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55+ lifestyle magazine

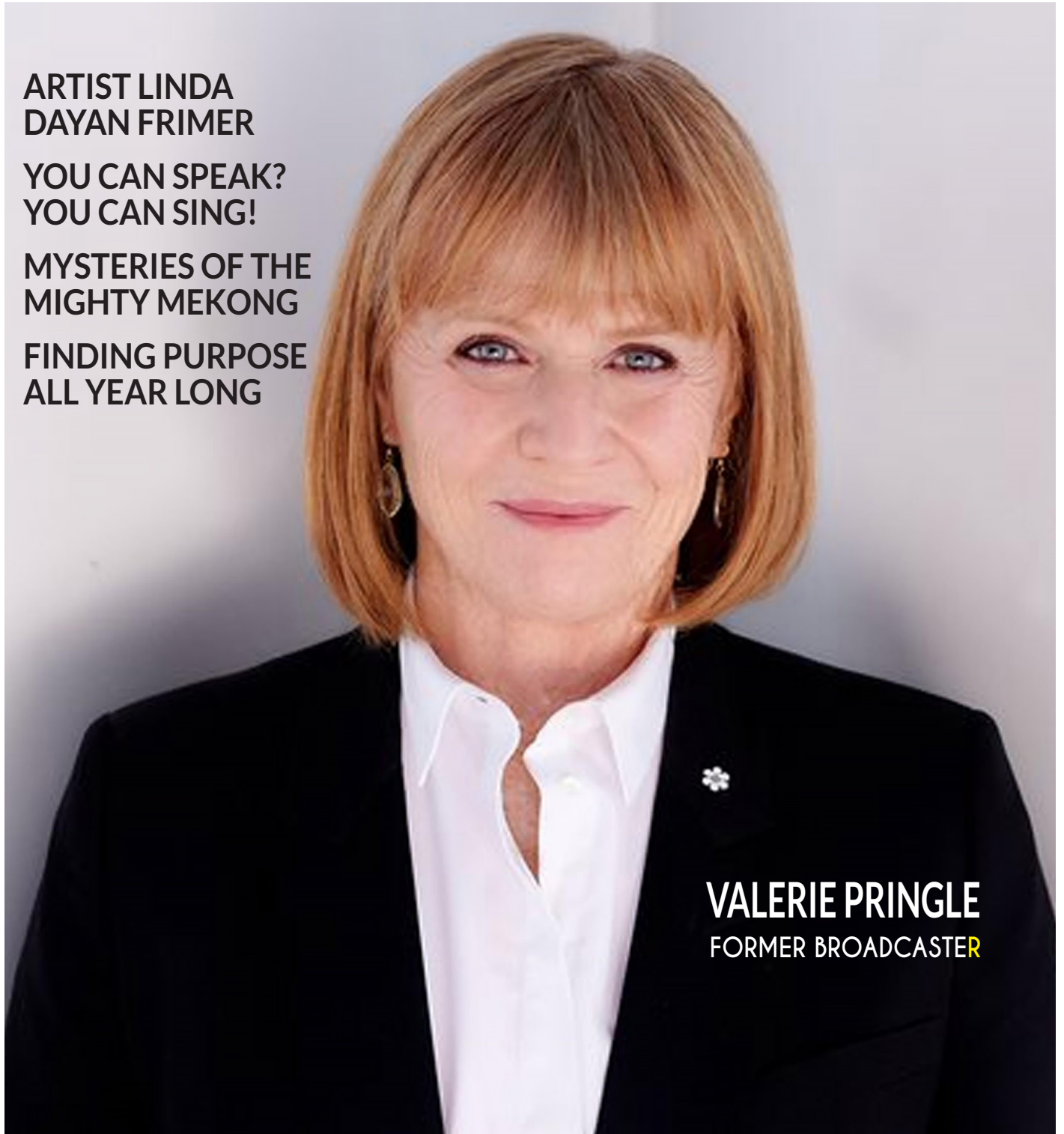
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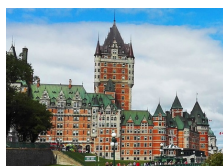
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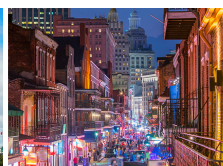
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Cover | Valerie Pringle

Giving up broadcasting after a five decades long career opens the door for other meaningful projects. What will be next?

Photo courtesy Valerie Pringle :

Photo credit: Tim Leyes

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True North, Strong and Free

THRIVE BEYOND 55

Giving Back by BARBARA RISTO

As we grow older and step into the role of elders in our society, we have much to be thankful for. Throughout our lives, we have benefited from countless charities, community groups, and volunteers who make our world a better place.

Much of the quality of life we enjoy today comes from the extraordinary efforts of people who give their time, energy, and money to causes that improve the lives of others. Without this civic brigade, our communities would be weaker, and essential support systems would falter.

The impact of volunteerism and charitable giving reaches far beyond immediate human needs. While many focus on feeding the hungry, supporting those in crisis, or advancing education, volunteers also help protect the planet and all its inhabitants. From environmental conservation to animal welfare, those who give of themselves strengthen both

society and the world at large. Their efforts may go unseen, yet the effects ripple through our communities in ways we often take for granted.

