

INSPIRED

55+ lifestyle magazine

MAR / APR 2026



ROBERT THIRSK
ASTRONAUT

MARY FOX:
Behind the Clay

**LISA MARSHALL &
MICHAEL FORBES:**
Turning Broadcasting into
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Cover | ROBERT THIRSK

Astronaut Robert Thirsk, now 72, was 55 when he undertook his second space mission aboard the International Space Station.

Photo: @Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre

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True North, Strong and Free

THRIVE BEYOND 55

Something Bigger Than Yourself

by BARBARA RISTO



At first glance, this issue's features could not be more different.

A world-recognised potter whose glazes are studied and admired internationally. A Canadian astronaut who has lived and worked in space. A broadcaster couple who traded radio microphones for real estate contracts. Yet beneath the surface of these varied lives runs a common current: the desire to give back.

Mary Fox's work is known far beyond her Vancouver Island studio, but her true legacy may not be found in clay at all. Through the Mary Fox Legacy Society Project, she is investing in the next generation of potters, offering studio space and paid apprenticeships. She has also

written two books—one a reflection on her life in clay, the other a practical and generous guide to glazing.

Her belief that helping others matters is not an afterthought; it is the foundation of her life's work.

Astronaut Robert Thirsk has flown multiple space missions, but his feet are firmly planted on Earth when it comes to mentoring and advocacy. He continues to coach young people and is deeply committed to improving healthcare systems. He also challenges those of us over 55 to remain fully engaged—physically, politically and intellectually. Exploration, in his view, is not confined to orbit. It is a lifelong discipline.

Then there is Lisa Marshall and Michael Forbes, familiar voices to many from their years in radio broadcasting. Today, they channel their communication and marketing expertise into helping older adults make thoughtful housing decisions. Through our INSPIRED podcast, they add another dimension to the stories in these pages, allowing readers to hear directly from featured guests and experience the nuances of personality and perspective that only conversation can reveal.

Different paths. Different professions. One shared impulse: to use experience not as a trophy, but as a tool for others.

I hope their stories inspire you to read on—and perhaps to consider how your own next chapter might serve something larger than yourself. |



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Behind the Clay

by VERENA FOXX

“Everything stems from my upbringing,” says acclaimed Canadian potter Mary Fox, speaking from her home in Ladysmith. The belief that helping others matters, she explains, was instilled early on. That belief now underpins the Mary Fox Legacy Society Project, which supports emerging potters through a traditional apprenticeship program that offers paid residencies, studio space, and a growing video library.

“From an early age, the notion of giving was instilled in me,” she adds, referring to how her postwar immigrant parents raised their family. They first settled in New Brunswick in the 1950s before moving to Victoria with their five children in tow.

Mary’s British-born father and Austrian-born mother both grew up in Europe during the Second World War. Each had been orphaned as a child and lived through wartime atrocities. Those childhood experiences, Mary explains, shaped their lifelong commitment to charitable action, both in their birth countries and later in Canada.

As a child, Mary observed—and participated in—her family’s regular efforts to gather clothing and financial donations to support the building of a mission school near Darjeeling, India, which still operates today.

She has now made it her life’s mission to leave a legacy based on sharing her creative knowledge to support young potters as they establish careers of their own. Royalties from her recently published second book, *Developing Glazes*, are donated to the endowment fund that supports the Legacy Project.

An accomplished potter who has exhibited worldwide, Mary is more than what her hands have created.

“Art has the power to guide us through life’s challenges and hardships,” she says.

Her philanthropic focus deepened after she stopped exhibiting her distinctive chalices and sculptural ceramics in 2018 to write her first book, *My Life as a Potter*. The book was intended to inspire the next generation of ceramic artists.

Her focus today is firmly on the Mary Fox Legacy Project.

“My whole life has been about helping others,” she reflects.

She spent years supporting her late wife during a serious illness, at a time when Mary herself was in fragile health while also building a career and a home.

“I was brought up with the importance of community building and giving back,” she says. “It’s no surprise to me that this is now the focus of my life.”

“As you get to the age I am now,” she adds, “you understand the ramifications of your backstory and how it shapes your life story.”

By 2020, Mary decided to sell her work in select galleries only—The Gallery at Mattick’s Farm and the Circle Craft Co-operative on Vancouver’s Granville Island—as well as from her home studio and at Sarah Wilson’s gallery in Ladysmith.

While she no longer formally exhibits, one of her pieces was included in the Vancouver Art Gallery’s 2025 exhibition *Written in Clay: From the John David Lawrence Collection*,



Photo: Sabrina Sachiko Campbell

celebrating British Columbia’s rich ceramic history.

“The books I’ve written are designed to funnel money to the project over the years—and after I’m gone,” she says.

Mary’s books are accessible and richly illustrated with photographs of her life’s work. *My Life as a Potter* traces how she built a successful career from the ground up, encouraging young artists to pursue their creative goals despite curveballs that life may throw their way. Her second book, *Developing Glazes*, supports emerging potters by inviting them not just to follow her methods, but to experiment themselves.

“It’s about thinking outside the box,” she explains. “Firing at a lower temperature, for example, reduces the carbon footprint and costs less. It’s about trial and error.”

Throughout the book, Mary documents her experiments, bringing readers along so they can understand her learning process.

“I started the apprenticeship program because I believe we need to help young people in concrete ways.”

Mary is currently working with her third apprentice, who has just begun a two-year learning period in her studio. During the first year, apprentices—paid \$2,500 per month—work alongside Mary creating her well-known tableware. In the second year, they develop their own work one week per month while continuing to assist Mary during the remaining weeks.

There is no government sponsorship for the program. An endowment fund through the Vancouver Foundation generates annual interest, while a growing artist fund currently supports the apprenticeship program and will eventually purchase resident housing for future apprentices.

“None of the donations have been touched since the funds began,” Mary says. “Everything else has been paid for by the pots sold here in my studio.”

She now has her sights set on another project in Ladysmith: creating several shared studios equipped with tools and equipment donated by potters across B.C. who are aging out of the profession.

