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55+ lifestyle magazine

SEP / OCT 2025



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HOUSE SITTING, WITH PETS
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Cover | Jean Chrétien

At 91, this former Prime Minister of Canada works almost every day and still has no plans for retirement.

Photo: Jean-Marc Carisse

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True North, Strong and Free

THRIVE BEYOND 55

by BARBARA RISTO



Parallel Journeys

This year, I stood on Parliament Hill in Ottawa for the very first time.

I was struck by the grandeur of the buildings, the sweep of the lawns, and the weight of history in every carved stone and echoing hallway.

It was a reminder that leadership, in all its forms, leaves footprints long after the individuals themselves move on.

In this issue, we profile a former Canadian prime minister whose legacy continues to ripple through our national story.

Reading his profile brought me back to my own first steps into Ottawa, standing as one citizen among millions who have been shaped by decisions made in that place.

Parliament wasn't the only milestone I found myself reflecting on this year.

Around the same time that our profiled prime minister was shaping the nation, another individual was shaping something much closer to home: Wendy Welch, who founded the Vancouver Island School of Art more than two decades ago.

Reading about her tireless commitment to creativity, I couldn't help but think back to my own beginnings.

Roughly 20 years ago, I was laying the foundations for my own publishing company. It was a leap into the unknown, fuelled less by certainty than by passion — not unlike Wendy's.

Though my art has always been more dabbling than disciplined, I have never stopped believing in the importance of artistic expression. It feeds the soul, just as leadership shapes the world.

That thread of courage and curiosity carried me into another story in this issue: the tale of a woman who discovered motorcycling in middle age.

Her account made me smile — and wince — because I had my own brush with that particular passion.

At 50, I earned my motorcycle licence and bought my first bike.

The learning curve was steep, but the exhilaration was worth it. There is something liberating about opening the

throttle, about stepping wholly outside one's comfort zone.

I sold my bike a couple of years ago, but, like the author of this article, I still carry the lessons from that season of adventure.

I know what it means to hear the call of the open road and to answer it, even when others might question why.

Adventure, of course, doesn't always involve helmets and handlebars. For some, it comes in the form of oceans and continents.

In this issue, we share the story of a woman who celebrated her 70th birthday with the trip of a lifetime: a cruise to New Zealand and Australia.

What struck me most was not just the scale of the trip, but the way it marked a milestone with purpose and joy.

This year has been the most travelled year of my life: Portugal, France, Mexico (twice), Ottawa, the Kootenays, and Thailand. Each trip was its own chapter, a reminder that new experiences remain wide open to us — if we are willing to say yes.

Travel is never only about the destinations; it's about seeing the world, and ourselves, with fresh eyes.

And then there is pilgrimage.

This month, we chronicle Japan's Shikoku Trail, an ancient route that winds past temples and through landscapes steeped in meaning. I have never walked the Shikoku, but my first trip to Asia earlier this year — to Thailand — has left me thirsty to explore more of that region of the world.

In Europe, I spent quiet moments at the pilgrimage cathedrals in Porto, Portugal and Santiago, Spain. Though I have yet to lace up my shoes for a full pilgrimage, I understand something of the longing it represents: the desire to pause, to seek, to walk with intention.

I even have a connection with the REFRESH article about martial arts. I trained in the practice of ju jitsu when I was a young woman, and spent a couple years learning karate in my 50s.

And yes, I also had a brush with Mr.

Chrétien. I was set to meet him in Ottawa earlier this year but he

was hospitalized for a heart stent two days earlier. He recovered quickly and fully, thankfully, but I will need to wait for another opportunity to meet this iconic man.

Now you know why all the articles in this issue resonate with meaning. They feel like a walk through my private life.

What else ties these stories together?

At first glance, politics, art schools, motorcycles, martial arts, cruises, and pilgrimages may seem like an odd assortment. But to me, they share a common spark.

They are about refusing to let age dictate our boundaries.

They are about curiosity, courage, and the willingness to keep saying yes — to leadership, to creativity, to adventure, to new cultures, and to spiritual journeys.

They remind us that our 50s, 60s, and 70s are not endings, but beginnings

Editing this issue has felt like holding a mirror. Each story reflected back something of my own path, and perhaps yours too.

That's the beauty of this stage of life: we have accumulated enough years to look back with perspective, but we are still facing forward with energy and hope.

Whether your personal journey leads you to Parliament Hill or the open sea, to a sketchpad or a motorbike, to a distant temple or your own backyard, what matters most is that you continue to walk it with intention.

As I put this issue into your hands, I invite you to see yourself in these stories, as I did.

Let them remind you that it's never too late for new passions, new milestones, or new journeys.

The footprints we leave — in our families, our communities, and our own hearts — are still being made, one bold step at a time. |

MOTION IS LOTION: A Martial Arts Practice

Many of us know that gerontological research emphasizes the importance of continuing to move our bodies. In fact, the Canadian Gerontology Association considers movement a cornerstone of healthy ageing.

While exercise programmes for those 55 and up are tailored to meet the changing physical needs of ageing bodies, each of us must find which form of “motion is lotion” best suits our own physiology and abilities.

The martial arts umbrella covers a wide range of practices. For seniors seeking a gentle introduction to connecting with and moving the physical self through martial arts, the Ken Ryu Jujutsu programme in Abbotsford offers just that.

Kenneth Brake, a retired respiratory therapist and nationally certified lifelong

martial arts coach, has developed a “soft form” practice based on the Japanese Aiki-jūjutsu style. This internal martial art, which he has studied for most of his adult life, is the foundation of the practice he now shares with others.

“It’s a mind-body practice that calms the mind, supports emotional regulation, and builds movement from the inside out,” says Brake, whose non-profit society offers free instruction and programmes at the Abbotsford Recreation Centre. During warmer months, sessions also take place outdoors at the Abbotsford Heritage Society.

“We aim for harmony and balance—while building strength.”

Linda, one of Ken’s students, reports that she now has a much better range of motion. “I love the classes,” she says.