This season is a natural time to reflect on all we have received as a result of these selfless acts. The comfort of a safe community, access to cultural and educational programs, support for those in need, and even the simple joy of parks and natural spaces—all of these exist because someone cared enough to act.

Now, we have the opportunity to give back, participating in the cycle of generosity that has enriched our lives

In this issue of INSPIRED, we focus on non-profits and the work they do to strengthen our communities. Their messages are woven throughout the magazine.

I encourage every reader to engage and take action.

There are many ways to contribute:

make a donation, volunteer your time, or leave a legacy in your will. Every effort helps build a stronger, more resilient community.

Giving back is not only about what we provide to others—it is about the connection it creates between people and causes. We thrive as a society when we nurture the volunteer spirit that forms the backbone of our communities.

As we reflect on the blessings in our own lives, let us also embrace the responsibility and privilege to give back. By doing so, we honour the work of others and the best of our own humanity.

This season, let us commit to returning a little of what we have received. Giving back is more than an act of charity—it is a celebration of community, gratitude, and shared purpose. |





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Living Forward While Giving Back

"I've got more to contribute," said Mark Phillips, 64, a longtime mental health and substance use professional with Island Health, when he retired in 2017. He just knew that "not working" wasn't part of the plan.

"I like helping people, and learning keeps my mind active."

It was his curious mind, combined with a professional life supporting the vulnerable, that pivoted his retirement into Elder Mediation training.

While Mark continues to volunteer with Victoria's Citizens' Counselling Centre, he sees his ongoing work as focusing on the elder population. "I want to support them in being heard," says the associate mediator with Mediate BC.

Elder Mediation, according to Mark, is a proactive tool through which issues such as financial discord, self-neglect, and intergenerational isolation are addressed before they escalate into conflict. "This type of support can improve and maintain

quality of life."

Mark, a resident of Victoria, where many elders continue living in their homes, says, "I want to guide them in continuing to have a voice."

Whether it's communicating with partners or family members, caregivers, or professionals, his role as an Elder Mediator includes facilitating conversations that proactively reach resolutions and resolve misunderstandings for all parties.

"It's a needed field designed to support our ageing population in feeling safe, being acknowledged, reaching understanding, and ultimately finding peace in that vulnerable stage of life that is inevitable."

Meanwhile, Carol Dale, 85, continues to give back to her communities by reinventing herself, while staying grounded, informed, and engaged through her lifelong love of reading.

"My book wall at home holds the story of my life," she admits. "It's staying there."

"I'm always working on learning something that moves me forward in the wider world," says the former literary editor and co-founder and co-owner of two iconic Vancouver bookstores of their day (Hager Books and Women in Print). "And that experience of learning supports me in finding ways to give back."

She says that continuing to develop human connections, along with finding intellectual stimulation through her love of books, has kept her going throughout her life.

As a longtime breast-cancer survivor, Carol still actively trains and volunteers, 30 years later, with her fellow Dragon Boat members of the Abreast in a Boat team, women who celebrate "strength, sisterhood, and survivorship" on the water.

Nowadays, Carol offers an engaging morning greeting at Vancouver's Brock House Bistro, where she serves coffee and



baked goods to senior members. "I just passed the Serving It Right certificate," she adds. "It's a useful skill for the society's social events."

"Use it or lose it," she concludes, referring to her love of learning, staying active, and always being available to serve her communities. |

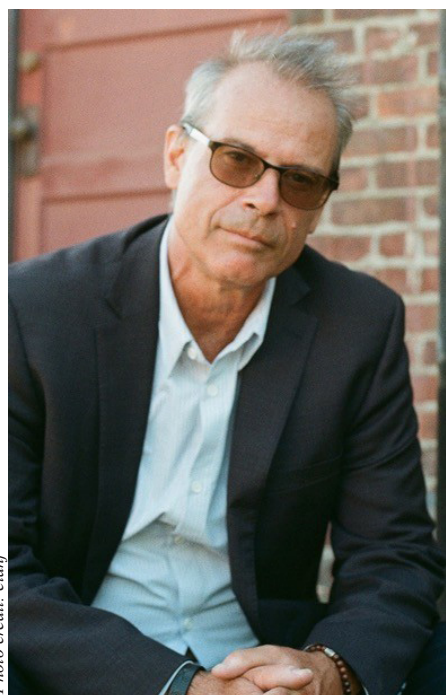


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“Valerie Pringle Has Left The Building.”

by JENNIFER HARTLEY

Photo courtesy Valerie Pringle: Credit: Tim Leyes

It may be the name of her 31-episode travel show that ran for four years, but in truth, it also marks a new phase in her life. Canada’s beloved broadcasting powerhouse is moving on.

This past spring, Valerie Pringle retired from broadcasting for good. Interviewing the interviewer—especially one of Canada’s most iconic faces—might seem daunting. Yet chatting with Valerie, who for over 50 years brought warmth, poise, enthusiasm, and curiosity to the airwaves, was anything but intimidating.

Valerie’s ability to connect with people has spanned multiple media, including radio (CFRB Toronto, where she began), television (both CTV and CBC), and specialty productions—her travel show and, most recently, an interview series on PBS. While known for her discussions with newsmakers, politicians, celebrities, musicians, and people from all walks of life, she also covered space launches, the Olympics, and royal events, to name just a few.