“It all started with an idea that keeps growing,” says Mary, who remains inspired by her own ongoing learning. While her output is now somewhat limited by health issues, she still holds her skills firmly in her hands—and takes joy in passing them on.

“Giving always feels good,” she says, heading out the door with her two dogs for their daily walk.

Astronaut Robert Thirsk Finds Joy

by MARION LOUGHEED



From Dr. Robert Thirsk's mild demeanour, you'd never guess he was an accomplished astronaut. His Zoom background gives it away.

"I see you're in outer space," I say.

"You can't keep me away," he replies.

Robert was born at Royal Columbian Hospital in Coquitlam. His father worked in sales, so the family moved around a lot. Growing up, Robert lived in Coquitlam, Powell River, North Surrey, and Kelowna. When he was a teenager, the family moved to Calgary.

Robert is one of only two Canadian astronauts from British Columbia, and the only one born in the province. (Bjarni Tryggvason immigrated with his parents from Iceland when he was eight.)

The 1960s and '70s were exciting decades for him, especially because of how quickly science was advancing. "The first heart transplant was done

in the 1960s," he says, eyes wide, still amazed decades later.

In 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space.

"Only eight years later, two people walked on the moon." Robert recalls that day vividly. "I can remember being in our living room in Kelowna and watching Buzz and Neil hopping about in their white flight suits on the surface of the moon. And then I'd run out to the backyard and look up at the sky and see the moon, and try to reconcile in my mind what was happening with what I was seeing on TV."

Robert grew up watching *Star Trek* and devouring stories about astronauts and outer space in *National Geographic* and *Life*. Whenever a new issue came out, he'd run to the library to read about his heroes.

In 1984, he was selected for the Ca-

nadian Astronaut Program and moved to Ottawa to begin training. This was the beginning of Canada's space program. Robert was a member of the first Canadian crew.

"Every day I was passionate about my career in astronautics. Every day when I was driving into work, I couldn't get there fast enough. I had to make sure I didn't press the gas pedal too much because I'd end up speeding. But every day was exciting, and every day there was a new adventure."

He joined International Space Station expeditions and served as Chief Astronaut of the Canadian Space Agency. His family moved to Houston, Texas, which he describes as "the centre of the universe in terms of astronaut training." He holds the Canadian record for the most time spent in space (204 days, 18 hours, and 29 minutes).

He still feels connected to British

in the Everyday

Columbia. “Even though I currently reside in eastern Canada, my heart is actually in the west,” he says. “That’s part of who I am.”

He believes people in B.C. “have an adventurous spirit.” He’s noticed this ever since he was a boy.

“I loved studying the American astronauts when I was young, but I also enjoyed learning about the early Canadian explorers: David Thompson, Simon Fraser, Alexander Mackenzie. The early Indigenous peoples. These were people who had the right stuff. They had an exploratory mindset. They were interested in what it’s like across the river, on top of the mountain, or across the continental divide. They had a spirit of curiosity and discovery and a desire to learn more, and I think that is something that’s really unique to B.C.”

After retiring as an astronaut, he took a new position in Ottawa with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. He worked there for a few years before retiring from that role as well.

Retirement hasn’t stopped him from staying active. “I still like to keep involved in space-related work, and it makes strategic sense to be located in Ottawa. You have to be close to the government. You have to be close to the decision-makers to push any new initiative forward.” He speaks regularly at conferences and seminars — university and corporate gatherings, as well as high schools across the country.

He tells young people about the values he believes are necessary to make your way in the world: “Self-care, self-management, teamwork, leadership, followership, cross-cultural skills. And I also love to excite the next generation in their explorations and pursuits. In the same way that I was blessed with the era and the mentors I had when I was young, I wish to be a mentor to the next generation and encourage them in their STEM pursuits as well — science, technology, engineering, and math.”

Talking to young people inspires him. “If you get out there and mix with the next generation and become acquainted with their passion, their enthusiasm, their commitment, their talent, it gives you hope for the next century.”

Healthcare remains an ongoing passion. He uses his astronaut experiences and his university medical training to advocate for better healthcare systems.

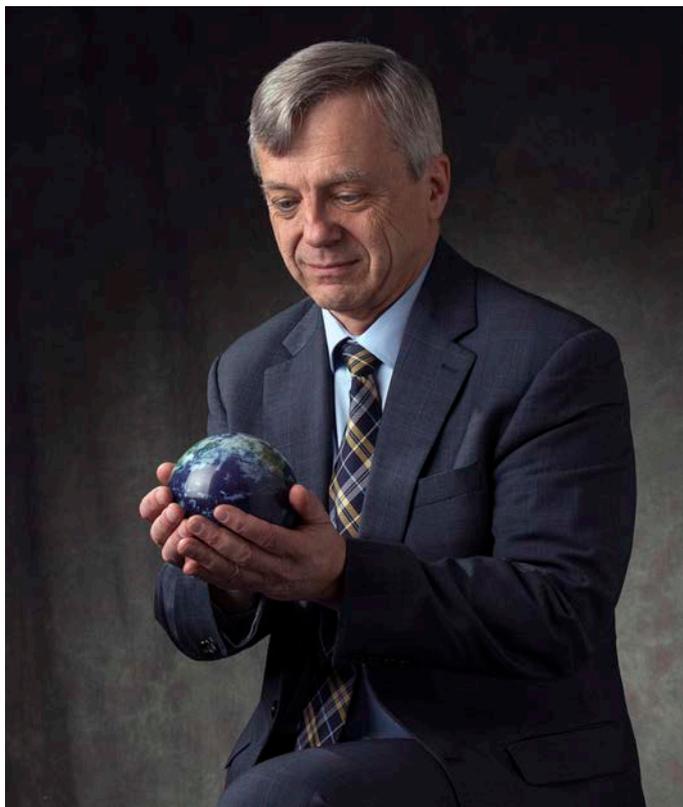
“There’s a health gap in Canada. It’s not between rich and

PAGE 4 | Robert Thirsk learns the skill of working in a weightless environment. *Photo credit: Canadian Space Agency / Canadian Press*

TOP | Robert’s passion may be space, but he’s equally concerned about planet Earth. *Photo: Dave Brown / U of Calgary*

MIDDLE | Robert Thirsk receives the Order of British Columbia. *Photo: Courtesy of Robert Thirsk*

BOTTOM | Installing equipment for a science experiment in space. *Photo credit: NASA*



poor; it's between urban and rural, or between urban and remote, or between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. And that's a travesty. We need to correct that. A lot of the technologies, processes, and innovations we will need to provide healthcare to astronauts who live on the moon or on Mars can also be applied to delivering better healthcare to Northerners, and to empowering the nurses and doctors who work there."

