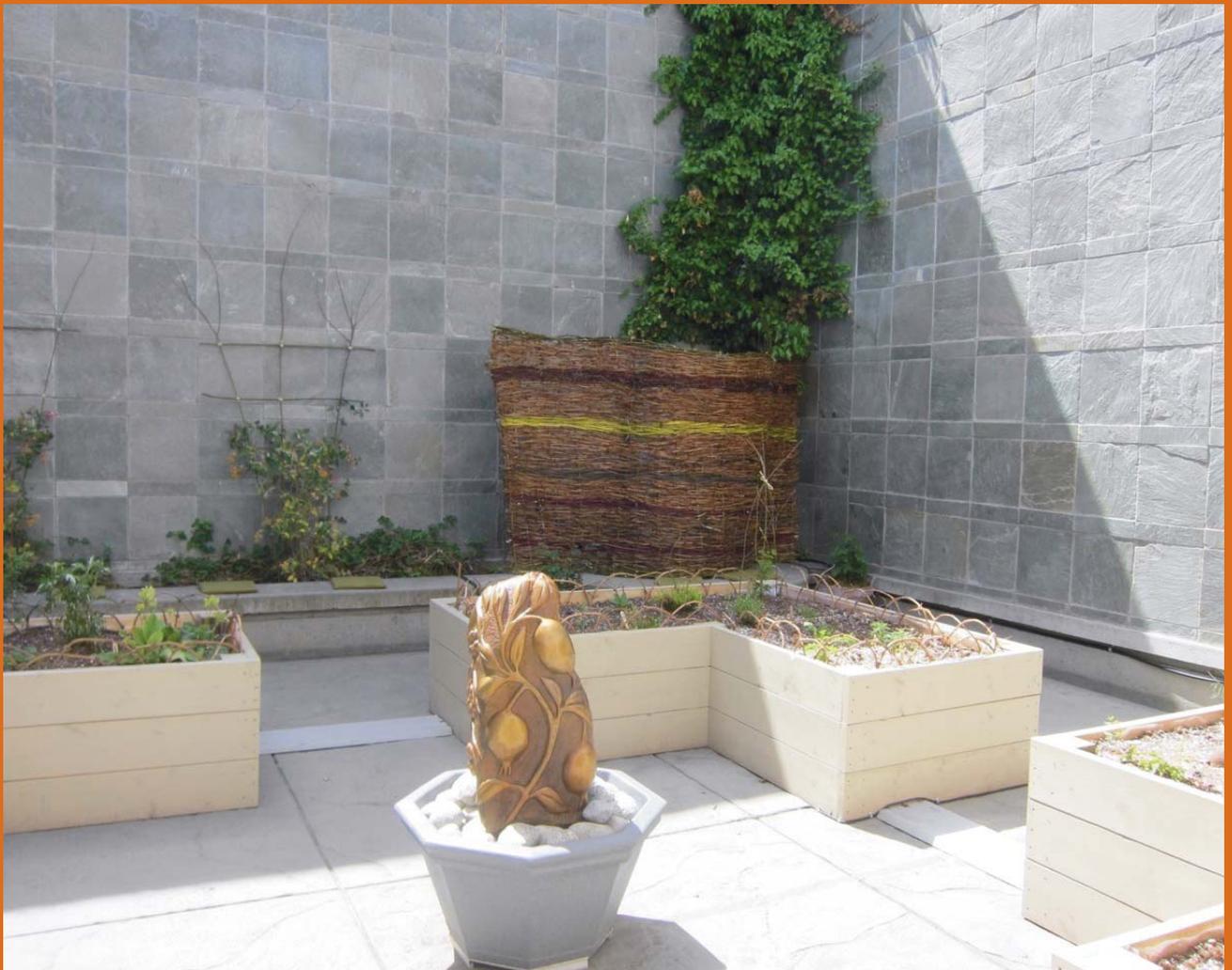


THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE  
NUMBER 15, SPRING 2015  
EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.  
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.  
AVAILABLE ONLINE AT  
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# The Voices of Creative Aging

**CREATIVE AGING** is a powerful new social and cultural movement that is stirring the imaginations of communities and people everywhere.

**This is the first book to document the movement.**

Often called Sage-ing, Creative Aging takes many forms: academic, social and personal. It includes festivals, conferences, classes, group sessions and individual creative pursuits. The Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude was founded by the Okanagan Institute in 2011 to honour the transformational power of creativity. Intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing, the Journal presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement.

Sage-ing is about seeking – satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to Know Thyself and contribute that

knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and wellbeing

for the individual and to our culture. Creative Aging brings together more than 50 essays and galleries of images that showcase the power of the imagination expressed and enjoyed.

## CREATIVE AGING

STORIES FROM THE PAGES OF THE JOURNAL  
SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE  
SPIRIT, GRACE AND GRATITUDE  
EDITED BY  
Karen Close and Carolyn Cowan



# The Journal of Creative Aging

EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

NUMBER 15, SPRING 2015  
ISSN 1920-5848

## SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE

### Okanagan Institute

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Cover image by Lynden Beesley, Courtyard  
installation 1.

## FROM THE EDITOR

This past week I went to a musical production of Julianne Moore's story *Freckleface Strawberry*. Eager to see what sage message this academy award winner wanted to share, I had the best seat in the house. Not only was the view of the stage good, but I could feel the reactions of a young girl two seats away. She starred with an open mouth through an hour and fifteen minutes of lively action and lots of singing. After, she jumped up, eager to accept the invitation to meet the performers. As she excused herself to pass me, I asked her age. Proudly, she replied, "I am three years old." She possesses the enthusiasm for life I want to regenerate as I complete my sixth decade.

Creative process is powerful and empowering, even if you're just watching; it's about engaging. In Carl Jung's words, "It is vital for each living being to become its own entelechia and to grow into that which it was from the very beginning." Entelechy was a new word to me, but I was delighted by its discovery. It is the act of realization of what before was only

potential. Enthusiasm for life is an act which purposely directs the growth of an individual. A creative act is entelechy and the ability to find joy through our natural inclinations is inborn.

When we see children playing or even just observing their surroundings the life energy is palpable. *Finding Neverland* starring Robin Williams presented James Barrie's decision to invite orphans to his opening night of *Peter Pan* and to seat them throughout the audience of skeptical, sophisticated theatre goers. Children exude authentic expression and joy. They are curious and willing to explore themselves. Stress begins when one fails to heed the urgings of the heart, but spring shows us how dormancy revitalises.

In Susan McClasin's INTO THE MYSTIC: MY YEARS WITH OLGA, she points out, "life is enriched when one becomes an integrative creative, and regains the vision of a child – the ability to look at adult experiences with the abandon, curiosity and wonder". The mystery of silence is the

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mystery of what Olga calls “the within,” the interior ground from which all things emerge”. Bo Snarski’s A PERSPECTIVE, recalls a youth spent idle in the freshness of spring and “being fascinated by the beauty surrounding me... I was perfectly happy and at peace.” In LOOK-UP: THE ART OF CLOUD PLAY Lisa Lipsett suggests an exercise to remember we are creative by nature. UP THE GARDEN PATH by Lynden Beesley observes cycles of nature’s creative energy and Derryn Yeomans reminds us APRIL IS POETRY MONTH. How might you

recapture the excitement of being three years old? Cathy Biagi shares how she has made her heart’s urgings her business in RITCHCRAFT GALLERY AND FRAMING: A DREAM FULFILLED. *“It is vital for each living being to become its own entelechia and to grow into that which it was from the very beginning.”* In this spring issue hear the calls by each contributor to: Know yourself. Be yourself. Love yourself. Share yourself. Celebrate your uniqueness and enjoy your freckles.  
– Karen Close

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## SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