“It’s very easy to follow and you can

go at your own pace,” adds Roxanne. “There is no judgment. It’s very inclusive. I felt welcomed.”

Ken’s sessions begin with intentional breathing, then progress to gentle motions, followed by balancing and focusing forms. All are practised in slow, methodical steps that calm both body and mind from the inside out.

“I never dreamed I could balance on one leg,” says another participant.

“Our 55+ programme is really taking off,” notes Ken, who runs sessions for adolescents through to seniors.

With many women in the older age group, Ken focuses not only on movements that enhance balance and flexibility to maintain mobility and prevent falls, but also on building a sense of community among participants. “Come and get some mind, body, and social connection,” invites Wendy, another class member.

“We are serving the community by offering these programmes free for all to enjoy,” says Brake, a dedicated practitioner and senior himself, who has kept diabetes at bay through his lifelong commitment to martial arts. His mantra: “Motion is Lotion.” |

LEFT | Kenneth Brake, martial arts instructor Photo: Verena Foxx

RIGHT | Kenneth Brake (far right) and one of his seniors martial arts groups, practising outdoors. Photo: Kenneth Brake





THE RT. HON JEAN CHRETIEN: Better than Ever

by JENNIFER HARTLEY

When you walk along the corridor of prime ministerial portraits outside the House of Commons chamber in Ottawa, there is one that stands out for its brilliant colour. From a bright yellow canvas, a serious face looks out, a man holding reading glasses, dressed in a suit and red tie. It is not just because of his official portrait that this man stands out.

The Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien is one of the best-known politicians and prime ministers in recent Canadian history. A feisty populist, he got things done. In 13,333 days in public office, he slayed the deficit, silenced nationalism, fixed problems, rolled up his sleeves, and governed with practical, solution-seeking leadership. He was instrumental in advancing Canada's national parks system and ensuring places like Pacific Rim were formally protected.

"Bonjour, je suis Jean Chrétien," is the way he always introduces himself, but of course, whoever meets him knows exactly who he is. It is part of his humble *petit gars de Shawinigan* (The Little Guy from Shawinigan) persona. He hails from the lumber town of Shawinigan, Quebec, where his father was a paper mill machinist.

Monsieur (as those around him address him) was number 18 of 19 children. "I knew my pecking order in my family."

His father had grand ambitions for his son. While Monsieur originally wanted to be an architect, he instead went to law school and was elected to the House of Commons at age 29.

When he left office in 2003, Monsieur was as popular with Canadians as he was when he was elected in 1993 as prime minister. For his 90th birthday in 2023, the term "30 60 90"

was the theme: 30 years since he was elected as prime minister, 60 since he had been elected to the House of Commons, and 90 for his milestone birthday.

I have had the privilege of knowing Mr. Chrétien for over 30 of those years and have seen him up close.

Yes, he is a populist politician who knows how to connect with people, but he has a very sharp mind and a sophisticated, big-picture outlook. Never a shy guy, he has stood up to world leaders, always defending Canada.

In this challenging time, it is easy to forget that we have had sovereignty issues before, a perspective Monsieur reminded us about during a recent speech.

"Way back in 1968, when the Americans sent a ship, the *Manhattan*, with no Canadian flag through our northern passage, they wanted to prove that the passage was international water. As Minister of Northern Affairs, I flew to Pond Inlet at the northern extremity of Baffin Island to confront them. I was on the *Louis St-Laurent* icebreaker. I called the captain. I said, 'I will be there in an hour and it better have the Canadian flag on the mast.' When I arrived, there was a Canadian flag on the mast."

Monsieur stood up against George Bush and didn't join the war in Iraq. Today, he stands up to Donald Trump in a way that only he can. With one sentence, he united our country, with his wit in that same speech: "I can say this. From one old guy to another old guy... Stop this nonsense!"

When I asked him to describe himself in three words, he said he's a "very normal person. Those are three words!" The truth

is, he is anything but. Behind that warm smile and populist façade is a political strategist and, as it turns out, a sports enthusiast.

“As a young guy, I loved baseball, basketball, hockey, lacrosse, softball, tennis. I tried everything.” He realized early on it needed to be a priority in his life. “It was important to me for my job to be in shape.”

As he aged, he became bolder and adventure sports became part of his repertoire.

“Generally speaking, I do things close to January 11th, my birthday. I like activities that are not done by everybody. I showed people that I was still waterskiing at 80. A lot of people will say to me, ‘bravo, you give a good example to people.’ So there is an element of bragging but there is also an element of me telling people that being older doesn’t mean you are done.”

When he was 86, it was simulated skydiving. “Floating in the air was spectacular.” He did that with his grandson. In between, while they may not be physical sports, he wrote two books, published when he was 84 and 87.

“There are other things too, you know. When I was 79, I caught some waves and went kitesurfing with a bunch of younger guys. I kept up.” (There is a video of it on YouTube.)

Today he works out with a trainer and walks four or five days a week for almost an hour. And he golfs as much as he can.

“But I also realize that more and more I am alone. I joked last summer that I did not play much golf because my partners were not accepting a tee-off time because they were on the other side of the grass. I have to find younger guys who can tolerate me.”

That sense of humour is something he says is critical to life and has been a survival skill for him.

“Humour is extremely important. It was a great tool to defuse difficult circumstances, to help people relax. To have good judgement, you need to be relaxed. You have to not worry too much. Humour was a tool that I have used all my life. But you have to work at it. I remember people didn’t understand. They said ‘Chrétien is never worried. He wears rosy glasses.’ But I always said if there was a problem, that meant there was a solution.”

He, like all of us, has experienced deep loss. During COVID, he lost the love of his life, Aline, to whom he had been married for 63 years. “She was my first girlfriend and my Rock of Gibraltar.”