In space, astronauts' bodies decondition and deteriorate. "If you're just floating around the spacecraft and not really stressing your body and your cardiovascular system," Robert explains, "it's natural that the body will get rid of muscle mass and bone mineral density that it no longer needs. But of course, astronauts need to return to Earth at the end of the mission. So we need to have strong bodies."

To that end, they exercise an hour or more every day. Robert continues to follow this routine.

"Even though the last time I flew was over 15 years ago, I still maintain the same physical exercise regimen as I did in space — aerobic exercise, stretching, and resistance exercises as well. And I plan to do that right up to my last moments. Because I want to remain functional."

Robert advises everyone, especially older people, to stay physically active. "Stress your body every day, physically. Be sensible about it. Don't overstress it. But I find that a lot of people today are not getting enough exercise. We sit too much. It's important to get out there and take the body close to its limits."

He also recommends interacting with others. On his first spaceflight, he and his five crewmates would spend time

simply hanging out. He believes this contributed to their collective well-being.

"We enjoyed being with each other. In the evenings, we would have deep discussions on a number of serious topics, solving the problems of the world from space. And we need to continue to do that in our senior years."

His suggestions? "Volunteer at schools, get together with friends and go to cultural events in town — theatre, concerts. Visit museums."

Along with socializing, he emphasizes stimulating our minds. "Get to the library, dive into reading, and stretch your mind. It's just as important when you're 68 as when you're 18."

One way to stay mentally active is to speak out on issues that concern our society.

"I think we all have an obligation," he says. "If it's not through writing op-eds or using social media, we can all write a letter to our MLA, our MP, the prime minister, or the premier. We can write a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. We can get into the local schools and pass on the wisdom we've accumulated over decades of life. Of course, we need to vote for the right leaders as well — and join organizations that are aligned with our beliefs."

He shows me a picture he keeps over his desk. It's a Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The one on the left reads, "Things That Matter." The one on the right says, "Things You Can Control." The space where they overlap is narrow. He points to this spot.

"It's not much where the overlap is, but that's where each of us needs to stop and think about what we can do."

Robert's life isn't all work and social

engagement. He enjoys taking his rescue dog, Otto, out for long walks deep in the forest. "We have the good fortune of living on the edge of the Greenbelt here in Ottawa. So we have access to tens of kilometres of deep forest trails, and I get out into the forest every day for an hour. I find that's a really good time for reflection as well."

He loves going on cruises with his wife, visiting friends and his three adult children, and skating on Ottawa's Rideau Canal.

One key lesson he's learned in life is how adaptable humanity is, both collectively and individually. He's convinced that, with the right group of people, we can accomplish any goal we set for ourselves. He illustrates this with an anecdote from his first trip to space.

"When I arrived aboard the International Space Station, I had to learn to move about — not by walking or running, but by flying around like Superman, using my upper body to pull myself along. I was awkward for the first couple of days in space. I was kicking my legs when I really didn't need to. It's not like swimming. It's a totally different way of getting around when you're in weightlessness. I might have accidentally kicked a crewmate, or knocked some object off a wall that could have hit a switch or a valve that it shouldn't have, with my flailing elbows or knees."

But after a couple of days, he was moving around beautifully, like a fish in water. "It felt like I had been born in weightlessness. I was very, very comfortable. The human body and the human mind are very adaptable. So that's pretty special."

Despite his extraordinary experiences, Robert's happiest moments have been more grounded.

"I can think of a lot of occasions where we're attending family events, hockey games, ballet recitals — things like that — where we're just beaming with pride and happiness.

"Even though I've had a pretty phenomenal career exploring space, the most important role for any human being is to take care of your family, nurture your family, and be there for your family. That's given me a lot of satisfaction." |

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
ROBERT THIRSK at
www.seniorlivingmag.com/podcast



Turning a Life in Broadcasting Into Service, Storytelling, & Community

by BARBARA RISTO

If you've ever listened to the INSPIRED podcast—the companion online experience to INSPIRED 55+ Lifestyle Magazine—you've likely noticed the conversations don't feel forced. They unfold naturally, with warmth, curiosity, and a deep respect for the person on the other end of the microphone. That ease isn't accidental. It comes from decades spent learning how to listen.

Behind the microphone are Lisa Marshall and Michael Forbes—partners in life, partners in business, and trusted voices in our community. Long before they were helping people over 55 navigate one of life's biggest transitions—finding or leaving a home—they were guiding listeners through their mornings on Victoria's airwaves.

Today, as real estate professionals who specialise in serving older adults, they continue to do what they've always done best: connect, communicate, and care.

Their work producing the INSPIRED podcast is an extension of that lifelong calling.

Michael's path into broadcasting began with an unexpected moment of clarity.

"As a young man, I didn't know what I wanted to be," he says. He had considered the army and even spent time as a reservist with the British Columbia Dragoons in the Okanagan. Later, while living in Montreal with his father, he found himself listening to CJAD radio. When the DJ introduced "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds", something clicked.

"I had an epiphany," he recalls. "I thought, I want to do what that DJ is doing."

It made sense in retrospect. As a child, Michael had been obsessed with his cassette recorder, creating pretend radio shows and interviewing family members. He just hadn't realised it could be a career.

Lisa, too, found her place in broad-



Photo credit: Debby Henry

casting—and, ultimately, alongside Michael. Together, they became a team, learning how to balance each other's strengths.

"I'm a good listener," Lisa says simply. "Michael is a great communicator. That combination works well."

It worked so well that their partnership became the foundation of everything that followed.

Broadcasting offered more than a job. It offered a creative outlet and a sense of purpose.