Today, Valerie inspires women entering the profession, but she credits other Canadian icons such as Barbara Frum, June Callwood, and Betty Kennedy as her mentors.

“Barbara was, I think, probably the best interviewer. She was extraordinary. She taught me the importance of discovering authenticity, listening for those moments of truth, and sharing them with the public. That has always been so rewarding.”

Betty Kennedy taught her about managing life—career, interviews, and kids—all with grace.

And then there is June Callwood. “She was a great writer, of course, but she was also a committed activist. I remember her saying she would not tolerate anything unjust. Interfering keeps us together as a society. And I liked her using that word ‘interfere,’ because you don’t normally think of interfering as a good thing, but when June talked about it, it was.”

While she wouldn’t put it this way, Valerie created her own style of “interfering” through decades of not-for-profit work, including mental health advocacy and fighting stigma at a time

when it wasn’t widely discussed. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto has been a major beneficiary of her passion.

“I’ve just finished there after 18 years, helping to raise now over a billion dollars.” She also speaks publicly on mental health issues.

Her work and travels instilled a deep passion for the outdoors. Walking with her two “big, smelly old labs” at home is one of her great joys. She golfs, plays tennis, and skis—“I still feel like a kid when I ski.”

She is passionate about Canada’s natural beauty and the positive effects of nature on mental health. Unsurprisingly, she devoted herself to making the Trans Canada Trail a reality.

“I was involved with the Trail for 20 years. I chaired the board and helped secure \$83 million for its connection. Those two things—the Trail and mental health—are very important to me, and actually are not unconnected. Apart from my kids and family, I’m most proud of that legacy.”

While she doesn’t brag about it, the desire to make a difference guides her wherever she goes. Even when travelling, she finds ways to give back.

“I did some trips that were real highlights—one to Everest Base Camp, and a trip to the top of Kilimanjaro. I took my sister to Everest, and then both my sisters and my youngest son came to Kilimanjaro. Of course, I saw an opportunity to fundraise at Kilimanjaro. We helped build a resource centre for women who started an HIV/AIDS outreach group. It became a great project. It underlined to me that everywhere you go, you can make an impact.”

Any other life lessons? “Keep calm and carry on. That’s all you can ever do. Put your head down, even when it’s awful. There was a moment when I was sure the Trans Canada Trail wasn’t going to work out when I was board chair, but things come in waves, and it’ll get better. Just hang in there, keep working, and things will work out. That’s not to diminish the



ABOVE | Leaving broadcasting allows Valerie Pringle more time to enjoy her grandchildren.

PAGE 6 | Valerie is very proud that her 20 year involvement helped establish the Trans Canada Trail.. This is the Mile One Marker of the Trail in Tuktoyaktuk.

Photos courtesy Valerie Pringle

fact that times are tough, and sometimes you lose your way a bit, but just keep calm and carry on—things get better. That was an important lesson.”

For Valerie, there is also the journey of self-discovery—finding strengths and tapping into new talents, such as realising she is a gifted leader, chairing boards, and taking on leadership roles.

“Who knew? I was totally surprised. I kept saying, ‘You want me to share what? I’m just a broadcaster.’ Most of us know more than we think. To plug in, take leadership roles, learn to fundraise, learn about governance, and apply broadcasting skills to projects I could be passionate about—it was wonderful.”

Her 51-year marriage to her husband Andy, their three children, and seven grandchildren top her list of support. Whenever things got a little shaky, she relied on her rock.

“I would just say to myself, ‘Andy won’t let me fail.’ Sometimes it’s hard to know exactly what to do, or what the right path is. But if you follow your gut and instinct, projects come up. I’m pretty strong. You can work through things. It’s not always easy, but Andy was always there, encouraging me.”

She also has two sisters and a brother. “I had an extraordinary base—my parents, two wonderful grandmothers who were just foundational, one small English one and one very strong Canadian one. My parents were lovely—salt of the earth, warm, generous, welcoming. They were as good as it gets.”



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"I look at a picture of my family. I love seeing us all together and thinking, wow, that's something. Look what we've done."

And what gives her meaning now? "There's my family, obviously. But I'm at a bit of an inflection point, because I've just finished a television series called *Canada Files*, three years of interviewing great Canadians for PBS. It was a bit of a surprise when that show came along. I hadn't done much broadcasting for a while and was a bit nervous since I'd focused on not-for-profit work, but

I just said yes and loved every minute. I was my own boss, which was great, and I'm at peace with putting that one to bed."

She began working at 19, and now, at 71, she has retired from broadcasting for good. Valerie Pringle has left the building.

As she embarks on her new journey, she is guided by words from Oscar Peterson, whom she interviewed many times. "Not long before his death, I asked him a legacy question: 'What's the best piece of music you've ever writ-

ten?' He said, 'I haven't written it yet.' I thought, how great is that? You've got to keep curious, keep looking forward. I saw that in the *Canada Files* interviews I did too—Rosie Abella, Roberta Bondar, Louise Arbour, Jean Chrétien—they're all looking forward. Even incredibly accomplished people are thinking, 'What's next?' That's spectacular advice."

For now, she sits on the board of a retirement home and long-term care facility where her own mother had been chair, and her 102-year-old mother-in-law now lives. She'll continue to look for meaningful projects.