It is no secret that spontaneity is the spice of Jean Chrétien’s life. Think of the shot of him grabbing a bike in Beijing and taking off on everyone, with the RCMP running furiously behind him, or leaping over a rock fence with a much younger



PG 4 | 1994 Team Canada trade mission to China resulted in this iconic photo of Mr. Chrétien riding a bike in Beijing. Photo: Jean-Marc Carisse

TOP | Simulated skydiving with his grandson in 2021 Courtesy 2021 Chrétien collection

MIDDLE | Playing a little basketball. Photo: Jean-Marc Carisse

BOTTOM | Always ready to demonstrate the “Shawinigan Handshake,” a moment captured in 1996 when Mr. Chrétien grabbed a protester by the neck to push him away. Photo: Jean-Marc Carisse

Bill Clinton trying to keep up, or the now-famous “Shawinigan handshake.” Those may be Chrétien clichés, but his spontaneity is legendary.

He has a genuine joie de vivre that is so deeply ingrained in his character, it guides every aspect of his life. His attitude is to just say yes, whatever that involves.

While he is not afraid of trying new things, he is equally not afraid of hard work. In fact, it has been his motto throughout life. At 91, he still heads to his office several days a week at his

Dentons law firm in Ottawa. Hard work is one of the most important lessons in life. “You have to work. Nothing comes easily. If you want to succeed, you just have to work hard. Some people say it is luck but you have to be there when luck passes.”

Mr. Chrétien loves music and plays a mean trombone. In 2016, I ended up on his doorstep with my son and daughter for a photo op, and as it turned out, Mr. and Mrs. Chrétien were on their way abroad. I was told I had 15 minutes to get in and out. Mr. Chrétien invited all

of us in.

“Do you like music, Little Man? Your uncle tells me you play the drums.”

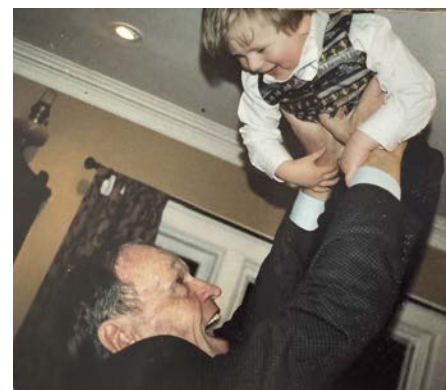
“Yes!!! I do!” replied my son.

I started to get nervous. I knew the Chrétiens had a plane to catch, facts Mr. Chrétien proceeded to ignore.

“Follow me,” he said.

We did, and watched as he pulled out his trombone. Meanwhile, the RCMP waited for him outside, increasingly concerned because they were now running horribly late, but here we were, having a private concert with the former prime minister of Canada.

That classic living-in-the-moment approach to life is infectious and part of his charm.



The author's son is lifted into the air by the always spontaneous Mr. Chrétien.

Keeping his brain active is another part of his secret. He is a voracious reader. “I take something out of every book I read.”

And then of course, there is politics. The mere mention of it and his eyes light up and his whole body language changes.

He has an opinion on just about everything, but these days it is his thoughts on Canada that resonate. As he recently said:

“Canada is the land of opportunity, the land of generosity, the land of tolerance, the land of stability, the land of rule of law. It is our land that is the envy of the world. Canada will continue to rise—true north strong and free. We have achieved what many others have not. Vive le Canada!”

Is there anything he would still like to learn? “I learn every day — I am still learning.” And as for his adventure for his 92nd birthday?

He says, “Wait and see.” |

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Art Maven Wendy Welch

by SAM MARGOLIS

A tireless work ethic, tenacity, and a passion for helping others through the artistic process are behind Wendy Welch's enduring and successful stewardship of the Vancouver Island School of Art (VISA), the non-profit post-secondary art school she launched more than two decades ago and where she still serves as executive director.

The exuberant Montreal native, who believes everyone can benefit from art, was teaching full-time and completing her Master of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria in the early 2000s when the concept of starting an art school on the Island first arose.

"When I finished my degree, I thought I should do something big, something to acknowledge it," Wendy recalls. "I felt that Victoria needed a contemporary art school. A lot of artists find it hard to live in Victoria because there is not much contemporary art. I thought, instead of being one of these artists who complain about the lack of art here, I would do something about it."

By the time of VISA's inception in 2004, Wendy had built up a large network of people who knew her and shared in her joy of teaching. That summer, she asked them whether they would still be her students if she opened a school.

One student, who worked for a graphic design company, told her boss about Wendy's plan.

"I talked to her boss, who asked my student if Wendy was for real – she wants us to design a brochure for a school she's starting. And the student said, 'Oh yeah, whatever Wendy says, she will do.'"

In September 2004, 47 students registered. By winter, that number had grown to 150 and the school had quickly outgrown its space, prompting a move to an old schoolhouse near downtown Victoria. Around this time, VISA also secured accreditation to offer a Certificate of Visual Arts and a Diploma of Fine Arts.

As the driving force behind VISA, Wendy has proven that business sense and devotion to the arts are not antithetical; in fact, at VISA they thrive when combined.

"I do have an entrepreneurial sensibility. Even as a kid I would be selling things like lemonade," she notes. "When dealing with banks, they were surprised I had a business plan and knew so much about business, because there is a stereotype about artists."

Over 6,000 students have participated in VISA courses over the years. Though

student ages range from 18 to 95, women over 55 remain the school's primary demographic, many of them with successful careers behind them.

"These are women who have done amazing things as doctors or lawyers, and they come here without much confidence in what they can do as artists," Wendy explains.

"I tell them they have so much life experience that it will make their art stronger because it's not coming from an empty place. What art does for people over 55 is give them confidence in what they have to say and helps them see that they are creative. I have never met anyone who isn't creative."

Many people, particularly those with substantial achievements in other fields, find it difficult at first to join an art class as a beginner. Yet according to Wendy, those trepidations fade once they see what they are capable of creating.

"I am always amazed at what people make. Sometimes I have the students put their homework up, and I love that they can share the joy of creating art," she says.

"It is so important to have these moments when you're making art and you're not thinking of anything else. It's so freeing, not to think about politics or



LEFT | Wendy Welch is not only the founder of the Vancouver Island School of Arts, she's an instructor, and an accomplished artist with her work shown in galleries across Canada and the USA. This is one of her pieces called *Invention of Nature*.

world events.”