Michael often reflects on something Johnny Carson once said—that he loved starting the day with nothing and, by airtime, having created an entertaining

experience. That same creative spark fuelled their work.

"We loved the creativity of it," Michael says. "It didn't feel like a regular nine-to-five job. It was show business—and we got paid."

For Lisa, the magic was in the process itself.

"Starting with nothing and allowing ideas to flow, and seeing them become something—it was amazing every time," she says.

Throughout their careers, Lisa and Michael became deeply involved in their community. They anchored annual Radiothons that raised more than a million dollars for BC Children's Hospital.

They exceed countless fundraisers and events. They used their voices not simply to entertain, but to inspire generosity.

“A lot of times we were just the megaphone,” Michael says. “But we saw first-hand what a difference that could make.”

That instinct—to use their talents in service of others—would later shape their work in real estate and their contributions to INSPIRED.

Michael was born and raised in Victoria but left as a young man, assuming he’d build his life elsewhere. Yet opportunity—and perhaps something deeper—called him back.

While working in Vancouver, a program director encouraged Lisa and Michael to apply for a morning show at a new Victoria station. They got the job, expecting it would be a stepping stone to larger markets.

Instead, they discovered they were already where they wanted to be.

“With this being Michael’s hometown and how beautiful it is here, it was a no-brainer,” Lisa says. “How can you move from this gorgeous island to anywhere else?”

Victoria became not just their workplace, but their home in every sense of the word.

When their broadcasting careers eventually came to an end—a sudden and disorienting transition—they faced a familiar question: What comes next?

The answer, it turned out, was real estate. It allowed them to continue working together. It drew on the same skills they had spent decades refining: communication, listening, marketing, and trust.

“Marketing and people skills through our radio career made it a seamless transition,” Michael says.

Lisa agrees. “Working as a team was already second nature,” she says. “We rely on each other’s strengths.”

But their approach to real estate is guided by something deeper than professional skill. It is rooted in empathy.

They understand that buying or selling a home is rarely just a transaction. It is often a life transition—one that carries emotional weight, especially for older adults navigating change. It’s one of the biggest decisions of one’s life, say both

Lisa and Michael. “We put our clients and their needs first. We listen. We’re conscientious and thorough.”

Their philosophy is simple: service over sales.

Their empathy is shaped, in part, by their own lived experience.

Lisa and Michael are parents to two adult sons. At the same time, they are full-time caregivers to Lisa’s elderly parents, who live in their home and require constant care.

They exist, as many in their generation do, in the space between raising children and caring for ageing parents.

This firsthand understanding of caregiving gives them unique insight into the realities faced by many INSPIRED readers. They know what it means to balance responsibility, love, and the practical challenges of changing life circumstances.

Working together so closely could strain many relationships. For Lisa and Michael, it has strengthened theirs.

Years spent together in the close quarters of a radio studio taught them how to communicate, how to compromise, and how to trust.

“We started and continue to be best friends,” Michael says.

“We know each other’s strengths and weaknesses,” says Lisa. “There’s no power struggle. It’s seamless.”

Their shared foundation allows them to navigate both business and life with uncommon harmony.

If there is a single thread connecting everything Lisa and Michael do, it is community.

Their ongoing community involvement reflects a belief that giving back is not optional—it’s essential.

“Serving the community we call home is everything,” Lisa says.

Michael often reflects on a quote by Pablo Picasso: The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.

For them, that gift has always been communication.

They have coached youth sports, served on boards, and hosted hundreds of fundraisers. Collectively, those efforts have helped raise millions of dollars. But their impact isn’t measured only in numbers. It is measured in relationships.

Their work putting together the

INSPIRED podcast brings their journey full circle.

Each episode features someone whose story appears in the magazine—individuals who have faced adversity, pursued purpose, or discovered new meaning later in life.

For Lisa and Michael, these conversations are not interviews. They are human connections.

“We meet the most fascinating and entertaining individuals,” says Michael.

Their approach reflects a rare skill in today’s fast-paced world: the ability to truly listen.

It is why their guests feel comfortable opening up. It is why listeners feel drawn in. And it is why the podcast is a meaningful extension of the INSPIRED experience.

In a world often defined by division and uncertainty, Lisa and Michael maintain their equilibrium through perspective and presence.

Michael finds grounding in meditation. “It brings me back to my centre,” he says.

Lisa finds peace in nature and in focusing on what she can control—her own outlook. “I like to concentrate on the here and now,” she says.

Both share a belief that life unfolds as it should, often in ways we cannot predict.

Some of Michael’s most meaningful experiences, he says, arrived without planning. Lisa echoes that sentiment. “Life happens while you’re busy making other plans.”

Their lives reflect a quiet but powerful truth: that kindness, curiosity, and service can shape not only a career, but a community.

Today, whether they are helping a client navigate a housing transition or sitting behind a microphone listening to someone’s life story, Lisa and Michael are doing what they’ve always done.

They are creating connection. They are helping people feel heard.

In many ways, they never left broadcasting. They simply found a new way to do it.

And through their work with INSPIRED, they continue to remind us that every life holds a story worth telling—and that sometimes, the greatest gift we can offer is simply to listen. |

bc senior housing directory

Whether you're exploring housing options for yourself, a loved one, or a friend, this guide will help you navigate the possibilities with ease and confidence.

Here, you'll find an overview of care levels, locations, pricing, and amenities to help you make an informed decision. We're grateful to all the senior housing communities that contributed to making this guide a helpful tool for you.

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LANGLEY

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Price: \$3400+

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Sunridge Gardens ■

604-510-5091; 22301 Fraser Hwy; www.SunridgeSeniors.ca

Capacity: 145 suites

Price: \$2950+

Amenities/Services: daily fitness & social activities; Red Seal chef prepared meals; housekeeping; courtesy shuttle; bus outings; hair salon; guest suite; close to amenities; theatre; courtyard gardens; pets allowed.