- Article is to be related to aging and creativity, in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining wisdom and self awareness;
- Article to be attached as a word doc in .rtf format;
- 500 to a 1500 word maximum;
- Photos: Please attach each photo separately including: the writer’s headshot photo and four or five photos, related to article . All photos should be attached in high resolution jpg format with a caption;
- Insert the word “**photo**” with its caption within the article where you would like each image placed (we’ll try to honour this request as layout permits).
- Please include brief bio information (one or two short paragraphs) placed at the end of your article; this is meant to give the reader an idea of who you are, your passions and/or what you do and have done with your life that feels relevant to the article. Include contact info: email, website, blog address – whatever you want to include; For each journal, due date is the 10th of the month preceding release date. We release on the equinoxes and solstices.
- Email the article and photographs to [karensageing@gmail.com](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com)

# INTO THE MYSTIC

## MY YEARS WITH OLGA



### Susan McCaslin

Susan McCaslin's recent spiritual autobiography, *Into the Mystic: My Years with Olga* (Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2014), is a mixed-genre work of creative non-fiction and poetry that explores the poet's apprenticeship with an elderly mystic who lived in Port Moody, B.C. Olga Park (1891-1985) shared with Susan her profound interior experiences and contemplative practices during sixteen of the author's most formative years (age 22-37). The book centres on the relationship of seeker to teacher and its continuing legacy. Susan is nourished by wilderness and by the world's global mystics and contemplatives of diverse spiritual traditions.

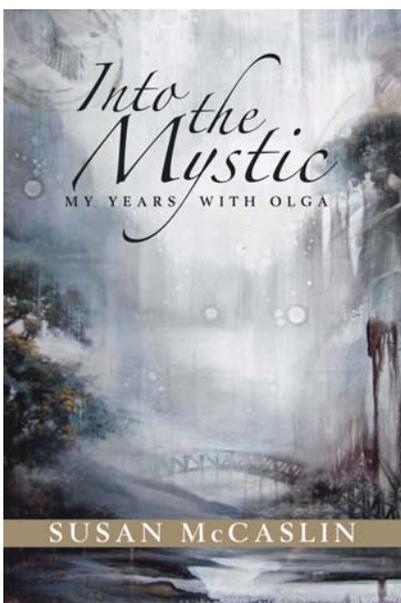
### Excerpted from the vignette, "Cross-Media Creativity":

Not only did Olga sing, play piano, write mystical theology, compose poetry, and contemplate, but she was a visual artist who worked in watercolours and pastels, an adept at illuminated lettering, a gardener, a herbalist, and an astrologer. And that is just the beginning. Her aesthetic sense permeated the way she presented simple meals and set out tea. It affected the Jain-like way she gently tore off pieces of lettuce and marvelled at the magenta stains of beets.

I would call Olga a holistic creative because these seemingly disparate aesthetic passions were absolutely interconnected in her mind and life. Although one or the other might predominate for a while, Olga did not let go of one form of artistic expression in order to develop another. They all moved alongside each other, intersecting and overlapping in various ways. You might say she specialized in mystical awareness, but mystical awareness was a many-rayed mandala including the arts.

Given half a chance, we all start out as integral creatives. Children are acrobats in trees, sculptors in mud, and fashionistas with dolls. They wax and press leaves into books, organize garage plays, and dance on evening lawns with fireflies. The great thing about the exploratory years of childhood is that almost everyone can recall at least one time of complete absorption in creative play where the mind stood amazed within the creative process.

What encourages this spontaneity and experimentation is that a child, unless pushed too soon by parents or society, or suffering from limiting social conditions, doesn't generally feel she has to be expert in any one area. When I gloried in swirling fuchsia finger-paints, I was not concerned about a final product worthy of exhibition. My parents' proud posting of a few of my efforts was enough. Though often, my early experiments in writing, visual





art, song and dance were carried out in secrecy, away from the eyes of parents, teachers, and evaluators.

Many people who show talent in multiple art forms eventually specialize in one to the exclusion of the others. Since I was equally good at singing, writing, and drawing as a child, I thought I might like to become a singer, playwright, novelist, or visual artist. By Grade 12, thanks to the encouragement of an English teacher, I discovered a special love for poetry, and by university had largely given up on distinguishing myself in other areas. During university, I mostly explored the English poetic tradition. Yet I did play guitar and compose songs in my twenties, and took up opera lessons in my fifties. Today, I still sing my heart out in the shower, doodle in my journal, and dance in the kitchen when no one is looking....

Now as I reconsider Olga's creativity, I ask: Why is creativity essential to the mystical life? For me, it lies at its very



Top: Susan, feeding creative spirit

Above: Susan, embracing "spontaneity and experimentation"

core and is inseparable from empathy and compassion.

The integral imagination opens us to a doubling of life's mystery, a double astonishment. Sometimes we enter silence, the wildness preceding words and naming. The mystery of silence is the mystery of what Olga calls "the within," the interior ground from which all things emerge as from a point of nothingness. It is beyond even the duality of being and becoming. A quantum physicist might associate it with dark matter, or a mystic with the dark ground of being. The truth is, we can't say very much about it. Our words and symbols only suggest and point. Yet imagination allows us to extend ourselves empathetically into the lives of others and the world around us.

### Endorsement:

"Not all of us who aspire to a mystical life are fortunate enough to have such a teacher as Olga Park. In this spiritual memoir, McCaslin offers the reader a place to stand, a sense of deep interconnectivity "between time and eternity." McCaslin has the ability to articulate ineffable experience with the well-thought-out clarity of a philosopher and the felt acuity of a poet. Let *Into*



Susan in hammock at Young Lake, relaxing into “beginner’s mind”, igniting the poetry within.

**The integral imagination opens us to a doubling of life’s mystery, a double astonishment. Sometimes we enter silence, the wildness preceding words and naming.**

**Imagination allows us to extend ourselves empathetically into the lives of others and the world around us.**

*the Mystic* lead you to explore hitherto untranslated dimensions. Let this book lead you home.” – **Penn Kemp**, poet and playwright, editor of *Jack Layton: Art in Action*

### **Author’s reflections:**

Olga made me aware that life is enriched when one becomes an integrative creative, and regains the vision of a child—the ability to look at adult experiences with the abandon, curiosity and wonder of a child. Writing poetry is one path that allows you to follow your wandering eye and sense of “what if?”

I began writing poetry seriously in grade 7, when my English teacher Mr. Lemieux noticed I had a way with words, and subsequently appointed me editor of a poetry page in the school newspaper. His generosity gave me an identity that has been able to emerge and flourish over the decades, partly due to the encouragement of various other mentors I met along the way.

Olga’s creativity woke mine up in a new way, as she enabled me to access and write about my deepest spiritual experiences without cheapening or exploiting them. She too composed poetry and would read my poems aloud, commenting particularly on their rhythmic structures, patterns of which I was partly unaware. She had a good ear and recognized that poetry was originally an oral form—“sounds ringing the air.” Like all good readers, she gave my poems back to me by seeing and hearing them in new ways. Poetry and all the creative arts for her weren’t just a transmission of ideas and images, but a form of communion. Real presences come into play in the process of making, weaving disparate things together. Poems held and released energy fields, not just concepts. I would invite readers of the poems below not only to enter the creative process of the poem through the play of their own imaginations, but to try their hand at poetry, either as beginners or as practiced writers. No matter what our age or stage in life, we all need to access “beginner’s mind.”