Sit still? Absolutely not.

Since COVID, she avoids gyms but feeds her need to move through online classes—Pilates, yoga, weights, Peloton—and, of course, walking her dogs (on the Trans Canada Trail when possible!). She also enjoys simple pleasures, such as a coffee with cream. "It has to have cream."

And she laughs. A lot. "Honestly, what would you do without your girlfriends? All my life I've had groups of girlfriends. I would just dance out the front door for a friends' night. It was so important and therapeutic, even when I had to get up ridiculously early for work. Socializing is essential."

She once learned that the name Valerie means vigorous and strong. "It wasn't appealing to me as a young girl, but at this stage of life, being vigorous and strong is pretty sweet. I'm grateful for it, and it's my goal to continue being so." |

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 VALERIE PRINGLE at www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast



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Photo: Alistair Eagle

The Luminous Linda Dayan Frimer

by SAM MARGOLIS

In a world in crisis, Linda Dayan Frimer seeks to inspire others to find more joy, love, purpose, and connection.

Linda's imaginative journey began at a tender age in the Cariboo District of central British Columbia. From there, every new creative endeavour for the esteemed Canadian artist carries an aura of enchantment.

"It's magical and exhilarating to approach each new blank canvas as if I'm painting for the first time, no matter how many works of art have preceded it," says Linda, from her home in Steveston. "I am entering both a creative and receptive world that is waiting for me to move the coloured light I absorb from creation onto it and to bring something new into existence that never existed before."

As a child growing up in the Gold Rush town of Wells, near Barkerville, her hands were always in motion, drawing every day as she roamed the nearby forests. The natural world, she recalls, lit up her soul and filled her with wonder.

"I realized very early—just like Chagall—that colour was love. I have spent my life reaching out to connect with nature," Linda remembers. "What I wish I knew then, but understand better now, is that every time I am outwardly making connections with nature, I am also inwardly absorbing an abundance of awe."

"I can actually visualise nature bringing herself to me and residing within my own heart. Just as I'm here for the universe, the universe is here for me."

The granddaughter of pioneers who

fled Eastern Europe in the early 1900s, she would overhear stories of cultural persecution as a child. Though she could not fully understand their meaning, the stories left a lasting impact.

The forest was a nearby haven where she could experience both darkness and light-filled wonder, and through painting, she found release for both the cultural stories and the forest's enchantment. Her art would go on to demonstrate the inherent unity in all of life's forms and, in the process, serve as a steadfast channel for promoting environmental and health issues.

From Wells, Linda and her family moved to Prince George before she settled in the Lower Mainland. In her twenties, she raised her children while

continuing to develop her artistic skills with the guidance of mentors. When her youngest child started school, Linda, then 33, began formal training, completing a four-year degree at Emily Carr University in just three years.

From childhood to the present, Linda has had a deep affinity for Indigenous culture. She has worked closely with Plains Cree artist George Littlechild, whom she describes as her best friend and “soul brother.” To Linda, they were bonded by their shared reverence and love for their intimate stories, families,

and brilliant colours.

In 1994, they illustrated *In Honour of Our Grandmothers*, a collection of visual art and poetry exploring the cultural heritage of First Nations and Jewish people, celebrating their survival. Reisa Schneider, Garry Godfriedson, and Littlechild co-authored the book.

“We have shared our life’s journeys and held our individual people with one voice of honour, compassion, and pride, without ever appropriating anything from each other’s culture,” Linda explains.

“I draw doves every day. They symbol-

ize my longing to cleave to the Creator and always reflect my state of being. Just a short while ago, as I revisited my childhood trauma, George sent me a beautiful wooden dove and a card expressing his unconditional support—it genuinely lifted me.”

Working alongside Littlechild on their mixed-media paintings for the book cover, Linda remembers feeling the presence of their forebears as she gifted symbols of their families and cultures.

A firm believer in the healing power of art, in 1998 Linda co-founded the Gesher Project in Vancouver to help survivors of the Holocaust and their children express their traumatic experiences through art, words, and therapy. *Gesher* is the Hebrew word for “bridge.”

“My work in the Gesher Project felt, in some ways, channeled,” Linda recalls. “I often awoke in the middle of the night, dreaming of creative concepts to help generations of Holocaust survivors release fear, connect deeply to their core selves, to their symbols that ground them in meaning, and to find safety from which to feel renewed hope.

“In the process, I created art exercises designed to release blocked energy, comfort the effects of trauma, ground meaning, inspire hope, and honour memory.”

Participants in the project created a large memorial from mixed-media paintings using enlarged family photos, words, and drawings on fibre-based paper bordered with personal symbols. These, Linda says, became powerful memory banks, expressions of resistance and resilience, and astonishing works of art.

In 2022, Linda released *Luminous*, a coffee-table book featuring scores of her vivid paintings, many influenced by a childhood spent in the wilderness, and paying homage to First Nations culture, her Jewish roots, and the history and significance of colour.

Subtitled *An Artist’s Story as a Guide to Radical Creativity*, the book includes dozens of exercises for aspiring artists of all levels, highlighting creativity as a positive force connecting humanity and nature.