SIDNEY

Legion Manor ■●

250-652-3261; 7601 East Saanich Rd.;

www.legionmanorvictoria.ca

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The Red Coat Trail

by JOAN THOMPSON

As the visitors had managed to hide their getaway car under a haystack at the edge of town undetected, no one suspected they might be bank robbers. They mingled with the townspeople going about their Saturday errands, stopping to chat with shopkeepers and passersby. But couched between a visit to the barber and a chin-wag with the mayor, the three men had stolen a heavy hammer and crowbar from the CPR workyard, cut all of the town's telegraph and telephone wires, and disabled any car parked near the bank.

In the early hours of the next day, they had a flashlight—and revolver—trained on the two guards at the town bank, the safe blown open, and tens of thousands of dollars in cash, and were bound for their getaway car.

They reached the Montana border within moments of leaving Foremost, Alberta, a town on the western edge of what would become known as the Red Coat Trail.

The Wild West lived up to its name in the Canadian prairies at the turn of the last century, when deeded land and adventure lured immigrants, drifters, and dreamers to the promise of big sky country.

Rife with stories of gambling, rum-running, and cattle rustling, the government of Canada, in 1874, decided it was time to rein in the goings-on and sent a battalion of 200 “Red Coats” (the North-West Mounted Police) into the badlands to lay down the law.

From Winnipeg, the newly recruited Mounties marched 1,300 kilometres across southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as far as Fort MacLeod to establish a chain of constabulary posts that might help referee relationships between Indigenous peoples, government-sponsored settlers, and the all-too-active outlaw gangs.

The police force's calming presence on the newly established Red Coat Trail was quickly apparent. The infamous bandits Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid, upon entering Canada via the Outlaw Trail, were directed to a ranch near Fort MacLeod that was in need of fresh cowhands. It wasn't long before their cowboy skills outpaced their bank-robbing



ones, allowing them to blend seamlessly into Canadian prairie life.

Sitting Bull, after the defeat of General Custer at Little Bighorn, was given asylum in Wood Mountain, where he and his Sioux followers, having agreed to respect Canadian law, lived peacefully and undisturbed between 1877 and 1881.

Another legend tells of a lone Red Coat—Daniel Peach—who offered to resolve territorial disputes between the Assiniboine and the Blackfoot by leading 300 Assiniboine 250 kilometres north to unstaked hunting grounds.

With the addition of another transportation artery in 1915—the southern spur of the Canadian Pacific Railway—the Red Coats were faced with further challenges.

With road and trail transport now available to support ranchers and wheat growers, industry close to these lifelines boomed across the prairies. Settlements became full-fledged thriving towns, complete with hotels, saloons, banks, dental and medical clinics, beauty parlours, post offices, churches, and schools.

During American Prohibition (1920–1932), saloons, gambling halls, and liquor outlets assumed an outsized role in local commerce—if only to satisfy American customers' thirst for 12 per cent Canadian beer!

One town, Scotsguard, was dubbed “Little Chicago” due to its notoriety as a sin bin, with bootleggers and card sharks flooding the town every weekend for dusk-to-dawn poker games—not to mention professional gangs of cross-border bank robbers.

With the onset of the Great Depression in the late 1920s, the high-living glory days of these boom towns were short-lived. On the prairies, the economic downturn was exacerbated by droughts, dust storms, typhoid outbreaks, unemployment, and towns' vulnerability to fire, forcing bankrupt homesteaders to flee to larger cities.



Those clinging to the last remnants of small prairie towns inevitably surrendered to the unstoppable tides of change.

Today, those poignant memories and whispers of history envelop visitors journeying along the Red Coat Trail.

Opportunities to comb through the relics of time await at every turn: a shuttered schoolhouse nestled in a field of Russian thistle; a single white church spire, stark against the prairie sky; an abandoned hardware store with pieces of the town’s boardwalk still nudged against its stoop.

And when you think all has been lost to time, you will stumble upon places that, through restorative magic (some would say madness), defy the label of ghost town.

One of those places is Etzikom, Alberta. Once the epicentre of windmill technology critical to harnessing the Chinook winds, it is now home to the Etzikom Museum and Canadian National Historic Windpower Interpretive Centre. In addition to hundreds of antique windmills and watermills on display, a cluster of the town’s original buildings has also been lovingly restored.

Another town that has found new life is Scotsguard. Keith Hagan, a proud descendant of a family that resided in Scotsguard during its glory days as “Little Chicago,” has bought and restored most of the town’s remaining pioneer buildings: the old United Church, the fire hall and jail, and the curling rink.

Even the original street signs have been rescued and are once more directing traffic through town. When you see the sign, “Speed Limit 20 miles per hour by Police Order,” you will be reminded of the missionary zeal of the first battalion of Red Coats sent to keep the peace in the West—and be

grateful for their enduring legacy along the trail today.

Travelling west from BC in your vehicle, the most straightforward access to the Red Coat Trail is via Highway 4 just south of Lethbridge. The eastern exit (or entrance, if travelling west) is via Highway 2, which approaches and leaves Winnipeg from the southwest.

When you tire of photographing tumbleweed-tossed streets, stop at the numerous museums along the route. Among them is the T-Rex Discovery Centre in Eastend, which features the six-million-year-old “Scottie,” described as the world’s largest T. rex, and the Rusty Relics Museum in Carlyle, which showcases prairie rail history. The Etzikom Museum and Canadian National Historic Windpower Interpretive Centre is another highlight.

Though there are a few larger, very much alive centres along the trail, much of the route is unserved, so prepare and pack accordingly. Municipal campgrounds, however, are plentiful, often situated in the centre of even the smallest towns. Take advantage of these lovingly maintained green spaces—quiet, clean, economical, and usually adjacent to an interesting historic feature along the Red Coat Trail. |

PAGE 11 TOP | With 30 buildings and 30,000 artifacts, it’s easy to immerse yourself in Prairie pioneer life at Kootenai Brown Historical Park in Pincher Creek, Alberta.

PAGE 11 BOTTOM | An ingenious portable farm windmill is but one of the many ‘artifacts’ and pioneer buildings on display at the Etzikom Museum and Historic Windmill Centre, Alberta.

BELOW | Step into the CPR’s Chief Engineer’s office as it was in 1910 at the Rusty Relics Museum in Carlyle, Saskatchewan.

