiny voice in the wilderness.

Sometimes, to gain some relief, I try to distance myself from all the despair by ignoring the plight of the masses. I try to adopt indifference. However, that seldom works because I invariably witness the plight of an individual who represents the plight of the very masses I'm trying to ignore.

This happened to me in Turkey a couple of years ago. I had stopped at a bakery in Izmir to pick up some sesame-seed cookies. As the young clerk was tallying up my purchases, I noticed a mass of thick cord-like purple scars on his wrists and forearms. I tried to look away but found myself transfixed by such horrible disfigurement. He saw me staring, and simply said, "Syrian prison." I apologized for staring at him whereupon he lifted his shirt to show me other evidence of the torture he'd endured. I felt sick.

Along with his father and older brother, he'd been imprisoned in Syria. He'd been tied up with heavy wire, then hung with his arms wrenched up behind his back and left that way for days on end. The wires had cut very deeply into his flesh. Both his father and brother had been shot dead.

Eventually, he was released from prison, but he was left crippled, both mentally and physically, by his experience.

At his mother's insistence, the money the family had saved up was to be used to get him and his sister out of Syria. They were smuggled into Turkey.

As I left the bakery, my thinking immediately reverted to the plight of the masses and with that, again came the terrible sense of helplessness.

Then, another newscast, another newsstand and more anger, sadness and frustration. My God, where to go, what to do to get some relief from a world gone mad?

Nostalgia has become my sanctuary. Either it comes upon me by accident, or I seek it out intentionally.

For me, nostalgia is a safe place. It's a place where I once was, where I was happy – maybe even at times, euphoric – and where I felt safe. It's a place of 'sweet sadness': sweet because that place once existed; sadness because it no longer exists.

The nostalgia that is triggered by accident is often the result of a sensory event, sight and sound being the most common ones.

One of my more recent retreats into nostalgia was triggered by a statue called "The Lamplighter" (*pictured*). I discovered



this beautiful work of art just last year next to Vilnius University in Lithuania.

I love that statue and as I stood looking at it, I found myself humming "The Old Lamplighter." When I got back to my flat, I brought "The Old Lamplighter" up on YouTube.

I was only about six or seven when this song was popular, but listening to it caused a huge wave of memories to come flooding back. Most of these were of the times I'd spent with my older sister.

The tears that started to flow because she is no longer here were eventually replaced by a smile of gratitude that she'd been here at all. This kind of thinking takes a lot of work, and it doesn't come easy.

When I saw a notice announcing the death of American singer Tony Bennett, I again found myself being drawn toward the sanctuary of nostalgia.

As I had done so often in the past, I listened once more to his rendition of "Because of You." I remembered the early '50s, especially the times with my first love, with whom after 70+ years, I am still in contact.

The 1950s were really an age of innocence. Jitterbug had given way to jive; radio had given way to TV; drive-in movies were all the rage; long skirts, bobby sox and saddle oxfords for teenage girls; Wildroot hair cream, loafers and blue denim jeans for teenage boys. What a lovely 'place' to have been and how lucky for me that I was there.

Another accidental trigger to nostalgia occurred on one of my dawn treks along a beach in Larnaca, Cyprus.

I saw the profile of a man standing on the shore looking out towards the horizon. In my mind, I began to hear "Stranger on the Shore," a haunting clarinet piece popular in the early '60s.

I was immediately whisked back to my carefree days at UBC

when this piece of music seemed to be playing everywhere.

As students, we were all so cocky and full of confidence, hope and optimism. The world was ours, we were the future, and it was all going to be smooth sailing from here on in. Reality hadn't set in yet.

Sometimes I activate nostalgia directly by reading through the many journals I've kept over the years. Other times, I slowly peruse my treasure trove of photographs.

My journals and photographs allow me to reconnect emotionally with another time and place. I can revisit the cast of characters I fell so much in love with and savour the wonderful experiences we once shared. I sometimes feel a pinch of poignancy, but it's a good feeling.