VISA has faced its share of challenges along the way. In 2009, during the aftermath of the financial crisis and while Wendy herself was in hospital, some suggested she consider closing the school.

In 2018, VISA was forced to leave the building it had long called home, relocating first a few blocks away and later to its current downtown Victoria site.

Despite such hurdles, VISA – the only independent art school in BC with university transfer credits – has persevered and flourished. The idea of closing was always unthinkable to Wendy.

“If I ever feel like I can’t do it any-

more, I say to myself: Victoria needs the school. The school makes Victoria better, and I really believe that. This is my contribution. Not only is it an art school, but I’ve also created a community,” she says.

“Some people don’t have other connections. This becomes their family. You meet new people. Everyone who comes here talks about that. I hear so many stories of friendship.”

When the pandemic struck in 2020, VISA’s curriculum was already well-positioned to move online. Today, up to half of its courses and workshops are offered on Zoom, drawing students from across Canada and the United States.

Starting in fall 2026, VISA will offer a Certificate of Drawing and Painting that can be completed entirely online.

The school year at VISA is divided into three periods – fall, winter, and spring/summer – taught by more than a dozen instructors, including Wendy. Courses and workshops cover a wide range of drawing, painting (in several media), and other artistic disciplines, with instructors weaving in relevant art history.

This fall, VISA will host the *Art Makes Life Better* VISA Alumni Exhibition, running from Sept. 14 to Nov. 14. “This will be a great opportunity for the public to meet some of the people who have made VISA their home over the last 20 years,” Wendy says.

Through its “Live Longer with Art” campaign, which provides subsidized tuition for low-income seniors, VISA also aims to expand access to art education. The campaign was inspired by a 2019 University College London study that found people over 50 who engaged regularly in artistic activities were more likely to live longer than those who did not.

Beyond her leadership at VISA, Wendy is also an accomplished artist, with solo exhibitions at the Portland International Art Fair, the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Her work has been shown at the Art Gallery of Calgary, the First Street Gallery in Los Angeles, the Produce Gallery in San Diego, and many others.

Reflecting on her journey with VISA, Wendy muses: “I believe in art so much and in how much it helps people. That’s what has kept me going. I think art not only makes people’s lives better, but it can actually save lives. I wish people understood that you don’t have to have talent – everyone can take an art class.” |

INSPIRED PODCAST

Long-time broadcasters Michael Forbes and Lisa Marshall, known as “Forbes and Marshall,” now real estate agents, bring their signature banter to bear in their podcast collaboration with INSPIRED Magazine.

Check out this month’s interview with WENDY WELCH at www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast



MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

by MONICA YUZAK

It turned out my new boyfriend, Yves, rode a motorcycle.

“Nope. No way. I’m nearly forty-five and not up for the ‘biker-bitch’ role,” I asserted. “Been there, done that, got the T-shirt, and it no longer fits,” I grumbled as I applied for Motorcycle Safety lessons. This decision was sure to take me outside my comfort zone. I had no experience with anything mechanical.

Class One, the first day: “Monica, this is where you insert the key,” said Jeff, the teacher, sensing my level of expertise. Then, “The right hand operates the gas and front brake. The left hand works the clutch. The right foot controls the rear brake and stays on the peg at stops. The left foot shifts gears and, at a stop, stays on the ground.” (I learned that the hard way.)

As usual, I was a hardworking, attentive, diligent student. In short order, I was having fun and excited by all the highways and byways I imagined in my future.

On the final day of classes, after the written and practical exams, the teacher asked, “Anyone feeling unsure about anything we’ve learned in the last six weeks?”

My hand shot up. “Stopping on an incline!”

“Okay, let’s ride!” Jeff intoned, as he always did when we left the airport tarmac for the real world beyond.

We paraded like ducks on a pond, nose to tail, wearing fluorescent yellow jackets on 250 cc Hondas. We followed him towards Spanish Banks along NW Marine Drive. I followed Jeff, and six riders were behind me when he signalled left and downshifted to ascend a very steep hill. Midway, he suddenly stopped. I stopped and froze. I couldn’t remember what my hands and feet were supposed to do and knew that if I fell backwards, the bikes behind me would topple like dominoes. Jeff parked and ran towards me.

“Breathe,” he said steadily. “Right hand gas, right foot brake, left hand clutch, left toe kick down into first.” I was terrified and registered his words but



seemed unable to think for myself.

“Okay, now rev the gas and slowly release the clutch and brake.” I followed his directions without adding my thoughts and reached the top of the hill. I stopped, turned off the key, and put the bike on its stand. Then I lay down on the boulevard grass, shaking. Then I vomited. There must have been a lesson here.

My first bike was a second-hand, cherry-red Honda VLX named Ruby. She had a 600 cc motor that scared the hell out of me. When I felt she was out of my control, I abandoned her and jumped off to safety. She went into one ditch, and I jumped into the other.

I dropped her on a gravel road when she skittered, and I tipped her over on her side when I lost my balance after running out of gas on the Second Narrows Bridge at rush hour—I forgot about the reserve tank. Sweet Ruby taught me a lot, and I’m afraid I banged her up quite a bit.

Bike number two was a brand-new, burgundy, 750 cc Honda Shadow. I had learned to hold on tight, grit my teeth, and never go down.

I vowed to keep her scar-free. I changed her pipes to straight cobras, and her guttural, low-pitched roar followed me everywhere.

I felt indecently wonderful, having been raised in a convent to be quiet and keep my knees together. I bought custom-made leather chaps with long fringes, big biker boots, and a leather jacket with studs. I wove leather strips into the braid that hung down my back. My helmet was sleek and black, and I bought a big silver ring shaped like a skull for my index finger.

Flying through tunnels, I would shriek, “Lara Croft... Tomb Raider!” and crank the throttle to a thunderous roar! My gaze was steely, razor-sharp. My body leaned forward in its form-fitting leathers—one hand on the magnum



ABOVE | Dude and dudette leaving for / arriving in Washington PG 11 | My latest ride, a 300 cc Vespa called “Cocchinella”

strapped to my thigh. I now saw the circle of light that would bring me to the successful end of my mission.