One can be radically creative at any age, Linda asserts. To do so is “to return to your foundational core of self, where, as long as you are moving your vital

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energy from your integral essence, real change in a creative manner can occur at any age and at any time. Keep playing outside of the box, for that's where the magic is."

When writing books, Linda felt it was important to express her life as art. Always longing to know her ancestors, she needed to write *Luminous* for future



generations to know her heart and her story.

"My writing is driven, purposeful, researched, and carefully crafted, while my painting is an absolute flow of coloured light and radiant exhilaration pouring from my receptive soul onto canvas or paper," Linda muses.

A previous book, *A Wilderness Journey*, published in 1994, examines the inextricable link between her ancestral story, love of the wilderness, and cultural resilience.

With a vast body of artwork encompassing commemorative, educational, and powerful pieces that honour the sanctity of life, Linda has exhibited widely. She has also collaborated on large-scale murals at UBC Hospital, Richmond Hospital, and Beth Tikvah Synagogue in Vancouver.

Collections and donations of her works have supported the Canadian Red Cross, the Canadian Cancer Society, Vancouver General Hospital, Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Vancouver Art Gallery, among others. She has received many awards, including an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of the Fraser Valley.

Linda's art consistently reflects the efforts of environmental organisations such as the Trans Canada Trail and the Raincoast Conservation Foundation.

Her work has also supported the

Western Canada Wilderness Committee, which promotes Canada's cultural and geographic diversity, wilderness preservation, and education on endangered species. Paul George, the organisation's former director, says Linda's work touches "the emotional and spiritual cords where real change occurs."

Not one to put her brush or pen down for long, Linda is beginning a series of large-scale forest paintings to express "the profound wonder and life-nurturing force of our living forests and our vital

need to remember always to protect them."

She is also writing and painting about her childhood experiences in Wells and working on a project titled *Magical Moments* with author and motivational speaker Darryl Segal, focusing on art, play, and reflection.

With every brushstroke and every word, Linda brings light into the world, weaving together memory, culture, and nature into a tapestry of enduring beauty and inspiration. |



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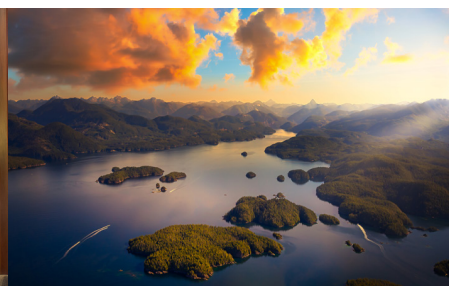
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Can You Speak? You Can Sing!

by JOAN BOXALL

I am sitting with one thousand singers at a five-day choral music festival called Kathaumixw (pronounced 'kah-tie-miew' in the Tla'amin First Nation's language). The Aboriginal people gifted the name to the community of Powell River. Spelled qat'aymixw in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), it means "a gathering together of different people."

Here we gather with all our differences in the Sunshine-Coastal community, in the qathet, or "working-together" region, located four hours from Victoria and Vancouver. This is the 20th anniversary festival. Since its inception in 1984, the festival has run every two years (except during COVID).

A woman is at the mic. Her words command attention:

"In every country I travel—at any age, from six-year-old kids to 102-year-old seniors... if you can speak, you can sing... Brilliance has no age."

Dr. Zimfira Poloz—conductor, educator, internationally recognized adjudicator and clinician—borrows her wisdom from a Zimbabwean proverb that espouses learning and intellectual curiosity as lifelong pursuits. She is the current artistic director of the Toronto Children's Choir. She came to Canada in the '90s from Kazakhstan after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

We are seniors. We are youthful. We can speak. We can sing.

We come together as sixteen choirs. Five are local to Powell River. Three more are from Metro Vancouver. One is from Alberta and another from Ontario.

Two are from the USA, and one each from Slovenia, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Taiwan.

Zimfira says, "Everybody has to sing. It is part of our nature when we are born. We sing and move first, before we speak... every voice is unique. Don't worry about technique. When it comes from the heart, it's touching."

Zimfira is conducting us in song, but she is speaking more broadly, about life. "You have to breathe. The air should move slowly like a little stream. Don't sit on the note. Keep the phrases going forward. Stay open. Let the air get in. Don't lose your energy. Open the space. There's always room for growth. Have fun, joy and connection. Use your eyes to tell the story."

All this singing makes me hungry. I meet the artistic director, Walter Martella, in the lunch line-up.

"Being in a choir is very healthy. It's social. It's physical. It's great for your brain. It's really great to experience other cultures through music... and time periods such as Baroque, Classical, pop and jazz... there are so many different styles," he says

"You can learn to sing without reading notes, too. Making sounds together through various civilisations... following a leader who may have been drumming or using an Indigenous instrument."

Walter ponders out loud how our ancestors may have done it.

"Listen to me. Now you do it."

Espiritu Vocal Ensemble director, Anita Comba, is past-president of the

BC Choral Federation (BCCF) and now chairs the Seniors' Committee.

"This demographic of 55 plus is one I've thought a lot about with regards to singing and choir. Since I work primarily with 55+ singers, I feel a great connection to and alignment with this demographic. Having just turned 55, I am increasingly aware of the benefits of choral singing as you age."