## The Lines on the Faces of the Middle-Aged

That carapace                      no more than a  
shell

to fall  
dissolve

so the original face  
might imprint itself

on the tables  
and tablatures of the sky

## On Revisiting Dorm Life

Rectangular quarters  
thin blanketing sheaf  
stricken pillow

coffee-stained floor  
where earwigs    crossly crawl  
florescent rooms

rant of conditioned air  
scratch-scratch of pen  
notes                                      zit cream

and other paraphernalia  
of this no longer sophomoric one  
past childbearing  
and schooling

who lived in such a space  
studied    assayed    kissed

some forty years ago

## Voluptuous Hair

My Pre-Raphaelite hair  
its ample sway

how it filled space

lusty    pregnant tresses

still dangling  
sine waves

## Saving the Trees

When I was a girl  
I devoured  
tales of    enchanted

rescued princesses—  
Sleeping Beauty  
Snow White

dreamed of waking into  
a harbour of strong arms  
carried away to safety

and adoration  
on a prancing steed

Life wasn't like that

Instead autonomy blossomed  
books manifested  
I learned to do things for myself

The edge of the universe beckoned  
I slept and woke  
on a ledge

Now I'm the prince  
galloping fiercely  
through gales

to save a rainforest—  
pristine princess  
rare and beauteous

I am that princely charger  
come with others  
though fires of love

to save the trees

## A Mottled Leaf

Walking the labyrinth  
of pacing time  
time thrusts to my eye  
a single leaf

Five yellowish bands  
browning  
like age spots  
on darkening hands

Some primitive  
wet greenness remains  
where I too am absorbed—  
another leaf

Sweetly    we are  
two leaves  
just now being absorbed  
into everything

## Eagle Power

(for Claire)

I walk to the big green cul de sac  
with my daughter

where eagle circles in a lone loop  
hovering  
falling

as she flings her arms up  
mirroring that fiery swoop—

herself                      eagle's brood  
and tribe

## Ice Neurons on the Surface of Young Lake

(Cariboo region of BC, Feb. 2015)

My husband and I step like deer  
onto the frozen surface of Young Lake,  
mostly safe, we gather,  
though some melting patches look  
treacherous.

Soon we are sliding, gliding, walking on  
water,  
pausing occasionally  
to be gathered in by the long silence  
that is presence rather than absence of  
sound.

Further down, we spy designs,  
curious formations, "Something like  
amorphous dark amoebas,"  
he says. "But with dancing tentacles,"  
I venture. "Ice spiders," he suggests.

Every few feet more and more,  
each unique, like snowflakes, or crystals,  
small and large optical explosions

beginning from a frail place or fracture,  
sheens with dark centres  
glimmering in the sudden winter sun.

"Not exactly spiders, more like neurons,"  
I muse. "I've seen them in photos,  
microscopic cells with arms  
resembling nerve synapses.  
Ice synapses."

Home, I Google the Internet  
and sure enough, photos  
of brain neurons leap to the screen,  
dark cells with synapses clasping hands,  
vast networks of neurons  
like Indra's net hidden in the body  
and body of the world.  
Then I find whole galaxies similarly shaped.

Ice art, brain cells, universe—  
one interconnected whole  
to which silence invites entrance.

**Susan McCaslin** is a Canadian poet who lives in Fort Langley, British Columbia and taught English and Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster from 1984 to 2007. She is a retired Faculty Emerita who has authored thirteen volumes of poetry. Susan published two new books in 2014, a memoir, *Into the Mystic: My Years with Olga* (Inanna Publications), and a volume of poetry, *The Disarmed Heart* (The St. Thomas Poetry Series). Her *Demeter Goes Skydiving* (University of Alberta Press, 2011), was shortlisted for the BC Book Prize (Dorothy Livesay Poetry Award) and the first-place winner of the Alberta Book Publishing Award, both in 2012. She is an essayist, editor of poetry anthologies, children's author, memoirist, blogger, and creative non-fiction writer. [www.susanmccaslin.ca](http://www.susanmccaslin.ca)

*Into the Mystic: My Years with Olga* may be obtained through Renee Knapp at [reneeknapp@inanna.ca](mailto:reneeknapp@inanna.ca)



Top, middle and above: Ice Neurons on the Surface of Young Lake

# MAKING ROOM FOR THE MUSE

## APRIL IS POETRY MONTH

### Derryn Yeomans



March 2013... the decision had been made...the documents delivered. As of May, I would officially retire from a satisfying, successful and stimulating career that had offered opportunity for personal growth and continuous learning for more than 25 years. This life-change would occur just two weeks after my 65th birthday, another watershed event.

I had done my research, sought the wisdom of professionals on “Transitions”, “Managing Change”, “Third Age”, “Women in Retirement”, “Life Change and Loss”, etc. But, somehow, it still didn’t feel quite “right”. There was a nagging sense of discontent that often nudged me awake at midnight hours, brought “what ifs” to my mind at unexpected moments, played (not nicely) with my soul.

It wasn’t that I doubted the decision to leave, it was the unfathomable future that troubled me. In the past, my changes had always been “going to” rather than “leaving from”. This time, “Going to WHAT?” seemed to cloud my mind. I needed something to “DO”. In retrospect, I think the prospect of leaving productivity, project completion and accomplishment behind was haunting me.

Serendipitously, I happened upon an article extolling April as Poetry Month. Since childhood, I had pursued creative writing “on the side”, attending many writing courses, eventually publishing poetry, short stories and articles. Then, as life became busier and busier and even busier, the “Muse” was neglected, the pen was applied to more pragmatic uses. Perhaps it was finally time to become reacquainted with “the Muse”. “What if”, I thought one sleepless night, “What if I wrote a poem each day of April – to reconnect with that evasive Muse, to provide a focus to take me through the transition time.”

So, the daily writing began. I soon discovered that the biggest challenge was taking time for a seemingly frivolous endeavor important only to me. It took a long while to realize that it was perfectly justified to take time for creativity for creativity’s sake. I was learning to take time for personal reflection, to set aside mundane or even (gasp) remunerative tasks for the sake of pure enjoyment. In diva moments, I felt like a Victorian lady whose days were filled with artistic pursuits.

The poems reflected my life-events over that tumultuous time, my thoughts and feelings of past and future. I recorded my observations of the world around me and my reactions to it. The unpredictable spring climate became a metaphor for my emotions, my fears and my frustrations. I’m not

sure I realized all this as I word-smithed that month. I do know it was a strong exercise in willpower to produce a poem a day. I knew the joy when a turn of phrase “worked” and the despair when the right words would not come. At times, the words seemed to appear on the paper of their own volition – “is that truly how I am feeling?”

I persevered, and at month’s end, I had thirty poems, some good, some not-so-good, and I had a feeling of accomplishment and fulfillment. I had re-learned to value time as my own to fill, and once again, I experienced the wonder of words and the absolute joy that creativity can bring.

By April 2014, my life had grown. In the year since I retired, my time was invested in art galleries, museums, music, theatre and travel. I was enjoying time spent painting, writing, reading and engaging in conversation with long-neglected as well as new friends. Time with family, especially my amazing grandchildren, was treasured. April is Poetry Month, so once more, I embarked on the challenge of writing a poem a day. Some themes were repeated, some new thoughts, feelings and observations evolved. Self-discipline was still part of the process. Working with words was a welcoming artistic endeavor each day.

At the end of another month’s poetry writing, as I reviewed the two sets of poems of 2013 and 2014, I became aware that, due to the always-Spring time frame of April Poetry Month, I was lacking the breadth of experience my life and our Canadian climate offers. And so, for 2015, it will be a poem per week – some good, some not-so-good – but each a valuable lesson in giving time to the arts, to my thoughts, my observations, my emotions. Art for Art’s Sake.

And did I mention that November is traditionally Novel Writing Month?

## THE STRUGGLE

My sweet grand-daughter – five years old  
So smart – So beautiful – so genuine.  
Does she realize what lies ahead?  
The struggle isn’t over, my little princess.

Women in our world still suffer,  
Their only ‘sin’ their gentle gender.  
Women in our world must still strive  
To have their voices heard.  
Women in our world still work so hard  
To gain their rightful place.

Be wary of the world, sweet girl.  
Don’t lose your loving nature, your love of life  
But match them with an iron will, and a watchful eye.  
Be brave my little princess. The struggle isn’t over.



granddaughter

## IN THE LIMELIGHT

From the shadows  
she appears  
silent, seductive  
chanteuse.