Get your motor runnin’. Gassed up, chrome gleaming, full leathers, dark shades, and red lipstick! Two by two, a long convoy of friends, we headed out on the highway, from BC into Washington, along curvaceous Chuckanut Drive to Anacortes for our yearly “Show and Shine” weekend. We would join 10,000 to 20,000 bikers in what was called the “Oyster Run” and descend upon the small town, parking like two sides of a zipper, side by side on both sides of the street, block after block.

My posse arrived early for bacon, eggs, and grits and to watch as the action flowed in. The bikes cracked and screamed as they burned rubber. Loud! Hells Angels, Bandidos, Mon-

grels, and Outlaws were all there, as well as Bikers for Jesus (mostly ex-addicts) and the 69ers (older riders from Seattle).

As far as I could see—facial hair, tattooed skin, protruding bellies, and worn leather. Some, like us, looked shiny and new, chaps and boots oiled. A motley gathering, there to check out the bikes and each other, to drink beer and down oysters: raw, smoked, baked, roasted, steamed, and broiled. Many would party till dawn, all accommodations booked a year in advance.

I loved to put on my strut. We all felt the part of us that was indeed born to be wild. We shucked oysters, perused the merch, met old friends, and made new ones.

I harshly judged the babes in bikinis posing on choppers until they called me over to shoot Jell-O shots with them. “Biker girls forever!” we screamed above the rock and roll as I became, for a time, part of their gang.

We headed back to Vancouver, tired and wired. Ears ringing, bodies vibrating, thousands of bikes leaving by the only exit.

I crooned into my helmet at full volume to keep awake.

My third bike was a black Victory Vegas 8-Ball, 1800 cc, a silky monster of a machine. He was only content when flat-out on a deserted road. In the city, he lurched impatiently as I fiercely restrained him.

Watching the sun rise, resigned to humming the most recent earworm, electric vest plugged in to ward off the chill. Fully caffeinated. “Yee-ow!” The highway to Osoyoos, in British Columbia’s interior, stretched forever, with giant sweepers (roads with gradual turns that can be taken at high speeds) and minimal traffic. These are the conditions bikers live for.

No traffic-tax collectors, I took it up a notch, exceeded speed limits, and finally 8-Ball would glide into sixth gear, purring.

It was counterintuitive. Approaching a right curve, I pressed my left hip to the left and, with my upper body, pushed into the curve; if I leaned too far, I had to lean further to bring the bike to vertical. I remembered how my brain once rebelled against the illogic of this and noted how it had become second nature.

Trust in yourself and your bike is a big part of riding. If you are parked on the side of the road and must do a U-turn in one lane, you crank the handlebars all the way, lean on the gas, and know you’ll make the turn. There is no room for second-guessing or backing out.

“Keep your handlebars up,” we cheerfully called out to each other in parting. We were all aware of the reality that every biker has or will go down. Yet we rode.

My spills have been relatively minor, and my bike always







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got the worst of it. As my motorcycle crashed, I developed the knack of flitting like a ballerina to safety. Yves would quickly repair the damage to my bike so the visuals wouldn't have time to sear into my brain: a patient, smart man.

Motorcycle riding is exhilarating, even though there is a risk of injury and death. For riders, the thrill is worth it.

For a biker, the *raison d'être* is the road: stunning scenery, perfectly engineered and smoothly paved wide sweepers, repetitive S-curves along oceanside cliffs. There is no past to regret, no future to look forward to, thoughts disappear, and the rider is fully present and free, picking a perfect line at a perfect speed through a perfect curve—biker bliss.

For me, cheap hotels, pubs, and bars were a licence to chow down on all the food I usually bypassed. What self-respecting biker would order a salad and tofu, and what self-respecting biker diner would have these on the menu? We downed bacon and greasy eggs for breakfast, hamburgers and fries for lunch, ice cream at breaks, and beer when the ride was over for the day.

Unexpected parties, opportunities for skinny-dipping, vineyards, and beautiful highway signs saying Winding Highway Use Caution are all part of the ride. You learn to take what comes, to react to the road. The destination is usually irrelevant.



A shiny black Harley Softail Slim was my fourth bike. I was sixty-two years old when I bought it. If not now, then when? Harley and I had a lovely three years together.

I was reluctant to tell Yves that my 750-pound Harley

was getting heavy to hold and that the leather gear was stifling when stuck in gridlock on steamy summer days. Finally, I did, and he surprised me by instantly agreeing and telling me his Victory Cross Country Tour, which looked like a Jetsons' family flying machine, was also feeling a bit much for him.

So, we said addio to our motorcycles and bought 300 cc Vespas. I chose a red-and-white one and named it Cocchinella (ladybug in Italian), and Yves, an olive-green-and-yellow model.

Yves designed logos: a cute bug with eyelashes for Cocchinella and a snorting wild horse for his Italian Stallion. Only later did Yves find out that Sylvester Stallone did one porn movie in his career, called—you guessed it—The Italian Stallion.

Our new machines are manoeuvrable, light, agile, and go like the wind. We explore the back roads, stop for picnics, and smell the wild roses and sage.

I wear red platform shoes, sport a red helmet with a white trailing scarf, and sound like a sewing machine.

Born to be mild...What a ride! |

Monica Yuzak has a memoir chronicling her life as a doctor, mother and woman, *Never Still*, available in Summer 2025.

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Housesitting, Including Pets

by BJ OUDMAN

Looking up from the keyboard, my gaze extends out over the neighbouring vineyard just waking up from its winter slumber. Escaping the dreary grey skies back home, my temporary office is the wisteria-shaded porch of the architecturally awarded house where I am staying in northern Sonoma.

I am here for three weeks to take care of two cats and a beautiful 13-acre property complete with olive trees and a fertile vegetable garden while the homeowners are away hiking in Japan.

I have always been a bit of a restless soul. I think it is a trait I inherited from my father, who was never one to sit still nor take the same road twice. Fulfilling that need was a challenge when I retired four years ago, but I have discovered something that satisfies both my need to roam and my partner's preference for stability.