Nostalgia may not work for everyone, but it works for me and for that, I'm truly grateful. It provides a sense of balance and a thread of continuity to my life. It allows me to cope so much better with the world I live in today. |



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MAGICAL CHRISTMAS MARKETS ON THE RHINE

by KATE ROBERTSON

Strings of twinkling lights line the streets where dozens of booths are whimsically decorated with pine boughs, glittering stars and red ribbons. Sublime food aromas like savoury bratwurst, sweet waffles, chocolate and cheesy fondues permeate the air.

Most visitors, including me, have a steaming mug of gluhwein (German mulled wine) in hand as we check out the vendors selling everything from handmade wooden Christmas-tree ornaments to locally crafted clothing and knitwear. I'm at my first-ever European Christmas Market in Basel, Switzerland.

Earlier that day at the port in Basel, with the 154 other passengers, we boarded the *Ama Mora*, one of AMA Waterways twin-balcony Rhine River cruising ships for a Christmas Markets on the Rhine cruise. On the seven-day cruise, we will visit markets in Switzerland, France and Germany on our way to Amsterdam.

Christmas markets in Europe have a long history, especially in Germany, where they date back to the Middle Ages. Markets are often held in the old town squares, close to a church, historically to get more people to attend church services. Generally, the markets run the entire Advent period, the last week of November until December 24th.

But this cruise is about more than just Christmas markets, and each day there is a chance to learn about the rich local history. Here are some highlights for me from each of the four countries we stopped in.

LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND

Usually just over an hour's drive from the Basel port, our trip to the beautiful lakeside setting of Lucerne takes us double that due to a snowstorm. Lucerne has more fresco paintings than anywhere else in Switzerland, and houses decorated with frescoes line the square in the car-free Old Town.

My favourite is the medieval Chapel Bridge, one of the oldest covered wooden bridges in Europe, built in 1332. The bridge runs from New Town on the south bank of the Reuss to the medieval Old Town and the water tower. The extraordinary 17th century picture panels within the eaves depict historic Swiss scenes. Tragically, many of the original paintings were destroyed in a 1993 fire but have subsequently been restored.

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

An overnight cruise through some locks (the Rhine was canalized for hydropower starting in 1932) brings us to our France stop, Strasbourg. Historically a former territory of the German empire, the city was taken over by the French in 1681 for the first time. Subsequently, the city has ping-ponged back and forth between the Germans and the French, resulting in an interesting blend of the two cultures.

As we stroll along the slushy sidewalks in the Parc de l'Orangerie, our guide is proud to point out the gargantuan stork's nests high in the treetops. In the late 20th century, the storks were on the edge of extinction, but local conservationists took to raising mating pairs. Now more than 900 storks have been born here.



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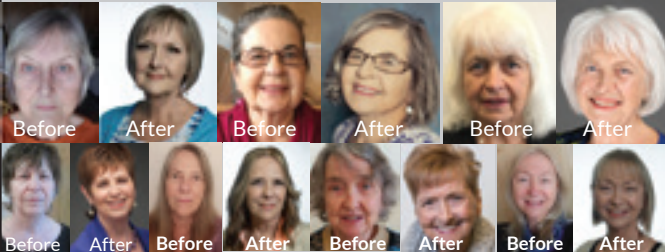
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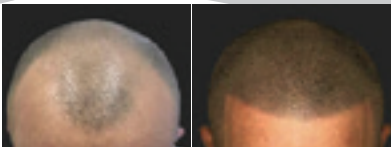
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The Christmas market set next to the Notre Dame Cathedral is Europe's oldest (dating back to 1570), and now the city hosts 11 others. With the snow falling gently on the bustling market and the backdrop of the striking masterpiece of the cathedral's Gothic architecture, I feel like I'm inside a magical snow globe (*pictured on page 1*).