Black light blue  
Defines her –  
Tentative, fragile  
As soft red petals  
held in her palm.

It is the moment  
before the moment  
She sings.

All is quiet, all is still  
Waiting...she pauses,  
savouring  
her moment  
in the limelight.

## THE RUN

The wind is brisk and cool,  
but the sidewalks are clear.  
The sky is overcast, but the  
temperature pushes to positive.  
Runners on, scarf, hat, gloves.  
It's time for the first outdoor spring run.  
Creaky joints protest, lungs rebel,  
winter-weakened muscles complain.  
Recommended start –one and ones.  
Walk one minute, run one minute  
Repeat – Repeat – Repeat  
Repeat – Repeat – Repeat  
Repeat – Repeat – Repeat.  
Just one more time.  
It can be done – it has been done!  
First steps taken.

As if to celebrate,  
The sun breaks through the clouds,  
For just a minute.

Please repeat!

## ONE PERFECT MOMENT, IN THE NOW

Warm breeze, soft sun  
And me  
Sitting solitary  
On the front deck.  
Birds chirp and twitter  
Grass ripples like waves



Left: one perfect moment  
Right: I'm not finished!

across the field.  
Spring leaves rustle green  
in trees.  
My cup is warm and full  
The tea is soothing,  
flows gently  
As timeless time.

One perfect moment  
No one needs me – now  
I need no one, no thing.

Just...now  
One perfect moment,  
In the Now.

## MEMORIES

Memories are not like stories.  
They don't have a start, a middle, an end.  
Memories are more like wisps of smoke,  
You hardly know they are there.  
Then, suddenly, unexpectedly,  
they fill your senses, triggered  
by the commonplace.  
Spring pussy willows, a song.  
Old movies, flapper pie,  
soft ice cream on an  
aimless afternoon drive.  
The scent of perfume, after-shave  
The odor of wet wool socks,  
the guttural sounds of a  
dog dreaming on the rug.

Memories drift across the mind  
Like wisps of smoke lingering  
After the fire is out.

## MUSE-INGS

The desire to "make" art,  
The creative urge

The Muse;  
All have deserted me today.

On the easel, an empty canvas  
Teases, perhaps mocks.  
Brushes stand, prepared  
To join with paint, create.  
The mind meanders, leaves the hand idle.

Blank pages of a journal  
Lie exposed, beckoning.  
The pen is ready, waiting  
For guidance to poem or prose.  
The mind wanders, seeks but finds no  
words.

All have deserted me today.  
The Muse  
The creative urge  
The desire to "make" art.  
Perhaps I'll make tea.

## OLD WOMAN

I am an old woman.  
Yes, it has come to this.  
I am an old woman.  
You can dress it up...call it  
"a woman of a certain age",  
But the fact is,  
I AM AN OLD WOMAN.

I am so defined by chronology,  
By wrinkles...grey hair...and bodily decline.  
I am so defined by my  
New title as 'retired'  
Recent role of 'grandma'  
Legal status of 'senior citizen'.  
Senior, as in OLD.  
Senior is not a designation I desire  
-although the only alternative  
Is much less appealing – so far!  
And there are the discounts....

But, if I am a senior...an elder...a crone,  
Why don't I feel it?  
My inner self rejects this outer image.  
My inner voice screams, "I'm not finished  
yet..."

I want to run, risk, leap, love,  
Create, cavort...  
I'm not finished!" Yet,  
I AM AN OLD WOMAN.

## THE CLOSET

How can it be that my daughters –  
remember the teenagers whose bedroom  
floors  
were reminiscent of rummage sale tables –  
are now grown women who urge me...  
often ...  
to sort through my closet, to throw out  
The old, the imperfect, what is no longer  
functional.  
"If it isn't useful or beautiful, get rid of it."  
is their mantra.

So I stand and I stare, I stare and I stand,  
Planning to sort, preparing to throw out...  
But, where they see castaways, I see  
memories...I see moments.

The blue "hippie" dress worn for my 50th  
birthday  
A dinner shared with my female friends,  
also of a "certain age".

The red plaid dress, to me it always speaks  
of Brigadoon,  
fantasy and the power of love...which led  
me to  
My off-the-rack, off-white, second-  
wedding dress... still here.

The dress I wore to lunch with my dad – we  
snapped a photo –  
The summer before he died.  
The Scottish kilt I shared with my mother  
for decades –

The penurious Scots made things to last –  
We each took our turn, secretly proud we  
could still fit.  
And oh, the black dress, long, flowing,  
elegant. I felt so "Audrey Hepburn" in it.

There's the yellow blouse, the red jacket,  
the velvet coat –  
A summer picnic, a walk in the snow, a  
special concert.  
Oh the meanderings of my mind. No  
wonder the sorting stops....again.

Or is it that now...on the eve of my  
retirement...  
When the mirror reflects wrinkles and grey,  
I am somehow trying to believe that even if  
it isn't beautiful or useful,  
Memories can make something....even  
someone....worthy.

## A GENTLE TIME

The sun, lower in the sky, is losing its  
warmth.  
My shadow stretches long, long before me  
on the gravel of the driveway.

The dog follows my trail, until some scent,  
some unknown mystery, calls him to the  
field,  
where he zigzags through the furrows,  
seeking... something.

The birdsongs seem more languid at this  
hour,  
backed by the lowing of cattle in distant  
fields.  
In the adjacent woods, the thrumming of  
lusty grouse,  
the drumming of the woodpeckers.

This seems a gentle time  
As day moves slowly into night.

Even the air is soft.

## SPRING SNOW

White morning surprise.  
Silent snow crept in last night.  
Spring, delayed again.

Like me,  
The world seems not to know  
If this is winter or spring;  
The end, or the beginning  
Perhaps both.

Snow's moisture nourishes  
New growth for spring.  
My past could nurture  
new growth for me.  
Where is my path?

## FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS

A bombing...people dying, injured  
People in fear. We're shocked,  
angry, disbelieving...so affronted  
when Third World problems invade  
our complacent peace, our proud  
prosperity.

Yet, in our 'First World',  
People live with fear each day.  
Children are hungry, hurt, orphaned.  
Parents weep, and surrender to defeat.  
Walking past, we ignore the homeless,  
Distain the poor.  
Replace care, concern with blame.  
Third World Problems are refuted  
in our First World minds.  
And we rage against retribution.

## LIVING IN THE NOW

For every story – for every life  
There is *The Beginning*, and there is *The End*.  
It is the time between that challenges,  
inspires, thrills and terrifies,  
as one end becomes another beginning  
and that beginning evolves to an end.

This is an end, but it is not *The End*.  
This is not *The Beginning*, but it is a  
beginning.

Now, my place on the continuum is closer  
to The End,  
though how close is a mystery better left  
unsolved.  
I am at a time of life when the exterior  
mocks the interior;  
when thoughts and hopes are young, but  
the body knows its age.

I have become a woman of a certain age  
that offers no certainties;  
How long, how able, how clear of mind,  
how to be.

Perhaps the answer lies not in Ends or in  
Beginnings,  
But only in the Now.  
Now is certain...  
Now moments, strung together like pearls,  
compose our life.  
Now is the story....what will I write?

# CREATIVE AGING

(as if aging could be anything else)

## Brenda Feist



I slept in this morning. Until 7AM. Most mornings I rise at five, sit on a barstool at the kitchen counter with my coffee, reading, writing, googling, pinteresting, and/or staring into space...until it's time to get dressed for work. It's my favourite time of day. But today is Sunday, and my only day off this week, so I'm slow to rise.