"Recently, I had the opportunity to work with Erica Phare-Bergh, founder of Voices in Motion, an intergenerational choir for adults with memory loss, their caregivers, friends and students. In collaboration with researchers at UVic, they found that singing alone lit up parts of the patient's brain, but singing in a group lit up many more parts. This led researchers to conclude that the social aspect of group singing was immensely impactful," says Anita.


Anita tells me how she fell into directing somewhat by chance. She was invited to fill a last-minute vacancy for the Langley Community Chorus. Having had many years of experience playing piano for choirs and coaching singers, she thought she'd give it a go. Something similar brought her to Espiritu, where she was choral accompanist under the artistic vision of Gillian Hunt in West Vancouver.

"I have the best seat in the house, standing in front of a group of people all united in their breath, intention, and focus, making music together," says Anita. "It's a real privilege."

Zimfira reminds me how musical education can be curtailed:


"When I tried for the first time to sign up for music school (a school for gifted children in Kazakhstan), I was told, 'Maybe you should do something else... you cannot sing.' And yet, I knew I could repeat that little melody our teacher was asking for. I was just so anxious and nervous."

As a result, she went to regular school. The experience fuelled her passion to train and develop young singers. Naturally, some have more talent than others. We cannot all be Pavarotti or Lady Gaga.



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ABOVE | Espiritu Singers share in the excitement for the Parade of Choirs, Kathaumixw Gala Opening. Author is bottom right.

Our ‘song’ experts—Zimfira, Walter and Anita—tell us to enjoy the process.

When inviting volunteers to join qat^haymixw, each participant is encouraged to: “immerse yourself in a global celebration of music and friendship. Connect with people from around the world, meet inspiring artists, and experience the magic of bringing people together through song.”

This invitation brought my choir, Espiritu, to qat^haymixw. We were awarded the Dr. Jim Sparks Award, given in memory of a beloved educator, conductor, and visionary who believed in the transformative power of choral music. We were told we embodied that passion, excellence and spirit of connection.

We were almost speechless. Then we remembered: We can speak. We can sing. Brilliance has no age. |

- Join Espiritu’s Christmas show, Only Joy Aloud, in early December 2025: <https://www.espirituvocalensemble.ca/>
- Join a Langley Community Chorus show: <https://www.langleychorus.org/>
- For a musical vacation at qat^haymixw: <https://www.kathaumixw.org/kathaumixw.shtml>
- Find a choir: <https://bcchoralfed.com/services/member-choirs/>

Joan Boxall is the author of “DrawBridge: Drawing Alongside My Brother’s Schizophrenia,” published in 2019 by Caitlin Press, a creative non-fiction account of an artful journey with her talented brother.

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Mysteries of the Mighty Mekong

by JAMES ROSS

I ate a tarantula — a rather large spider.

The crispy-fried arachnid was surprisingly tasty, rather like a delicate piece of pork. The crickets, on the other hand, were somewhat dry. These local delicacies were offered one day at lunch for any brave and inquisitive guest to try, and I decided that when in Cambodia — well, why not?

Though a journey through Cambodia and Vietnam might take you out of your comfort zone on a number of fronts, fear not — you will eat well. The Asian cuisine, whether aboard

Uniworld's elegant *Mekong Jewel* or in any Cambodian or Vietnamese restaurant you visit, is delicious beyond compare. You will also learn that the locals, especially in the rural villages, are extraordinarily resourceful — they will eat almost anything.

The Mekong River is one of the world's great waterways, a magical route that winds its way from its source on the Tibetan Plateau through China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia before draining into Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

The mighty river is an essential life-

line for those who live along its banks, bringing both sustenance and trade to millions. Travelling this majestic waterway is perhaps the best way to experience this fascinating part of the world.

My week-long cruise with Uniworld took me through two of Asia's most beautiful, historic, and welcoming countries — pastoral Cambodia and dynamic Vietnam. Each has its own unique charm and cultural traditions, as well as a rich and sometimes complex history.

My journey down the Mekong offered a window into both, from awe-inspiring ancient temples and intricate palaces to the haunting remnants of soldiers' tunnels and the solemnity of the killing fields.

LEFT | Angkor Wat stands timeless amid Cambodia's turbulent history.

BELOW | Dried fish and other delicacies are ready for sale in Phnom Penh's lively markets.



From gentle, quiet fishing villages to the frenetic, chaotic pace of the cities, the contrast between historic splendour and recent horrors, and between rural tranquillity and urban bustle, is profound — each aspect offering a deeper understanding of the resilience and spirit of the people who live along the river.

The river voyage is bookended by city stays in Siem Reap, for the magnificent temples of Angkor, and in Ho Chi Minh City, where visitors can delve into the history of the Vietnam War.

Colourful Siem Reap is the gateway to the vast UNESCO-designated temple complex of Angkor Wat. Not just a temple, nor even a collection of them, the 12th-century Angkor Wat is a ruined city containing a royal palace, monasteries, and residences, surrounded by a moat and perimeter wall.

Many structures have been pitted by weather or reclaimed by jungle vines over the centuries. At its peak, Angkor covered 260 square kilometres.

We departed Siem Reap for Kampong, on the west bank of the Mekong, and boarded the *Mekong Jewel*.

While I found the warm, heavy air challenging when touring the ruins, once we were on the river the breeze felt much more tolerable.