THE RHINE GORGE

That night, we cruise into Germany, and after morning stops at several markets, we spend a sunny afternoon cruising through the Rhine Gorge, a UNESCO World Heritage site protected for its history. The Rhine is important as it once formed the northern boundary of the Roman Empire and was used for trade and military strategy, so defence structures, castles and cathedrals from the Middle Ages still dot its banks.

On this 65-kilometre section of the Rhine Valley, the river flows through a deep gorge. Vineyards fleck the mountainsides, so steep that at harvest the pickers need to rope up to harvest the grapes. Over 40 hilltop castles and fortresses were erected along this section over a period of 1,000 years, most now picturesque ruins. The day finishes off with a tour through one of these, the 13th century Castle Lahneck, where we learn about stories of warfare and tragedy as we follow the guide through the remaining rooms.

COLOGNE

Cologne is considered to have some of the best Christmas markets in Germany, but it also attracts several million visitors a year. After pushing our way through the markets, we opt for a Kolsch tasting tour at a local pub, and enjoy a glass of this bright, hoppy beer the way the locals do – with a warm, crispy potato pancake served with applesauce. Kolsch is a German beer that is strictly brewed to certain specifications and geographically defined to be made only within 50 kilometres of Cologne.

Cologne is unique in that the nearly 2,000-year-old city was mostly destroyed in World War II bombings. The Cologne Cathedral, started in the 13th century and completed in 1880, miraculously remained standing, and still towers over the streets with an ethereal glow (*pictured on page 18*).

AMSTERDAM

Our final cruise down the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal brings us to our last port of call. The iconic windmills are visible and already the waterway is higher than the surrounding land, flood controlled by canals.

Christmas markets in Amsterdam aren't such a big deal, and on our last day we take a canal tour, the best way to see the city.

Amsterdam's canal system dates back to the 17th century and, from the water, we get a front-row view of the charming houseboats (there are over 3,000), as the guide explains the city's extensive trading history and its most famous landmarks, like the Rijksmuseum and the Anne Frank house.

The next day, as I board my plane to return home, I can't think of a time when I've felt more in the spirit for the holiday season. |

For IF YOU GO information, visit www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/christmas-markets-rhine



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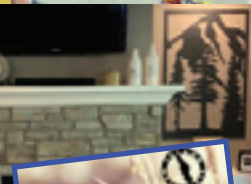
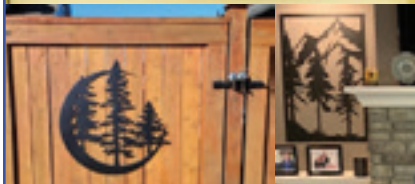


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FOREVER FIT

by EVE LEES



‘TOXINS’ IN PLANT FOODS?

Gluten, phytates, oxalates and lectins are just some of the “food toxins” in plants we are continually warned about. We are told to avoid them. If that’s the case, soon we won’t be eating anything because every plant on this planet has a protective property that is harmful to animals and humans if consumed in *large quantities*.

Some of us may react badly to even small amounts. In addition, certain people must avoid some of these properties, like those with celiac disease, who must avoid gluten or people with serious reactions to peanuts or shellfish (Incidentally, animal sources of food also have natural properties that may be harmful in large amounts – including aquatic foods).

Rice contains arsenic. But so does broccoli and many leafy greens. Broccoli also has goitrogen, as does lettuce. Many foods have cyanide, including apple seeds, almonds, elderberries, nutmeg, mangoes, cashews, rhubarb and cassava (if uncooked).

Potatoes, tomatoes and blueberries (and many other foods) have solanine, which can cause paralysis in large amounts. Nuts, legumes and many other plants have phytates and/or lectins, so-called “anti-nutrients” that may inhibit the absorption of nutrients like calcium.

Spinach and lots of other plants are rich in oxalates, another “anti-nutrient.” And the list goes on and on. Every plant has a protective property to ensure its survival from the elements, insects and being overeaten. This is nature’s assurance that the plant will continue to thrive and not become extinct.