When I awake, my first thoughts are: Coffee. Family. Time to think. In that order. I turn on the kettle, and Face-time New York, where my mother is visiting my oldest son, his partner, and their new daughter. I drink coffee with them and laugh out loud, at Eloise, my six-month-old granddaughter, whose big discovery this week is flipping back to front and front to back. She is so concentrated in her efforts, throwing her body, arching her back, rocking back and forth...until...over she goes! And she is so complete in her successes, limbs flapping wildly as we cheer and laugh. I feel whole. I feel healthy. And my first thought upon hanging up is "I cannot imagine life without art."

Such a strange intrusion, this thought. It seems out of place. Yet, I realize in this moment that I have always felt this way. Despite minimal exposure to art growing up, it's always been there, this love, this recognition, this me in it, and it in me. And I see that love there in Elly, and the wordless place she lives. She IS nature, unfolding; she IS pure awareness; she is a bell, rolling and ringing, and my belly answers her, my neurons fire and branch to mirror hers. Everything is new again, and yet she calls me back to something ageless in me...joy. And suddenly, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for the fifty-seven years that I've inhabited, and I find myself secretly hoping I will meet my crone one day, look into her wise eyes, touch her deeply-etched face with my gnarly, tissue-paper hands.

After labouring for weeks over some clever attempt at an article on creativity and aging, I tossed it this morning, after attending a symposium on sustainability yesterday. It all seems *connected* in a way I can't articulate. Yet.

Who decided growing older is a bad thing, something to be fixed, stalled, or stopped? Isn't that death? Are you growing at all, if you aren't growing older? Getting older is *the point*, it seems to me. Another chance at the brass ring, to find out what's real, what matters, what's true. Let the young gather knowledge, I want to apply it. Wisdom is *applied knowledge*. It seems to me the point of living long is application.

...And who decided that creativity is something outside of you; something you do with your hands, heart and mind...and not something you *are*? Creativity grows out of us like our nails and hair, or Elly's laughter, bubbling up from her cells. David Bohm, in *On Creativity*, says that just as the health of the body demands that we breathe properly,

Brenda and Elly





Top: Anish Kapoor taught me that the contemplation of an artwork can leave you awestruck, with a serious case of Stendhal Syndrome.

Above: Andy Goldsworthy taught me that beauty is everywhere and that what I see is not what's *out there* but what I'm capable of seeing.

so the health of the mind requires that we be creative, *make, bring forth, produce, beget*.

The essence of the whole artistic enterprise is to notice what you notice; *experience your experience*. Art is anything *but* an elitist activity by its very nature. And the *process* of creating, as well as the art that is created, has the potential to *transform* the maker and *anyone* who experiences it. Neurological research shows that *making or even viewing* art causes the brain to continue to reshape, adapt, and restructure.

Some of the *proven* benefits to older adults who engage in creative activities are

- improved emotional and physical health
- reduced stress, fear, and anxiety
- enriched relationships and socialization
- activation of the senses and spontaneity
- playfulness and a sense of humour
- restored and motivated muscle memory
- improved cognition and focused attention
- new opportunities for connecting with others
- self-expression and self-discovery.

Great artists have always been great thinkers, and oh, by the way, the very best of them, have been “older.” Listen:

*The object is not to make art but to be in the wonderful state that makes art inevitable.* (Robert Henri, painter)

*The world is not to be put in order, the world is order incarnate. Our work is to put ourselves in harmony with this order.* (Henry Miller, writer)

*The adventure of creativity is about joy and love. An artist is not just removing apparent surfaces from some external object; he is removing apparent surfaces from the Self, revealing his original nature...* (Stephen Nachmanovitch, musician)

*The hundredth time I taste an artwork I love, I still find something new in it, because I am different, and because there is some largeness or manyness in the art that can resonate with the changing versions of myself.* (Stephen Nachmanovitch)

*When you take time to make something, to look at something, you turn your attention inwards. You withdraw your energy from the world and the artwork begins to reach you with energies of its own. The creativity and concentration put into the making of the artwork begin to cross-current in you. This is not about being recharged, as in a good night's sleep or a holiday. It is about being charged at a completely different voltage...Capitalism doesn't want you to concentrate—you might notice that much is amiss.* (Jeanette Winterson, writer).



Chris Jordan taught me that an artists' vision is more important than his tools or techniques, and that a singular image has the power to change your world.

After yesterday's event I find myself wondering if art isn't a much, MUCH bigger part of a sustainable future and sustainable self than I ever imagined. And then suddenly...I'm thinking, *OMG, WHAT IF WE'RE WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING?* Wouldn't it be *wonderful?* And I laugh from my Elly belly.

The Kelowna Art Gallery is in the process of developing programming for elders, with EngAGE (tours, discussions, art appreciation, hands-on activities), an art book club, bus tours to other galleries, conversation cafes and professional days for caregivers. For more information on, or if you have an idea for upcoming programming, call Brenda at 762-2226, x 312, or email [brenda@kelownaartgallery.com](mailto:brenda@kelownaartgallery.com)

**Brenda Feist** is the Education Coordinator at the Kelowna Art Gallery where she oversees adult programming. She recently completed her MFA at UBC Okanagan, and cites her three grown sons as her greatest teachers. She is passionate about too many things for the word count of this article.

# UP THE GARDEN PATH



## Lynden Beesley

Growing up in England I was involved as a child in enforced gardening — weeding the strawberry beds, mowing the lawns and raking up leaves. Not exactly what a child wants to do in his or her spare time, and so I vowed that when I grew up I would never have a garden. However somewhere, somehow, over the years gardening grew on me. My childhood labours stood me in good stead and I became a gardener, a garden designer, and an artist.

For many years I could see a particular garden in my mind's eye, regimented, restorative and redolent of fragrant herbs. I am talking about a physic garden. Then I found the ideal space right under my nose in the centre of the Kelowna Art Gallery. My site-specific art installation is a medieval-style enclosed herb garden or "*Hortus Conclusus*." An art installation is defined as an artistic genre of three-dimensions that is often site-specific and designed to transform the perception of a space. This is a perfect description of a garden such as the *Hortus Conclusus*.

The planning and the research for the garden were engrossing and fun. Once the plans were completed, the groundwork finished and the planting done there comes an element of anticipation and excitement. How will the garden look? Gertrude Jekyll, a British horticulturist, garden designer, and artist said, "The purpose of a garden is to give happiness and repose of mind." In any garden there should be a serendipitous element of surprise, after all this

is a living creation. Gardens are in reality artifices harking back to the Garden of Eden and notions of paradise. When the plants have grown it is pleasurable to lose oneself in the rhythm of the garden, pattering around, clipping, digging, and thinking. It would probably be called meditating by others, but I call it thinking.

What happens within gardens somehow touches the depths of the human psyche. Gertrude Jekyll recognized this and said we come from the earth and return to the earth, but in between we garden. She understood that a garden fills a space somewhere between humans and nature.

Courtyard installation 1.





Top: A restful Corner

Middle: Transformation

Above: The Garden Grown

The visitors who have been to the *Hortus Conclusus* bear witness to this by leaving such written comments as “beautiful, contemplative, restful, peaceful and spiritual.” People come to smell the herbs and touch if they must. They read their books and eat their lunch. They come to the garden for renewal and regeneration and from their words it would seem they find this whilst they are in the garden communing with nature. They are part of the natural scale of things. Birds that fly in to drink water from the fountain and the bees and other bugs that are busy with their everyday lives join them. Proust loved to be in a garden because he liked to read there. He said he could remember what he had read by imagining the garden where he had read it.

Tending to the *Hortus Conclusus* was not without its special moments. As the plants grew during May and June of 2014 an infestation of aphids invaded the space. They just loved sucking the life out of everything growing there. At one point I became afraid that the garden would be decimated with nothing green left for the visitors to enjoy. It was like a biblical plague of locusts. I started spraying the aphids daily with my homemade soap spray, sometimes twice a day. In the midst of the carnage I had the idea of introducing some ladybugs, which are available for purchase at garden stores. I continued spraying until one morning I saw some wiggly black and red bugs on the leaves, along with the aphids. To begin with, I sprayed these wigglers also, until I realized, to my horror that these were pupating ladybugs. At this point I stopped and the garden regained its equilibrium, thanks to the ladybugs.