We often disembarked for morning




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tours when the temperatures were pleasant — and to avoid the afternoon rains.

At Wat Hanchey, we climbed a long stone staircase from the river to take part in a water blessing at a Buddhist temple

Our next stop was Angkor Ban, a village left untouched during Cambodia's 1975–1979 civil war and a beautiful example of a traditional Cambodian town. We docked at the pier and wandered past temples blaring incantations over loudspeakers, and among wooden houses with bamboo floors built high on stilts to avoid river floods.

A highlight of the day came at a children's school, where we were paired with eager students wanting to practise their English. It was a rewarding experience — made even better if you bring along some distinctly Canadian school supplies from home.

The next day we were in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh. Architectural highlights included the Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda, and the National Museum, with its impressive collection of Angkor treasures.

A tuk-tuk tour of Phnom Penh contrasted these splendid structures with the sombre reminders of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (S-21) and the killing fields. During the late 1970s, Cambodia was in the grip of the Khmer Rouge, ruled by the reclusive tyrant Pol Pot.

Once we crossed the border into Vietnam, the rhythm and pulse of the river changed. Here, rather than docking at wharves, our ship anchored mid-river, and we boarded traditional sampans to explore the narrow canals and waterways of rural villages.

The true magic of the Mekong lies in the people who live along its shores and on its islands. They are friendly and eager to share their stories.

Reminders of the Vietnam War are everywhere, and the locals often reminisce about those difficult years — while speaking proudly of the present and with abundant hope for the future.

We were invited into a humble and wondrous world — visiting a family of weavers and traditional hat makers, and stopping at the home of a sampan boat builder. We learned how to make rice paper and rice wine.

Returning to the ship, I loved sitting on the top deck in the refreshing breeze, cruising the river and watching life unfold in the floating villages.

Ho Chi Minh City offered a heady mixture of old and new, often surprising visitors with its charm. This year, on April 30, Vietnam marked the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the reunification of North and South, ending the Vietnam War.

We visited Independence Palace (now a museum), where a North Vietnamese tank crashed through the gates in 1975, ending the conflict.



TOP | Paddling a canoe down the Mekong River

RIGHT MIDDLE | Buddhist monk and a Vietnamese traditional hat maker

BOTTOM | Water buffaloes graze by the rice fields

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We also toured the Cu Chi tunnels, a 268-kilometre network that once connected Viet Cong support bases on the outskirts of Saigon all the way to the Cambodian border. It was hard to imagine living underground — especially after I crawled through a narrow 20-metre tunnel that was dark, hot, and disorienting.

Fifty years after the end of the Vietnam War and forty-five years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam and Cambodia have rebounded into two of the world's most vibrant destinations. Their traditions, colourful cultures, diverse histories, and endlessly changing scenery are best experienced on an exotic journey down the magical Mekong. |

Sailing the Mekong

With its elaborate woodwork and elegant fittings, the 68-passenger *Mekong Jewel* resembles a floating boutique hotel with a distinctly French colonial flair.

It is perhaps the most spacious river ship I've experienced (there are no river locks to navigate on this route). The nostalgic atmosphere on board does not disappoint — nor does the cuisine, a mixture of local dishes and international fare.

Evening entertainment includes traditional Vietnamese music, a Cambodian dance show, a cooking demonstration, and illuminating lectures by the local guides. For more information: www.univorld.com

Wet or Dry Season

From June to September, Southeast Asia flourishes during its lush Green Season. My journey took place in mid-September, when the landscapes of Vietnam and Cambodia were at their most vibrant.

This tropical wet season brings short, refreshing afternoon showers that breathe life into the region. Rice paddies shimmer in vivid green, jungles flourish, and riverbanks bloom with wildflowers.

It's also less busy — we had only 36 guests aboard the ship.



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“I NEVER IMAGINED I’D BE A PATIENT”: LORE HOFFMANN’S STORY

How My Journey with BC Cancer Began

I started working as Assistant to the Head of the UBC Department of Physics and Astronomy in 1973. During my 30 years as an administrator in the Department, I got to know several of the BC Cancer’s bio- or medical physicists who joined our department as Associate Members to teach graduate courses. The odd time I even had a chance to visit their labs at the BC Cancer research centre, across from the BC Cancer – Vancouver treatment centre.

Although my administrative work connected me with cancer research, the disease itself was far from my mind. Still, I’ve always believed in supporting organizations that make a difference. That’s why, years before I ever became a patient, I decided to include the BC Cancer Foundation in my will. At the time, it felt like a simple way to give back to an organization doing important work.

I never imagined that one day I’d be in the building across the street – not as a visitor, but as a patient.

The Day It Became Personal

In 2014, I was diagnosed with an invasive malignant melanoma on the tip of my nose. After surgery and reconstruction, I hoped the worst was behind me.

But in 2019 – the dreaded five-year mark – I felt a lump in my cheek. I was diagnosed with relapsing melanoma.

I’ll admit, I was scared and nervous. But as soon as I met my oncologist, Dr. Sarah Lamarche, I knew I was in good hands. She explained my treatment plan clearly: a cycle of immunotherapy with 26 treatments, every two weeks for a year.