Rabbits in the wild will not overeat lettuce because they instinctively know the goitrogens in the lettuce can harm them in large amounts. This is a perfect example of the balance animals – and humans – have with plant life. We benefit from the plant’s nutrients and the plant benefits by not being overeaten. It’s the win-win intuitive dance of nature.

But we humans have forgotten the steps in this life-on-Earth dance. For various reasons, we’ve lost this instinct or intuition. Many of us have become gluttons (knowingly

or unknowingly), overeating certain foods, like wheat (it’s in everything!). In addition, we have well-meaning but misinformed, self-proclaimed ‘experts’ telling us to avoid certain foods because they happen to contain some type of “toxin” that will destroy our good health.

Nonsense.

Every food contains at least one property that may be harmful in large quantities. So, if you listen to those who villainize a food because of one “toxin” (and sadly, ignoring all the nutrition the food offers), you will not be eating anything.

Instead, focus on choosing from a wide variety of real foods in reasonable amounts. And more often, choose foods of high quality (whole, not refined) to ensure you get all the nutrients you need to survive.

Prepare your food as necessary (like cooking your cassava, soaking your beans before cooking them, etc.) and avoid overcooking to preserve the nutrients. It also means stop eating the same foods at every meal.

Do you always have almonds for breakfast? Change it up occasionally with walnuts, filberts, etc. Instead of potatoes for each main meal, try sweet potato, jicama or even cassava. Eat spinach, Swiss chard, parsley or kale instead of lettuce in your salad. Don’t always have flax seeds; opt for chia, hemp or poppy seeds. You get the idea.

Change your food choices often and don’t overeat. You’ll keep the “toxins” down and the nutrient variety way up. |

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

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Aitutaki Lagoon
Private Island Resort
Photo: Compliments of
Rarotongan Beach
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REKINDLING ROMANCE ON THE COOK ISLANDS

by JANE CASSIE

After years of marriage, romance often needs to be rekindled – maybe a new knot needs tying, a milestone anniversary needs toasting or vows need renewing. Whether you’re rejuvenating an old-time relationship or launching into first-time nuptials, in our opinion, there are fewer places to generate those loving vibes than The Cook Islands.

The 15-isle archipelago is in the Polynesian Triangle between Tahiti and Fiji, and Rarotonga is the queen bee of them all. Billowy palms canopy the 32 kilometres of grey asphalt that rings this island gem. They throw shade over the interior hills that are cloaked with vibrant flora and line the sensuous strips of sand that hug up to iridescent blue lagoons. Coral reefs thrive beneath, heavenly floral scents waft in the sultry breeze, and crimson sunsets magnify the backdrop. What more do you need for a romantic vacay? How about some pampering properties?

Just 10 minutes from the main hub of Avarua, the Sanctuary Rarotonga On The Beach caters to adults only and her sister neighbour, The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa, is perfect for multi-generational groups. They both trace the captivating white sands of Aroa Beach, where there is tide-safe swimming, stand-up paddle boarding and sensational snorkelling.

Here on Rarotonga’s southwest coast, the sparkling waters of Aroa Lagoonarium are sheltered from the Pacific Ocean by an offshore coral reef and are home to a variety of marine life, including Eagle Rays and Green Turtles, making it the island’s leading snorkelling spot. It comes as no surprise that this hot spot has deservedly earned the title ‘Lagoon of Love.’

“Our beach front has real appeal for couples who are in search of that special ceremony,” shares Director of Sales & Marketing, Liz Raizis. “If couples are seeking a child-free

ambience, they’ll find it at our next-door property. And here at Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa we can please guests of all ages.

Over a hundred varied accommodations including rooms, suites and villas sprawl over this palatial 2.4-hectare property. And for that quintessential experience of the South Pacific, the Deluxe Beachside Suites, Grand Beachfront Suites and Honeymoon Pool & Spa Bungalow, all feature heavenly open-air showers.