For some visitors, a few of the herbs were a little unexpected and it was all I could do to stop people from weeding them out for me. They were especially keen on getting rid of the dandelions. I also had to hide the label for the wolfsbane, after one person mis-identified it as a poisonous plant. (There is poisonous wolfsbane, but the one in the *Hortus Conclusus* is not poisonous.) The stinging nettles did prove bothersome to a few people who (even though it said stinging nettles on the label) felt compelled to touch them. These people soon realized their mistake because the rash produced really smarted.

Stanley Crawford said “to dream a garden and then to plant it is an act of independence and even defiance to the greater world.” I think that this statement describes quite well my feelings about creating this garden as a work of art, not only for myself, but also for others to enjoy. The installation has transformed a cold barren grey space into an organic being, complete with trickling water and chanting monks. Claude Monet considered his garden to be his most beautiful masterpiece. For him it was not only his creation but also his muse. For me the experience of creating the *Hortus Conclusus* has been cathartic. I had no idea when I started my art project that this garden would be as consuming to me as my garden at home. Nor did I anticipate how energized I would be by it.

It is interesting how literary, artistic, and spiritual metaphors can be horticultural and that the annual cyclical nature of the garden — Spring,



An old fashioned rose

**Lynden Beesley** was raised in Surrey, England. In 1975 she immigrated to Canada with her husband and two daughters. For twenty years, she practiced podiatry in Winnipeg. In 1998, Lynden moved to Eastern Ontario to formally pursue a career in art at Queen's University. She graduated in 2001 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree specializing in printmaking and sculpture. Lynden is based in the Okanagan. She is active in its art community. Currently she is the secretary for the Kelowna Sculptors Network Society, a retired docent from the Kelowna Art Gallery and a member of the Ars Longa artists group. Lynden also represents Canada as delegate to the International Medal Federation, FIDEM. Her work is produced at her home studio Atelier Pom and Pyramid Bronze works. Her recent work *Hortus Conclusus* is on exhibit at the Kelowna Art Gallery. Feel free to check out her website [www.atelierpom.com](http://www.atelierpom.com) Lynden Beesley <[lynbee@shaw.ca](mailto:lynbee@shaw.ca)>

Summer, Autumn and Winter — echo our own biorhythms and lives. In the first verse of Robert Herrick's poem "To Make Much of Time," he urges the virgins to

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
Old time is still a-flying;  
And this same flower that smiles today  
Tomorrow will be dying.

Herrick urges us to seize the day — *carpe diem* — not to put things off because we have no way of knowing our own life expectancy and tomorrow could be too late. In old master paintings known as *memento mori*, the bugs eating the flowers and a rotting leaf remind us of our own mortality. Perhaps that is why people are drawn to the garden. They realize the value of its transient nature and that when they spend time in the garden, time is suspended for them.

The *Hortus Conclusus* has rotated through all four seasons now and there are now signs of new life — green bits are poking through. The cycle of life is about to begin again. In medieval times the pagan green man would be celebrated. The *Hortus Conclusus* project has made me realize now, more than ever, how important it is to cultivate one's own inner garden in life. It also reminds me of something that one of my elderly bedridden patients shared with me when I asked her how she always remained so positive and cheerful. She said that not only did she take time to smell the roses, but that she also counted them as blessings each day.

Over the past year I have had the opportunity to give public talks about the *Hortus Conclusus* and my work. These events have entailed a review of my past works, so that I could use images of my art as illustrations. I am drawn to medieval, mythological and religious subjects, but what surprised me most is that much of my work is about nature and gardens. Digging through my archives I found some childhood paintings of roses and iris. I found the designs of the gardens I had completed over the years. In my print works I have depicted the Garden of Eden and images of cloister gardens. When I was not illustrating actual gardens I used the seasons as my muse. The subjects of my bronzes have been drawn from Greek and Roman mythology. They, and my marble sculptures, were all intended to be placed in natural settings. In fact, all of my marble sculptures have found garden homes.

I even remembered my entrance interview for the fine arts program at Queens University, and I realized that one of my instructors, the ecological sculptor, Reinhard Reitzenstein, had honed in on my garden designs. In fact, we spent over an hour discussing gardens and sculpture. It was as if I have been headed up the garden path all the time, but I just hadn't seen it.

# THE SCARF PROJECT

**Dee MacGibbon**



My alter ego

For many of us, we find meaning by tending to the needs of others or immersing ourselves in our work outside the home. As we age, our children become independent; we no longer have a place in the workforce; and our responsibilities to others decrease. Many of our coping strategies are no longer effective and many of us experience a deep sense of loss, loneliness and meaninglessness in our lives.

From the moment we are born we are faced with a world that is not always comfortable and readily available to meet our needs for love and attention. In reality, this world is often unfriendly, frightening and dangerous. In order to survive and adapt we develop behaviours that relieve the stress and anxiety of uncertainty. These behaviours become our coping strategies and in times of extreme stress they often become our lifeline.

Like everyone, I developed my coping strategies and social behaviours that enabled me to function and feel somewhat comfortable in my world. Those strategies slowly started to break down as I entered my sixties, I left my job of 25 years, married off my only child, and lost the physical and mental stamina to maintain a lifestyle which included bare bones camping, and travelling, strenuous mountain hiking, frenetic doing for others and self denial regarding the pleasures of eating, relaxation, and enjoying the fruits of my labour. As the coping strategies started to crumble I found myself withdrawing more from other people. I was isolating and battling anxiety and depression.

And so began the return to my creative self which I have repressed and ignored for many years. It hasn't happened overnight. In reality, and thankfully, it has been a gentle process, involving lots of doubt and fear, but at the same time, there is a fire in me which refuses to die. I think this impulse for creative expression is what some people call 'their inner child' and maybe others, 'the Holy Spirit'. For me, it is my reason for living, my creative muse and it is lovingly stroked and tended to by family, friends, and good teachers. From this, *The Scarf Project* was born.

*The Scarf Project* is personal, contributory, and collaborative. I try to avoid 'the political', but even this crops up from time to time. This project continues to evolve and deepen as time goes by and more women choose to participate.

Since I love thrift store shopping and cherish the things that other people no longer find necessary or useful, I focus on using only materials that are recycled. As well as searching for unusual, beautiful and often, tacky scarves, I also search for small wire grids such as cake racks and refrigerator racks and



Top: Inner Child



Above: display of scarves in New Zealand Thrift Store

then begin by weaving through them some of the beautiful silk, cotton and wool scarves that are either given to me by friends or that I find in my travels through various thrift stores. The resulting works of art, although simple to make, involve choosing scarves with colours that work well together and textures that are expressive of what I want the piece to suggest. It is such a lot of fun and a great learning experience to apply to other mediums I work in.

Because it is easy to weave the scarves into the grids and even easier to change or remove them, I have no fear of making a mistake. Because of this I find the process quite playful and free. My approach is different. It's more spontaneous. If I'm not happy with the resulting design or colour placement I just change it. After all, it is just fabric! Now when I am creating a portrait in pastels I tell myself, 'It's just paper'. The risk is minimal and all mistakes are workable. Lemons can always be made into lemonade. Just go ahead and do it. Take a risk! All flaws have the potential to become features. I find this openness is giving me the permission to create with joy, less tension, fewer expectations and more satisfying results.