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Discovering Tofino & Ucluelet's Flourishing Culinary Scenes

by MICHELLE HOPKINS

When I was invited to embark on a curated culinary journey to dive deeper into Tofino and Ucluelet's vibrant food scenes, I was intrigued. Ideally situated along the west coast of Vancouver Island, both towns are renowned for spectacular rainforests and rugged shorelines.

I've visited both multiple times over the years and have always enjoyed the gastronomy, but I was about to discover just how exciting it is.

Over the past decade or so, a culinary wave has been reshaping the narrative in these coastal gems. Both gastronomic terrains are heavily influenced by fresh, hyperlocal, foraged, and sustainable ingredients. Chefs, farmers, ranchers, and fishermen work together toward a green future, where island ingredients are the featured attraction on daily menus while reflecting the agriculture and people of these two seaside hamlets.

Lise Hines, founder of Chew on This Tasty Tours, and self-proclaimed foodie, storyteller, and community builder, put together some must-visit eateries for me to explore.

"In the Pacific Rim, our culinary experiences are intentionally curated by request," says Hines. "This allows us to work closely with local chefs and producers to create deeply personal, seasonal journeys that reflect the character of Ucluelet and Tofino rather than a one-size-fits-all tour."

Here are just some of the restaurants I visited over four days...

In the picturesque surf town of Tofino, its epicurean offerings are as impressive as its crashing waves—ranging from white-tablecloth dining to rustic eateries.



A compelling reason to visit the Relais & Châteaux-designated Wickaninnish Inn is the renowned The Pointe Restaurant. At the creative hub is seasoned executive chef Clayton Fontaine, former chef at Vancouver’s acclaimed Osteria Savio Volpe. Fontaine crafted two distinct menus—the Table d’Hôte, a three-course pairing, and the evolving five-course Tasting Menu. Both highlight the region’s seafood and ingredients, transforming them into beautifully plated dishes that inspire your taste buds in the best possible way.

Overlooking Cox Bay, the Long Beach Lodge Resort’s Great Room features outstanding east- and west-coast cuisine orchestrated by award-winning executive chef Shaun Snelling. Think crab, chard squid, and the best burrata salad—all of which emphasize Snelling’s fondness for farm-to-table, locally sourced land- and sea-inspired plates.

“I am so blessed to have at my disposal the freshest, local ingredients to work with,” says Snelling. “I take notes from our surrounding environment and work that inspiration into every dish.”

Nestled at the Tofino Resort + Marina, The Shelter is a landmark. Opened in 2003, it burned to the ground in December 2022. It didn’t take long for the hip and laid-back local hangout to start anew with a refreshed upscale look along the Tofino Inlet. It showcases exceptional gourmet comfort food with breathtaking waterfront views. Chef Matheus Cunha offers multiple showstoppers, including the tuna stack and pan-roasted Pacific halibut.

“Through the Ucluelet Tofino Culinary Guild (UTCG), we can order directly, and they deliver B.C. products that we can’t source on the island,” says Cunha. “Our menu is based on whatever seasonal ingredients are available.”



UTCG was founded in 2010 by a collective of forward-thinking chefs, including visionary Lisa Ahier, chef and author of the prized SoBo cookbooks, as a nonprofit distribution chain where small-batch farmers and suppliers from across B.C. can sell their goods.

Many also credit Ahier for her grassroots efforts to invigorate Tofino’s gastronomic scene. The owner/chef of the now-closed SoBo Restaurant, Ahier says locals can still pick up her signature SoBo wild salmon chowder and other products at various stores. P.S. The chowder paired with her famous cornbread is simply divine.

“I wanted to start a rebirth of SoBo on my terms,” says Ahier, who is opening a smaller version of SoBo soon. “Running SoBo Restaurant (short for Sophisticated Bohemian) was exhausting, but I still love to cook for people.”

Ucluelet has shaken off its sleepy-town past; today, it boasts a small but rich tapestry of dining experiences worth exploring.

Gone are the days when fine dining was confined to Michelin-star restaurants in large cities. Since opening in 2019, the 27-seat Pluvio has garnered multiple accolades, including Canada’s 100 Best New Destination Restaurants 2022.

Executive chef/owner Warren Barr is a veteran of destination restaurants such as PEI’s The Inn at Bay Fortune and Tofino’s The Pointe. Barr’s marathon of tantalizing flavours is a choreographed voyage of small plates that have achieved cult status among both vacationers and locals alike.

Diners might begin with an amuse-bouche, such as a foie gras tartlet, followed by courses like its famous humdog, ending with a cake that you swear is an apple.

Next door to Pluvio is the 30-seat Heartwood Kitchen food outfitter. Opened in 2018, Heartwood is also a catering company, cooking school, and grab-and-go lunch spot. Former chef at Long Beach Lodge Resort, Red Seal Ian Reddick’s passion for cooking is palpable.

Sitting in the 1920s yellow heritage home, Reddick says the culinary team didn’t want to peg itself as one style of cuisine: “We wanted to be able to scratch our creative itches depending on the seasonality and what we were feeling.”

That they do extremely well. From its fried buttermilk chicken to Heartwood’s chowder, to its Driftwood chickpea fries, the carte du jour is delightfully home-style cooking with an island twist.

Lastly, housed in a former church, a pleasant surprise was dinner at Ucluelet Brewing Company. At the helm is Columbia-born Pablo Castillo, who blends flavours from his home country with the best of Vancouver Island’s ingredients.

“The way the flavours are built is definitely influenced by watching my mother and grandmother cook back in Colum-

PAGE 13 LEFT | Chef Ian Reddick, Heartwood Kitchen

PAGE 13 TOP | Pluvio’s world famous humdog

PAGE 13 BOTTOM | The Great Room at Long Beach Lodge

LEFT | Culinary mavens Lise Hines and chef Lisa Ahier

PAGE 15 | The Shelter chef, Matheus Cunha

bia,” admits Castillo. “I also pair diverse flavours from my travels around the world.”