Thatched-roof walkways lead us from The Rarotongan’s sandy shores to a lush South Seas garden. A waterfall plummets over grotto rocks into an infinity pool and an activities hut offers us everything from kayaks and paddleboards to night-time snorkelling tours. We can feed the reef fish, learn to dance the ’ura (hula), make a fresh flower lei, play the ukulele – all which are part of the complimentary Activities Programme. And while children make new friends in the free Moko Kids Club, us older kids can relax with a soothing coconut-oil massage at The Rarotongan’s SpaPolynesia.

Another attraction that we’re captivated by during our stay is the resort’s famous Island Night, featuring E-Matike Island troupe’s award-winning performers.

Beads of perspiration dampen the beautiful Cook Islander’s copper-tone brow and beneath a quivering grass skirt, her hips swivel to the beat of rhythmic drums. Her partner also gyrates beneath his skimpy loin cloth and while knocking his knees together and swaying both arms, he performs his African tribal-like boogie. Before long, they’re joined by a team of others who range in age from the very young to the aged fit. And in spite of the sultry stillness that engulfs the open-air stage, they all shake and shimmer in perfect synchronicity.

It's certainly an experience that leaves lasting memories – as is our next Cook Island destination the following day.

“All aboard on a one-way trip to Paradise, ladies and gents,” a voice calls out. Although decked out in Polynesian florals instead of traditional navy gear, the make-shift pontoon boat Captain knows his business. “If you don’t ride our cruiser, you’d better be a good swimmer,” he says with an impish grin. The two-minute voyage to the private island is certainly doable by front crawl, but the venture helps authenticate the real Robinson Crusoe feel.

A modern-day version of *Fantasy Island* comes alive after we disembark on Akitua, and home of the island’s solo property, Aitutaki Lagoon Private Island Resort. Swaying palms stand like watch-tower sentinels as they line the pristine beachfront of this adults-only paradise and all accommodations cast an allure with their captivating features. The beachfront bungalows entice with their superior views, the garden bungalows are embraced by manicured flora and the over-water bungalows (our heavenly hut

away from home) cantilever beyond the sensuous shoreline to offer us a quick dip into a world-class lagoon.

Over the next two days, after slathering up with sunscreen, we splash in the glorious Pacific, paddle and kayak to neighbouring islands, and laze about in idle reverie. As well as a glistening pool and pampering spa, we’re offered everything from coconut climbing and fish feeding to sarong tying and Cook Island culinary lessons. And when we prefer to be served, we have tasty dining options to choose from.

As the sun drops beneath the horizon, the lagoon’s aquamarine surface shimmers with brilliance. The distant evergreen islets transform to sapphire mounds and the crystal blue skies turn a coral pink with streaks of amber and orange. It’s a silent symphony of colour that seems to go on forever. And it’s the perfect view to end every romantic Cook Island day. |

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by VERENA FOXX

JULIE & TOM

“You can’t put a price on the experience we just had with our grown children,” says Julie. “It was profound.”

Julie is referencing the anniversary trip that the family of four Vancouverites recently returned home from.

Julie and Tom, her husband of 28 years, decided to not only revisit the Greek island where they eloped in 1995, but to invite their sons into their memories with them.

Both Canadians, living in Los Angeles at the time, Julie, an actor, and Tom, a film editor, had imagined a runaway marriage in Italy after dating for four years, until they found out that Italian matrimonial law required witnesses that had known them for longer than a day or so.

That’s when they decided to get married in Greece, where all they needed under Greek law was their marriage licence, translated into Greek by consular services, and no witnesses.

They chose the island of Paros, where neither of them had been, and which had airport access. “I also loved that it sounded like Paris,” adds Julie.

Before landing in Paros, the couple travelled extensively through many of Europe’s vibrant cities, starting in Paris, then Florence, Venice, and Rome, staying in Bed & Breakfasts and exploring their cultural interests, mostly on foot.

Their Greek wedding was the apex of the adventure. “We were never completely sure that we were married to each other,” they laugh, “because the

ceremony was completely conducted in Greek.”