One morning while walking in my neighbourhood I saw a large piece of white plastic lattice that was destined to go to the dump and I asked if I might have it for an art project. The owner of the house was more than willing to let me take it. He even offered to drop it off at my house! This large piece of lattice is now hanging in my studio and beside it stands a large wicker basket overflowing with scarves of every type. When friends come to visit, I invite them to choose a scarf and weave it into the piece. This usually involves digging through the basket of scarves and a delightful shared experience of enjoying the rainbow of colours and the wide variety of textures, sizes, scarves from different eras, each with their own trademark designs. Conversations ensue and I find that every person has a 'scarf story' to tell. Perhaps it is remembering their mother knitting each of the children a new scarf at the beginning of every winter, or a scarf they wore as students while attending university, Maybe they tell a story about a scarf they wrapped loving around a baby needing extra warmth and nurturing, or maybe they remember a scarf their grandmother from Europe wore whenever she went out of the house.

I remember one day when I was visiting a good friend. Many of her most treasured scarves were ones that had been given to her by her daughter who had travelled all over the world playing on the LPGA. From each place that she visited to play golf she bought her mother a scarf - my goodness, some of those Italian scarves were beautiful! But the story I loved the most was when she told me about a beautiful scarf that she had taken to wear at her nephew's seaside wedding. At the wedding it was her sister, the mother of the groom, who was chilly and needed the warmth of her sister's scarf. And so, in all the wedding photos as she let's go of her youngest child, she is wrapped in the love of her sister.

Something started to open in me and I was interacting and relating to



others in a new way. I was enjoying these interactions and finding joy and pleasure whenever a friend came to visit. At the same time many of my friends were asking me to come to their homes as they had a bag of scarves set aside for me to use in my project. I am always grateful for these contributions to my creative work, but before long I found myself encouraging these women to tell their stories by using their own beautiful scarves to create their own art piece for the project.

I am overwhelmed and overjoyed by the response to this project that I'm receiving from family, friends and ac-



quaintances all around the globe. My feelings of loneliness and my tendency to isolate in response to social anxiety are abating. I am experiencing joy and pleasure. My connection to other women is growing and strengthening. Women's intelligence, creativity, and need for self expression continue to astound and inspire me.

One of my sisters, when she heard about The Scarf Project, thought it might be a wonderful activity to use in the recreational day program she facilitates for people with Alzheimer's disease. Because she lives in Toronto and I live in Kelowna, we used Skype to communicate with one another and design suitable activities for her program. With the help of their caregivers the participants were asked to bring favourite scarves from home which might stir their memories of special events from the past. We designed simple memory games using scarves my sister and her co workers had collected from friends or purchased at thrift stores. We wrote a short, intriguing story about an old woman who knits a beautiful scarf for her husband which ends up being much too long and causing him to trip and stumble whenever he wears it. My sister is a wonderful storyteller and was able to engage her clients fully. From here she was able to move into more hands on, creative activities. Each person was asked to select a few scarves from a basket and talk about why they chose them, then they made a collaborative design on the floor.

After the floor art was completed, photographed and marvelled over, each of the clients had to retrieve the scarves they had added to the piece - an interesting activity for people with memory issues! Next, the participants were divided into groups to weave their scarves into grids. The results were fabulous as you can see from the photos. We will continue to fine tune this program and document our results and eventually will offer it to other organizations who work with the elderly.

Top: collaborative piece in progress

Above: Floor Art



Top: women's project

Above: men's project

It seems that my new coping strategy is going to lead to a retirement that is rich in many ways. If you wish to participate in *The Scarf Project* or simply want to discuss it further you may contact me at [deirdre.t.3@gmail.com](mailto:deirdre.t.3@gmail.com). I am always open to contributions, suggestions and new ideas.

“We are all in charge of our own bliss” is something that Dee MacGibbon reminds herself about often and part of keeping that bliss in her life's routine means ensuring she has regular opportunities for creativity.

Highly qualified for a career in business or education, her priority in life has always been her family, particularly her relationship with husband, Neil and being a mother to her only child, Patrick, a mother-in-law to his wife Jaimie, and an adoring Nana to Parker and Jackson.

Happiest at home or exploring her neighbourhood, Dee reaches out to the world with frequent travel, prolific reading, contact through the World Wide Web and with coaching Korean professionals in English language in her virtual classroom.

Dee explains:

I love making things. I have always loved sewing and fabrics since I was a young girl and was taught this skill by my mother, a master seamstress, who loved fashion and design.

In my late fifties, I studied portrait drawing and pastel painting with Tina Siddiqui and spontaneous magazine collage with Shelley Klammer. I enjoy dabbling in a variety of mediums but my greatest pleasure comes from using fabrics and miscellaneous embellishments to create art pieces. I try to use only materials that are given to me by family and friends and items that I purchase from thrift stores. I love up-cycling the things that no one else wants.

All my life, I have struggled with mental illness but with the help of good genes, a loving partner, family and friends and excellent doctors, I have learned to manage it well and to find my bliss. (written by Doris MacGibbon, New Zealand)

# FATHER TOBACCO

## Harold Rhenisch



Harold visiting Mount Mazuma before sunrise. Mazuma is one of the biggest volcanic explosions ever; this is its ash near Olalla BC in the southern Okanagan.

This article is an invitation to readers to join Harold in the upcoming issues of the Journal on a pilgrimage through this land he loves.

My country, the Okanagan, is a small fjord of grass in a large sea of shrub steppe stretching south into Oregon and Idaho and north into the Cariboo and the Chilcotin. It is a cold, volcanic land, created by wind.

I've grafted apple trees in early August in Osoyoos, when the thermometer read 45 degrees Celsius. I started those days at 5 a.m., as soon as it was light enough to make the trees out from the surrounding dark. At that hour, my fingers were numb. If I was going to cut myself with my grafting knife, it was likely to be then. A lot of the work of grafting is done by feel, and cold hands feel very little, not even a knife going in. By 9AM, though, Osoyoos was waking up on the lakeshore below, the first ski boats, towed over the mountains in the night, were growling on the lake, and the sand between the young apple trees I was converting to red fujis was so hot I couldn't touch it with the flat of my hand. By mid-afternoon, when the sun was high in an almost pure white sky, I was working in a blast furnace. Each breath I took was fire. With a straw hat, a loose, long-sleeved shirt and gallons of water to cool myself, I worked through the throat of that heat into the evening, and through that until I could no longer make out my grafts clearly between the grainy, distinct photons of the late evening air, and then for a few minutes I grafted by touch alone. After that, with a day's 1200 trees behind me, I could do no more. The sun had long before gone down behind the edge of the world. All that time, ski-boats were whining out on the water, leaving white tracks like contrails. I shivered. It was cold, not hot.

In the lower, open seabeds of the grasslands, the valleys of the Methow, the Chelan, the Kettle, the John Day, the Wenatchee, the Yakima, the White Salmon, the Columbia, the Snake and the Palouse rivers of Washington and Oregon, the sensations of heat and drought are even more intense. Even the grass feels it. On the northern, cooler edge of this grassland sea, in Osoyoos and up into the Chilcotin, blue-bunched wheatgrass, the signature old-growth plant of this country, is either ochre with light or grey with weather. Down in the heart of antelope brush country, though, in the shrub steppe of the Columbia Basin, wheatgrass turns as white as bones in the sun.

It's often fifty degrees Celsius in the Lower Grand Coulee, in the lungs of that country, or on the steep descent to the ancient rock shelter above the green basin of Palouse Falls, at the country's heart, where grasshoppers only



Top: Palouse Falls

Middle: a pair of grasshoppers mating

Above: almost going out

come out for the last half hour, before the sun vanishes among the old underwater, wave-sculpted, glacial outwash mountains to the west. The rest of the day they keep to the shadows, so they don't burn away like paper held to a match.

One evening two summers back, I came up the long path from the Palouse River, winding my way through abandoned railroad equipment thrown downhill from an old watering station on the Union Pacific Line to Spokane. There was a pair of grasshoppers there, mating on sun-droughted flower heads on the edge of the dark.