Whether it’s the ridiculously delicious hummus topped with hazelnut dukkah or the squash and labneh salad, Castillo redefines “pub fare.” |



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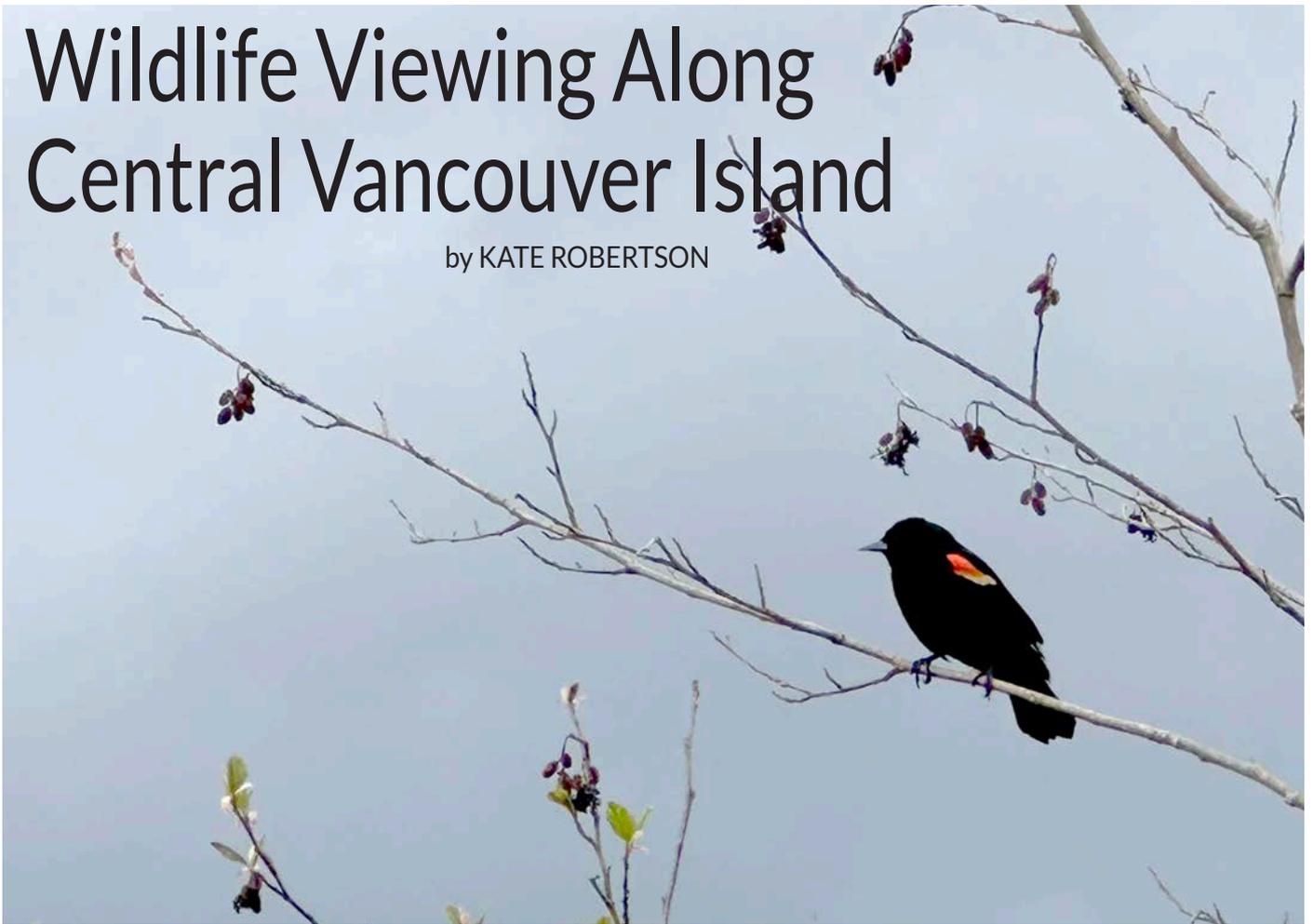
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Wildlife Viewing Along Central Vancouver Island

by KATE ROBERTSON



“One of the things I love about this job is how much personality each whale has,” says our Vancouver Island Whale Watch tour guide, Vanessa. Just kilometres from our Nanaimo departure into the Georgia Strait, we’ve seen eight orcas, a colony of harbour seals (orcas’ main diet) and Steller sea lions—in less than four hours.

Vanessa and Rodrigo, the boat captain, have a knack for finding whale pods, based on experience. Companies also share their intel on the most recent sightings. What amazes me most is that both Vanessa and Rodrigo can identify an orca just from the shape of its dorsal fin, or even its saddle or eye patch shapes.

One of the pod groups we see today is the T49As, one of the most frequent Bigg’s orca families in the Salish Sea (this vast inland sea made up of the Georgia Strait, Puget Sound and the Juan de Fuca Strait). Nan, the matriarch, is 39 years old and has birthed six offspring.

Wildlife viewing opportunities on central Vancouver Island are plentiful,

and that’s the focus of my long weekend trip. Nanaimo itself has more than 180 kilometres of trails and so many parks to visit that you won’t be able to fit them all into one weekend.

I recommend a visit to the rocky trails and beaches of Pipers Lagoon Park, an isthmus that extends out to a rocky headland. From here, you can see the northern tip of nearby Galiano Island and watch BC Ferries entering Nanaimo while you beachcomb and birdwatch. Shorebirds and waterfowl are abundant, and the park is home to the graceful great blue heron.

Just a five-minute drive north is the much larger (36-acre) Neck Point Park, with its winding oak grove trails (watch for wild rabbits!), beach trails and rugged rock cliffs. It’s not uncommon to see orcas, sea lions or otters from the north headland. I wasn’t that lucky, but I did sit and watch the graceful undulation of porpoises feeding close to shore at sunset.

At Buttertubs Marsh, a 136-acre bird

and wildlife sanctuary in the centre of town, I walked the two-kilometre loop around the marsh. It’s spring, and the trail is a cacophony of birdsongs and whistles. I easily spotted red-winged blackbirds, towhees, robins, chickadees and a great blue heron feeding just metres from the trail.

I am amazed at how much Nanaimo has changed over the past few years. As prices have soared in Victoria, more and more people are opting to move to this blossoming city of 110,000. New businesses are popping up, and culture is thriving.