Dr. Alison Wepler took over in late 2020 for the remainder of my treatments and follow-up scans. I could not have asked for two better oncologists. Both were friendly, compassionate and always took the time to explain results.

I also noticed something special about BC Cancer: every time I walked into the clinic, I was greeted with a smile. Volunteers, nurses, doctors – everyone was kind. I think that’s remarkable for what the staff must see each day.

Luckily, I had no adverse reactions to treatment. This was particularly fortunate as my treatment was during the pandemic. I decided to walk the eight kilometres (or 11,000 steps) from Kitsilano to BC Cancer and back each visit.

After five years of follow-up scans, I knew every block, every street crossing, every tree. Those walks became my time to reflect and stay active. They became part of my healing.

Why Giving Back Matters

What started as a simple decision years ago – to include the BC Cancer Foundation in my will – feels even more meaningful now. I also donate monthly because I know firsthand how important this work is.

Even though my contribution isn’t huge, I hope it helps patients and families in the years to come.

I’ve now been retired for more than 20 years and (touch wood) I am enjoying good health. I exercise every morning, enjoy long walks, serve on the Vancouver Opera Guild Board and volunteer. I love



Lore Hoffmann

spending time with friends, attending arts events and relaxing with a good book.

I hope others will consider including a gift in their will to the BC Cancer Foundation to help future patients experience the same health and longevity I’ve enjoyed.

To learn more about leaving a legacy gift, contact Jordan McClymont at jordan.mcclymont@bccancer.bc.ca or (250) 415-1888. Or visit bccancerfoundation.com/legacy



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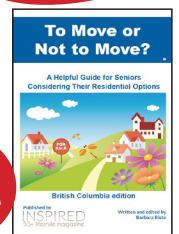
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LIVING ON PURPOSE

by LAURIE MUELLER



Finding Purpose All Year Long

The title of this column is Living on Purpose, and for most of my years I've managed to find spaces in my life to do just that. But there have been times when I was living out someone else's purpose, or doing a job that helped the family's income but didn't speak to my true nature—yet still served a purpose in my life.

We move through various stages in life, and as we do, it's important to remember that not all of them are meant to last forever. Some are humdrum, some exciting, and some downright difficult. When we're in a stage we don't like, it can feel endless—but it won't last. And the ones we wish would never end? They won't last either.

A good friend recently said to me, "I just want to figure out my purpose for this stage in my life." Circumstances, relationships, health, and finances all play a role in shaping what our life is—and what it can be. We seldom go through life without

reassessing where we are and where we want to head next. Sometimes we can plan for it; other times, we simply need to stay open to opportunities that make our soul sing.

The key to navigating life's seasons is to treat each one with respect. You've probably heard the saying, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience." Does that make it easier when we realize the world we once knew has changed and it's up to us to adapt and grow?

I met Peggy a few years ago while visiting Puerto Vallarta. She had just retired and was looking to make Vallarta her second home. When I returned last winter, she was president of the International Friendship Club—an organisation that raises funds from the resort's more affluent visitors to help local residents in need. They sponsor three cleft palate clinics each year, along with funding requests from educational groups and food banks.

Of course, you can't ask too many questions without being offered a job! So when I was asked to write the newsletter, I knew it was something I would love doing. It felt purposeful to me.

My original plan was to spend time in PV relaxing—writing, enjoying the beach, the sunshine, the tequila, and the food. But having spent some of my childhood in a tourist area, I understood that I needed to contribute to the community's well-being, not just enjoy its beauty.

Some people carefully craft their purpose—researching, planning, and setting clear goals. Others stumble upon it unexpectedly: by answering a phone call, replying to an email, or saying "yes" to a request. And for some of us, it's more of a spiritual experience—we simply know what matters to us, and life seems to align the right opportunities in our path.

Now that I have a purpose that spans the whole year—whether I'm there or here—I don't feel 73 years old. I feel younger, more vital, and like I'm making a difference.

Don't let age, or other people's values, stop you from finding the thing that makes your heart sing!

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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Children, women and men forced to flee their homes have made extraordinary efforts to survive. For as long as people are displaced, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, will continue to answer the call to support millions of refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people—today, tomorrow and for years to come.

Leaving a gift in your will is a meaningful way to help provide emergency assistance for the world's most vulnerable refugees.

Contact **Kudzai Riva, Director of Planned Giving**, at rivak@unhcr.org or **(416) 926-7974** to learn more about the impact of leaving a gift in your will.



unhcr.ca/legacy



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

For over 70 years, UNHCR has been dedicated to protecting the rights and well-being of people forced to flee all over the world. With your help, we provide shelter, food, water, medical care and other life-saving assistance. We help safeguard human rights by offering safety, documentation and access to education. And, we develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home and can build brighter futures.



Vibrant Senior Living in East Vancouver

Located in a charming neighbourhood just minutes away from the Killarney Community Centre, our community offers a highly personalised senior living experience. At Sunrise of Killarney, residents will receive best-in-class care as they enjoy:

- A rich variety of engaging activities and social events
- Comfortable, contemporary-style residences
- Fresh, seasonal cuisine crafted by a talented chef
- Ample amenity spaces such as a salon, spa, and theatre

**Schedule your personalised tour today by calling
672-206-0283 or visiting SunriseKillarney.ca.**



KILLARNEY

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