Housesitting allows us to embrace the best of both worlds: a chance to explore new places yet still have a place to call home.

My first experience housesitting was for my fiftieth birthday. I wanted to “live” in France for a month, and one of my clients had told me about her mid-life crisis experience caretaking a small winery near Bordeaux through a company called Nomador. I signed up and scoured the listings weekly for an opportunity that would fulfil my birthday dream.

A sit that met my search parameters came up for Nantes in northwest France. It was a renovated farmhouse just on the outskirts of the city and came with two black labs, one cat, and

two egg-laying chickens. Though not an area of the country I had ever considered or knew much about, after communicating back and forth a few times with the homeowners using Google Translate, we committed to going.

Our friends and family thought we were crazy, travelling halfway across the world to stay at a complete stranger's house, even suggesting we were going to be locked up and robbed. We ignored the naysayers, confident that should the worst-case scenario occur, we would always have our credit card and passports.

Our stay in Nantes turned out to exceed any expectations, and we have been hooked on housesitting ever since. The homeowners picked us up at the train station and made us feel welcome immediately. After sharing a lengthy, classic French apéritif and dinner (and perhaps a bottle or two of wine), we felt like part of their family.

Since then, we have travelled specifically for sits to Mexico City, Palm Desert, Chicago, Portland, Seattle, Calgary, Vancouver and more. We have established relationships with many of the homeowners and have been invited for repeat stays at a few of our favourites.

The community I now belong to is appropriately called Trusted Housesitters. Founded in 2010 in the UK, the company now has over 200,000 members and operates in 180 countries worldwide.

Members pay an annual fee to belong and establish a vetted online profile. Although some sits may involve just looking

after a property, most often they require taking care of pets. Pet parents value the opportunity for their fur family to stay in their own space rather than be sent to a kennel or other facility. There is a huge level of trust for both the homeowner to have a stranger stay in their home and for the sitter to follow through on expectations and responsibilities.

Housesitting is not for everyone. Pets have schedules that need to be followed. It may mean earlier morning wake-ups for potty breaks, taking longer and more frequent walks than usual, and even administering medication.

I have learned to give pills orally, transcutaneously, and most recently had to give an asthmatic cat a daily inhaler! I have cleaned up pet accidents from every orifice, been yanked down overgrown hiking trails, and thrown infinite sticks into bodies of water for retrieval—rewarded only by smelly, wet dog affection.

Some people want none of this when they are on vacation, but for those who do not mind, the benefits are plentiful. The housesit itself may be the end goal, or it can be a great way of extending a trip to a target destination.

I have searches set up for the places I want to travel to all over the world, from Vietnam to Italy, waiting for the right timing and location. No money is ever exchanged, making it an affordable alternative to hotel or other rental accommodation.

Living in a home with a pet provides an instant sense of community, allowing a more authentic and immersive way to travel.

During our stay in Condesa, Mexico City over Christmas and New Year a few years ago, walking the two French Bulldogs we were caring for, people assumed we were local expats and included us in their neighbourhood festivities! The genuine experience was something not attainable for a random tourist, no matter how diligently planned out.

To be a house sitter with pets included, you genuinely need to love animals. After a lifetime of having our own pets, it is now our way of getting pet satisfaction without full-time obligation.

I admit to being more of a cat person, but I love the time-limited experiences I have had with so many different breeds of dogs.

PAGE 12 | First housesit experience in Nantes, France

TOP | Chillin' with the pups in Yaletown

BELOW | Cats on our lap in California



Reviews are a pet sitter's trading currency, and with my 20+ sits with five stars, I now get to be choosy about which sits I accept.

I expect to do increasing numbers of housesits over the next ten years as to me it is a win-win situation. The homeowner can be reassured that their home and pets will be taken care of lovingly and respectfully, and in return, I get to feed my restless spirit, travelling the world and having beautiful places to call "home." |





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Cruising to the 7th Continent

by MARILYN JONES

With my newfound friends gathered around me, I celebrated my 70th birthday. Joy, Barbara, and Cansi sang Happy Birthday to me as the wait staff joined in and presented me with a slice of chocolate cake.

I am sailing on the *Royal Princess* on my 70th birthday. My dream was to reach my seventh continent by the age of 70, and I am completely wrapped up in the charm and beauty of New Zealand and Australia.

I met my new friends and several other wonderful passengers at the singles and solos meeting. My plans didn't start as a solo cruiser, but circumstances have a way of squelching even the best-laid plans.

Royal Princess can accommodate 3,560 passengers with 1,346 crew members. The atmosphere is calm, and the décor is tasteful.

There is a lot to do onboard, including the usual pool, spa, sports court and jogging track, driving range and putting green, fitness centre, casino, *Movies*

Under the Stars, a Watercolour Fantasy fountain and light show, and plenty of entertainment.

The dining options are excellent. Reservations are easy to make, and the selection of included and specialty dining is extensive.

The rooms are tastefully decorated with subdued colours and lots of storage space for possessions. Cabins range from 160 square feet for inside rooms to 300 square feet for mini-suites.

As beautiful as the ship is, and as friendly and professional as the crew, I was eager to explore the ports of call.

New Zealand

A mist was in the air as we gathered for a New Zealand Indigenous ceremony. A young boy approached our group with a kind of strut or dance, shouting words in the Māori language and brandishing a spear.

Our interpreter explained that the boy was asking if we came in peace and offering a token gift. Our designated

“chief” (a man in our group) returned the tokens as a gesture of goodwill.

Next, we gathered in a sacred meeting house. An older woman, a middle-aged man with symbolic tattoos on his face, and the boy explained many of the tribe's beliefs and customs, including the face tattoos that illustrate the bearer's heritage.

Our excursion continued to a Māori immersion school. Here, high school students performed dances and explained additional customs.

My Indigenous education continued in Wellington at Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum, where I learned about the Polynesian journey to New Zealand and Māori history.

Another highlight of my Wellington excursion was the Wellington Cable Car, which dates back to the late 1800s and takes visitors from the city's heart to a grand view of downtown and the harbour.