It was always their intention to celebrate their 25th anniversary, in 2020, back in Paros. They wanted to introduce their two sons, by then in their early 20s, to their past by retracing their 1995 travels.

When the pandemic got in the way, they deferred their adventure until 2023.

Julie, now 63, and Tom, 75, knew it was high time to relive their memories. This time, they also invited extended family and friends to join them in the Paros celebration that was held on the same day and at the same time in early May as their elopement 28 years earlier.

The family of four, after the Paros party, then headed out to re-trace, in reverse, Julie and Tom’s European travels.

“The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, for example, had been closed for renovations in 1995 when we were there, and this time we were able to spend hours languishing in the company of Renaissance art,” says Julie. “Whereas in Venice, we ended up doing mostly everything we had done on our earlier trip.”

Spending the same amount of time on this trip as they had in the past, the family of four created new memories in the present, for all of them to embrace into the future.

“It’s in the follow-up of the experience that you realize how meaningful it was,” says the couple. “We absolutely loved sharing what we loved with our adult children. You only know it by doing it.” |

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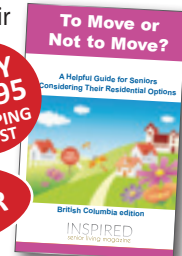
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PLANNING CHRISTMAS



If you have ever thought of changing up December and doing something different for the holiday season, you're in good company. For many years, I participated in a very merry season, with parties, Christmas concerts, family dinners and get-togethers. Sometimes, we drove for hours in a snowstorm to get to our destination. My life is different now. And so, these ideas to try something new are coming from my need to do something different.

IDEA No. 1

If you long to leave the Christmas decorations in the storage unit, the turkey at its free-range farmyard, or the snow shovel for the house sitter to use, if needed, you could contemplate a trip to a warmer locale. Just take one piece of carry-on luggage that only has two swimsuits, a coverup, change of underwear and your makeup bag with your medications in it. Don't forget your passport! You can buy toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant and sunscreen when you arrive at your destination. Many places have department or drug stores if you aren't at a fancy resort that supplies such items.

One year, our Christmas tree was replaced with a yellow piñata, our turkey dinner was replaced with a barbecue by the Cuale River in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and our crazy Christmas sweaters were replaced with bathing suits and crazy, jokey t-shirts. We truly had a Christmas season to remember with old and new friends that "happened" to be in the area. The weather forecast was hot and sunny. My mental outlook was the same!

IDEA No. 2

If your storage locker is too small for you to store a Christmas tree or if you want to leave the live tree in the forest, try substituting a step ladder. My daughter lives in a pretty little house on a lake up north and has decided not to cut down a tree every year, but instead to use a step ladder.

She found the idea on Pinterest and asked her friends on Facebook if anyone had an old ladder she could have. Someone did! It has rungs for poinsettias, holly or Christmas decorations, and when her boys come for Christmas, she still loads the space under it full of gifts. It's a fun way to decorate and there is no need for tinsel.

IDEA No. 3

Have you Zoomed Christmas? In 2020, the Zoom Christmas became a "thing." People synchronized their meal with family and friends across the world to be together on Zoom. When I checked on Google, I found a whole new industry has been created – a whole new way of doing Christmas!

Two of my favourite ideas come out of Europe. The first is Reindeer Games. Rudolph is retiring and his lead position must be filled. Participants vie for the coveted front reindeer position. It uses Chrome and Zoom. Groups from eight to 150 people participate, so you can include your whole family wherever they are in the world.

The second – an adult option on Zoom – is Christmas Cocktails. A mixologist, who lives in the Alps, teaches participants how to make cocktails in front of a view overlooking a snowy Alpine Village. He delivers a hamper of ingredients to your door ahead of time. Sounds to me like a good way to spend Christmas Eve, if you want to sleep through the rest of Christmas!

And don't forget to send out your virtual Christmas Cards – no postage required just a computer, the internet and your favourite way of communicating with those you like and love around the world.

However you choose to celebrate, may your holiday season be filled with events that make you happy and create memories. |

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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