Vibrant downtown Nanaimo is fun to explore. It’s divided into three handy neighbourhoods: the Old City Quarter, a charming historic district with revitalized heritage buildings that now house spas, studios, galleries, cafes and vintage shops; the Arts District and Commercial Street, the primary business hub and home to the Nanaimo Art Gallery; and the Waterfront District, situated along the lively Harbourfront Walkway,

with scenic views of the marina and across the channel to Gabriola Island and the mainland in the distance.

Of course, a necessary ingredient for a great road trip is great food, and I wasn't disappointed. First stop was Horang, which serves modern Korean-inspired dishes in a lively setting (think mandu dumplings and kimbap with a twist). I was glad I had a reservation because there was a lineup out the door.

The next evening, I ate authentic Italian cuisine at La Stella Trattoria, a small, cozy restaurant located in the Old City Quarter. Wood-fired pizza and handmade pasta are specialties, and be sure to try the flame-roasted meatballs, served with a delicious tomato sauce and sprinkled with fresh Parmesan cheese.

From Nanaimo, I head 37 kilometres north to the small city of Parksville, known for its large sandy beaches and mild climate, to explore the Central Vancouver Island Bird Trail. The BC Bird Trail website is a handy resource and contains detailed information for birdwatchers to find the best birding hotspots in British Columbia. The website is kept up to date with field notes and seasonal bird lists.

In the Parksville region, a few places for bird and wildlife viewing are the French Creek Estuary and the Englishman River Estuary, both just minutes from downtown. The much larger Englishman River Estuary is a critical staging ground for the Pacific brant and more than 250 species of birds can be seen here. It incorporates 312 hectares of protected estuary and adjacent forest, with excellent views of the river, salt marshes and the ocean. There are several flat walking loops around the park, with viewing areas and interpretive signage.



PAGE 16 | Red wing blackbird at Butter Tubs Marsh Park, a 136-acre bird and wildlife sanctuary in Nanaimo BC

TOP | Nanoose Bay Cafe

MIDDLE | Pizza oven at La Stella Trattoria in Nanaimo

BOTTOM | Trails at Pipers Lagoon Park

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Hamilton Marsh, just minutes from the town of Qualicum Beach, is located within 360 hectares of forest. (Tip: when I put the address for the marsh in my GPS, I was taken on a wild goose chase. To get to the main trailhead, head west on Memorial Avenue [Highway 4] and turn north onto Hilliers Road South, then watch for the second trailhead sign on the left—it's easy to miss.)

Wetlands are areas of high biological diversity and support a large number of animal and plant species. They are extremely productive breeding and feeding areas for wildlife. Along with the 130 species of birds that can be found at Hamilton Marsh, there are several species of frogs, grey wolves and black bears. It's also a particularly rich environment for an impressive 30 species of dragonflies.

As the largest waterbird brood marsh on this part of the island, it is home to many endangered bird species, including the northern pygmy owl. Research shows that habitat loss is the number one challenge facing bird populations. Until recently, Hamilton Marsh was at risk of encroachment by developers, but fortunately, I was happy to hear that an agreement has now been signed to preserve the area.

Dinner on my final night at Nanoose Bay Cafe is a full-on local experience. The warm spring evening light shines through floor-to-ceiling windows as I savour the flavours of fresh, local Ocean Wise seafood—just-shucked oysters, albacore tuna tataki and wild-caught salmon. I wish I had longer to explore this central Island paradise. |



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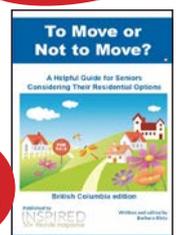
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LIVING ON PURPOSE

by LAURIE MUELLER



What's Your Personality Type?

I've always been fascinated by the way people behave—how they are the same as or different from the way I act and relate to the world.

I've started to review my life and reflect on how I act now, as opposed to how I acted when I was younger.

Of course, being sometimes labelled as elderly (according to my sources, an elder is defined as 65 years or older) is a serious blow to the way I see myself.

I used to think that being elderly isn't a personality type or style—it's simply an ability to move my body and mind in the way I expect. But perhaps "elderly" is a personality type, with subtypes.

They say extraverts have a lot of energy, while introverts live more in their own little world. Well, I have been accused of both.

Now I find that if I don't use my energy and spend my time with my computer on my lap, typing away at miscellaneous projects, my body stiffens up, and I act like the elderly woman I'm trying to avoid.

Sometimes I watch a friend rise from her chair, and I can feel her pain. She adjusts herself in stages until she is standing upright. I remind myself: remember when we could stand effortlessly with one quick movement?

I'm not complaining about being this age. I love it. But there are some things I simply have to come to terms with.

Being this age means I can do whatever I want. I don't have to do things because they are best for the family, the organisation, or the firm. Now I can do them because they are best for me.

Returning to the subject of personality types, I'd like to officially announce that the "elderly" personality type is a sought-after one.

For some of us, this personality type may take longer to process information or retrieve important names and dates—but eventually, they come! And if they don't, do we really care?

Will our "elderly friends" remember our names, the great time we had the other night at the casino (okay, I don't do casinos, but I could), or whether they remembered to pick us up for our afternoon card game?

This personality type wakes early, but there is no obligation to let the world know we are awake until we want to.

We can eat when we want (though not always what we want), exercise when we choose, and attend whatever events appeal to us. We can turn off our hearing aids when the conversation turns to a topic we don't enjoy. We can make excuses to avoid activities that bore us or require too much energy. We don't have to worry about the hairs on our chin because our friends' eyesight isn't any better than ours.

And there are subtypes within the elderly personality type.

I've decided my sub-personality type is IWDIT, which stands for "I will do it tomorrow."

My husband's is INIIWNDI, meaning "It's not important; I will not do it." But sometimes he has a change of heart, and his sub-personality type shifts to DINII—"Do it now; it's important."

Another favourite personality type is INAN: "I need a nap." Then there is IHTR&P: "I have to rush and pee."

You are old enough to know your own sub-personality type. Don't be afraid to let others know what it is. |

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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