I also enjoyed Dunedin, our next port, where I saw the world's steepest street,

the glorious 162-year-old botanical garden, and Olveston Historic Home.

The house, built for businessman, collector, and philanthropist David Theomin, his wife Marie, and their two children, Edward and Dorothy, is open for tours and offers a glimpse into the wealth of the last century.

Intended for future generations to enjoy, those plans faltered when both Theomin children died without heirs. Surviving the deaths of her father, mother, and elder brother, Dorothy lived at Olveston until she passed away in 1966. She willed the house and its original contents to the City of Dunedin.

I always appreciate excellent guides. A young woman showed us around the lavish rooms, including the dining room, living room, and parlour, before leading us upstairs to the bedrooms and the billiards room.

As a final farewell to New Zealand, we sailed through Fiordland National Park.

The park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, spans mountain ranges, dense forests, and alpine lakes. Covering 3.1 million acres in the southwest corner of the South Island, it is by far the largest of New Zealand's 14 national parks.

The day began with rain and fog. The fiords appeared black and white until the sun broke through, revealing beautiful greens and blues. Water crashed down the cliffs, forming waterfalls.

Standing on my stateroom balcony, I admired the beauty as the ship slowly passed this natural paradise.

Australia

Tasmania always makes me think of the Tasmanian Devil. I saw one with its distinctive white V across its chest at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary. Here, animals are rehabilitated and set free into the wild. Those that cannot fend for themselves live out their lives in comfort.

Take Fred, a 110-year-old sulphur-crested cockatoo. Our guide said his



owner raised him from a chick and asked the sanctuary to care for him after the owner's death. This spry bird proves that being a certain age shouldn't stop you from living life to the fullest.

When I set out on my Melbourne excursion, I didn't know it would be a foggy day. We took a two-hour motorcoach ride to a park high above the city for what should have been spectacular views and gardens.

Fog blocked every view, but the gardens were lovely in their mist-shrouded dress. We also had free time to shop and explore a mountain village.

Sydney was the end of my cruise, but not the end of my adventure.

A lifelong dream of mine was to see a platypus.

I caught a ferry from Circular Quay to Taronga Zoo.

I was in the nocturnal house, nearing the exit and thinking I had missed the

animal, when I suddenly saw it—the little creature with a duck bill, beaver tail, and webbed feet—swimming in its large water-filled enclosure. I stood for at least 20 minutes watching it swim, dive, and surface again.

Perhaps, beyond the fascinating Māori culture, the beauty of the fiords, and the wonder of the platypus, I also discovered something about myself: I am far from finished with travel. I still have too much to see, and 70 is only a number. |

PAGE 14 | Sydney Harbour stretches out before Taronga Zoo visitors

TOP | Olveston Historic Home in Dunedin, New Zealand, is filled with family furnishings and heirlooms.

BELOW LEFT | A Tasmanian Devil is one of the animals cared for at the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary

BELOW RIGHT | Dunedin Botanic Garden Celebrates its 162nd anniversary in 2025





Japan's Shikoku Pilgrimage Trail

by KATE ROBERTSON

"I'm going to take the stamped pages from the book and frame them on my wall when I get home," says Sherrell, a vivacious 60-something henro (pilgrim) from Australia. She's referring to the goshuin temple stamps, and each of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Island pilgrimage trail has its own design. They really are beautiful—aside from the bright red stamp, the temple workers also add elegant strokes of black calligraphy, using a traditional brush.

My partner and I are doing Walk Japan's self-guided Shikoku Wayfarer tour. There are two other couples starting at the same time, and our paths cross frequently, especially at mealtimes.

Some days we walk parts of the journey together. It's fun to compare notes on our experience.

Shikoku, an island known for its beautiful nature, is surrounded by the Seto Inland Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Less populated than the other islands, it's a relatively off-the-beaten-path destination, with a very rural population, plenty of farmland and fruit orchards.

The Shikoku pilgrimage trail is associated with the ninth-century Buddhist monk Kukai, who founded the Shingon school of Buddhism after returning from China in the ninth century. When Kukai died in 835, pilgrims started visiting the sites where he had been affiliated.

There are many reasons to do a pilgrimage. Several pilgrims are deepening their spirituality; others are doing it simply for recreation, or just to prove to themselves that they can complete a multi-day walking tour.

Unlike some other pilgrimage trails, such as the Camino de Santiago, the Shikoku trail is still very quiet, so for me it was an ideal time for reflection. I had lived in Japan for two years in the mid-90s, and I was curious to see how things had changed.

One of the few circular pilgrimage loops in the world, the Shikoku trail is 1,200 kilometres, and the entire route takes about 45 days on foot. My tour

with Walk Japan is a brief excerpt—five days and nine temples.

The temples are scattered mostly along the perimeter of the island, some on the coast, and others in the mountainous regions. It's usual for temples to be located at the top of a mountain, for symbolic reasons, meaning that there are many climbs up and down, adding to the fitness challenge.

On our tour, distances ranged from 17.5 km on the first day (mostly flat walking) to 10.8 km. However, each day Walk Japan provides a “more relaxed option” to cut walking distances, in case the longer route feels like too much.

Initially, I had worried that because our tour was self-guided there could be plenty of wrong turns and backtracking. However, thanks to the 144-page Walk Japan “route booklet,” there are instructions for every junction, street-level photos, Google Map screenshots, and QR codes that link to a “real-time” location on Google Maps.

The first day walking from Bando, where Temple #1 was located, to the monastery at Anraku-ji (Temple #6) was the most challenging for route-finding, as we became familiar with the noted signs and symbols. This route went through several small villages, forests and alongside country lanes and rice fields.

The routes on days two and three were up over forested mountain passes, so route-finding became much easier. These trails took us through lush red cedar and bamboo woodlands, with forest floors heavily blanketed in ferns. Although we had missed sakura (cherry blossom) season, in early May there were brightly blooming azalea and camellia trees along the way. The final walking day was along the coastal cliffs at Hiwasa, where the views of the Pacific were stunning.

Accommodation each night was traditional, either at small ryokans (traditional Japanese inns) or onsen (hot spring) hotels. Traditional Japanese rooms look very different from your average hotel room. The main room is floored with tatami mats, with a low coffee table, a safe and mini-fridge often being the only furniture. Futon beds and pillows are stored in a closet with sliding doors. Slippers and a yukata, an unlined kimono, are provided to wear around the hotel.



At all but one of our ryokans, there was a communal onsen, divided by sex. After long days of hiking, a soak in the hot springs was the perfect therapy for sore muscles.

Mealtimes at the inns were exceptional—traditional kaiseki dining. Kaiseki is a small-plate, multi-course meal of Japanese food, considered haute cuisine. Presentation is as important as taste, and meticulous attention to detail and choice of dishware are critical. Regional delicacies and seasonal ingredients are always used.

PAGE 16 | Yakuoji Temple

TOP | Kaiseki dinner

ABOVE | Bell gongs are at every temple

BELOW RIGHT | Dunedin Botanic Garden celebrates its 162nd anniversary in 2025

PG 18 TOP LEFT | A pilgrim at the train station

PG 18 TOP RIGHT | A typical ryokan room

PG 18 BOTTOM | Walking through rice fields



since approximately 2010, and there is a trend for young people to migrate to urban areas. As Japan's smallest, least-populated island, Shikoku has had difficulty maintaining services and infrastructure in its rural communities.

I was glad to learn that in recent years, the Japanese government has implemented programs to incentivize families to move to rural areas. One small town where we stayed, Kamiyama, located in a lush green valley next to the Akui River, has had some success.

Historically dependent on forestry, sudachi citrus and plum farming, Kamiyama had been flagged as being at high risk of disappearing. In 2004, the community launched a revitalization plan to stimulate the economy and encourage cultural development through art programs, forestry management, a movement for organic farm products, and IT satellite offices. Businesses such as bistros and a local brewery have repurposed vacant houses, and this beautiful community is starting to thrive.

En route, I remembered what I loved about Japan: beautiful countryside, mouth-watering cuisine, kind, peaceful people and an organization that people wordlessly agree to for the collective good. I hope that revitalization projects continue to be successful on this charming island, so that small communities can thrive into the coming centuries. |

Common dinner elements include appetizers (such as pickles and sashimi served on a long tray), a grilled dish or hot pot, a deep-fried dish like tempura, soup, lots of fish and seafood, rice and pickled vegetables, and a light dessert.

Kaiseki breakfasts included steamed rice, salad, an egg dish, grilled whole fish, miso soup and a selection of side dishes such as vegetables, pickles and seaweed. We bought our own lunches each morning at a local convenience store.

As we walked through several small towns, one alarming change I noticed—different from when I lived in Japan in the 90s—was how many local stores and services were shuttered. Often, there were no people on the streets.

It's well known that Japan's population has been declining



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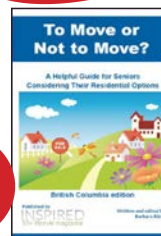
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LIVING ON PURPOSE

by LAURIE MUELLER

Today I Give Thanks

This Thanksgiving, I will give thanks for my friends and family who help me get through life. None of us can do it alone. We need support, guidance, acceptance, challenge, laughter, and the camaraderie that comes from being in community.

I remember how lonely it was being the “new” girl in school. It lasted for a year until Janet arrived at the beginning of Grade 6—now she was the “new” girl.

I thought she might make a nice friend and decided it was time to be brave. I still remember walking up to her in the back playground and asking, “Would you be my best friend?” Then I held my breath. She looked at me, perhaps sizing me up, and said, “Sure!” She still is.

We have other friends and other interests, and we don’t take up all of each other’s lives, but we play Mahjong with a group once a week.

When I introduce her to others, I always say, “She’s my best friend since Grade 6,” and people marvel. So do we!

My children and grandchildren don’t live close by, but modern technology allows us to stay connected in many ways—through phone calls, text messages, Facebook, and more.

Many of my friends from years gone by are scattered around the world, but we keep in touch through the internet.

I love the internet! This summer, I made new friends by participating in a

Summer Writing Challenge. Thanks to Zoom, I had the benefit of writing and talking with writers from around BC several times a week.

I also write a newsletter for an organization in Mexico, in the city where we spend a few months each year, and I keep in touch with those members through Zoom, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

Some days, I feel as though I am happily living in two countries with two sets of friends.

I think we are truly blessed to have so many ways to maintain our connections and even create new friendships.

Over the years, some friendships have fallen away, but I treasure even those for the memories they leave behind. A few friends have died, and though their absence brings a tear to my eyes, it also fills me with gratitude for what we shared on this earth.

Other friendships have simply grown apart. It’s sad, but it’s part of life. People come into our world for a reason—and, as some say, for a season. We need to be grateful for the time we had together.

Sometimes I stayed in a relationship too long, and its ending caused pain.

Other times, when our shared values faded, we found new ways to enjoy each other’s company when we crossed paths again.

Most of us have learned that we can’t change another person. When differences



in values create tension, we must either face them and agree to disagree or thank the person for the times we shared and move on.

My husband is better at having friends with different values than I am. I am still learning when to let go and when not to.

The pandemic, for example, caused unexpected friction—I assumed everyone would think the same way about vaccines. They didn’t. Then there are the red and blue issues that divide two of our three North American countries. I know which colour I support, but I am often surprised when people I thought would agree with me don’t.

I have worried about these differences, but in the end, I can’t change anyone’s mind. Just as I can’t tell people how to live spiritually, what to wear, or whom to love, I can’t dictate their beliefs. That isn’t my role.

In the end, it’s up to me to live the best life I can—being a model of what I believe, not a preacher. Arguments only deepen divides.

Listening to Yurong “Luanna” Jiang’s commencement speech at Harvard last June, I was struck by these words:

“We carry everyone we have met across wealth and poverty, cities and villages, faith and doubt. They speak different languages and dream different dreams, and yet they have all become a part of us. You may disagree with them, but hold onto them, as we are bound by something deeper than belief: our shared humanity.” |

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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