Literally. Because of the low angle of the sun, the night was just a few steps away. At that moment, any heat in the land came from the earth. The sun was behind the hill, down over the plutonium plants to the east, where it was burning in the Columbia River. Above the grasshoppers, the sky was chilling to the temperature of starlight.

As I came up onto the crest of the plateau and a jackrabbit skittered away from my feet like a stone, it was chill.

People have been fishing below Palouse Falls for 8000 years. Young Palouse men still come to build shelters here out of willow branches; they are waiting for the first salmon to find its way back to the heart of the world since the damming of the Snake River at the Little Goose Dam downstream in 1961. Late morning, teen-aged girls skip down the ancient trail from the campground high above and swim around the bowl of the falls. The young men balance on rocks emerald with algae, casting a line out over the water. The line tracks into the pool of the falls, then away from it, and then is cast again. Each time, it lays a perfectly-shaped bee, a construction of feathers, string, wire and yarn, on the surface of the river, a bee so light that the water holds it up like a mote of dust. The current spills over hidden stones; it dances to their stillness; it pours and pools with light. The light flares across the pool of the falls like fire. The line is drawn in, and it is cast again, and again, the water carries it across the face of the sun.

But now it is dark, and the sky is singing a hymn of the locusts at the campground and the old water station at the railcut, and rustles like all the days of the earth through my hair, and the stars cry out, turning in their great wheel in the dark. I am watching them now, with a thick jacket on, and a tuque pulled down over my ears. Bats are hunting above me in a sky now gone to ink, occasionally blotting out the constellations of summer—leaves being tossed on a wind I can not see but feel, as it moves through my arms with a thousand wings.

Beside the crest of the falls, a black volcanic dike rises from softer red basalt. This is the tobacco pipe of Palouse Falls.

The first sun of the day lights its tip, on the topmost crooked finger of stone. Before long, the whole pipe glows with light from that spark. It burns all day with its good tobacco, then dies down again when the evening wind blows again off the stars. Soon, only the tip of the last thread of leaf in the pipe glows, as the earth swings around the tether of the sun, then this last coal goes



Top: dawn

Above: canyon trail

out, and the long hours of the evening begin. The stars rise again out of the air. Bats fly again against the violet sky. As the wind rises, its song is the sound of the blood and breath pouring through the heart. This is a story that has been told for 10,000 years. It tells me now.

In this country heat is as insubstantial as a breath — a trick of altitude and pressure, nothing more. This is a cold desert. Very little time has passed since the air here lay over the grey swells of the open ocean, breathed only by albatrosses and migrating whales. This cold, wet air seems hot and dry because it has been pushed high up the coastal mountains, depressurized, and stripped of water. It might rain in Osoyoos, Washtucna or Keremeos, but usually this rain will be swallowed by the air before it strikes the ground — too insubstantial to counter the pressure of increasing atmospheric depth. The sun might shine on the land below, but rather than being an ocean sun, drenched with water, it is now a sun in a vacuum; it pulls the water out of your body. You evaporate. That feeling of vanishing into the air and becoming the wind is the feeling of heat in the grasslands. It is the mountains you

feel on your skin, and the way they transform the sun.

The land even plays its tricks on the salmon. 150,000,000 years ago, five chains of volcanic islands erupted in long arcs along the mid-Pacific Rift. As North America slowly floated towards them on the hot mantle of the earth, they erupted once more. New chains of volcanoes ran down the Okanagan — Crater Mountain, Munson Mountain, Giant's Head, Mount Boucherie, Turtle Mountain, the Armstrong Bluffs and Monte Lake — and stitched the two landmasses together. The western slope of the Okanagan slid for a hundred kilometres over its eastern slope before it finally ground to a halt, welded tight by new rock. Then the islands started moving with the continent, back towards the east that they had come from.



coyote moon

Many of these valleys in British Columbia still follow the old tide courses that surged between these islands when they formed far out at sea. The salmon swimming home among them today, up the Columbia, to the monoliths of McIntyre Bluff at Vaseaux Lake and up the Fraser, past the spirit bears of Nikomen, are following these ancient tides. The salmon swim out, and then they swim back again, from the volcanoes of the Aleutian Islands to volcano-shadowed Chilko Lake, and from the cold shores of Siberia to Okanagan Falls. They do this again, and again — yet they are not going anywhere. They are just staying home, where they've always been, these creatures of the ocean and the wind. It is the land that has moved. It is to it that the Nk'mip salmon, the Okanagan salmon, come home, following the water back up through cold lava to the ancient islands where the rivers are born.

When the salmon came back 6,000 years ago from their Ice Age refuges in Mexico, the people stayed year-round for them and became the Yakama, the Palouse, the Nez Perce, the San Poil, the Spokane, the Couer d'aleine, the Walla Walla, the Nespelem, the Warm Springs, the Chelan, the Wenatchi, the Methow, the Tsilhq'otin, the Secwepemc, the Nlaka'pamux, the Syilx, the Synixt, the Sinkiuse, the Umatilla, the Tulameen, the Similkameen and the Sinlahekin, each in their place, each with the spirit of their own valleys yet all of them brothers and sisters of the grass and the red fish. The grasslands and the people and the salmon became themselves together, in the same way that monarch butterflies and milkweed are one joined life. We who have come late to this story are still in it. We are still the people of the grass and the red fish, on a cold ocean shore far inland, with its heart at Palouse Falls.

**Harold Rhenisch** has been writing about the Okanagan for over thirty-five years. His work is based on literature, ancient prayer, myth and spell-craft. After twenty years in the Cariboo and on Vancouver Island, and after two long journeys on the German section of the Camino, he has returned home. Harold lives in Vernon, where he writes the deep ecology blog, [www.okanaganokanogan.com](http://www.okanaganokanogan.com) Harold may be contacted at [rhenisch@telus.net](mailto:rhenisch@telus.net)

# LOOK-UP: THE ART OF CLOUD PLAY



**Lisa Lipsett**  
**Creative By Nature Art**

“Every time we look up and see a cloud and understand it, we are closer to understanding ourselves.” – Roger Caras

It is a favourite childhood pastime of many to indulge in cloud watching. We lay in the warm grass and lose ourselves in creative cloud forms. Formally known as *Nephelococcygia*, cloud watching is partly about wasting time productively. Clouds give material form to nature’s invisible forces like gravity and the wind. They break up the blank canvas of the blue sky with infinite possibility.

It is interesting how a phenomenon of nature can be imbued with strong human emotion. In the case of clouds, though technically a water vapour, our experience has led us to have many feelings about them. This is reflected in our use of the word “cloud” in the English language. Antonyms for clouds are brightness, light, clarity and understanding. This must mean that clouds are synonymous with darkness, confusion and ignorance. To cloud also means to cover, confuse, bewilder people or blanket something. We don’t like it when people cloud an issue or exhibit cloudy thinking. Clouds hold back the light somehow and we feel heavy and rained upon. Clouds make the wind, gravity and water cycle visible in an otherwise invisible blue sky. The sky is transformed from being a background set above us to being a living breathing creature in its own right.

Maybe cloud watching has stayed with us for so long because its two ingredients are so simple: a few minutes and a view of the sky. Season doesn’t play a part, and it doesn’t matter whether you are in a city or in the country. You simply have to look up and connect to nature’s dynamic creativity. Cloud Appreciation Society founder Gavin Pretor-Pinney says, “clouds are one of the most egalitarian of nature’s displays because we can all have a glimpse.” He goes on to say, “we don’t live beneath the sky we live within it”. <http://cloudappreciationsociety.org/>

The infinite opportunities for cloud appreciation has spurred the society to pledge to “fight blue-sky thinking wherever we find it. Life would be dull if we had to look up at cloudless monotony day after day.”

Many artists also have cloud fascinations maybe for just that reason. Clouds are ubiquitous, never dull and always changing. They are also challenging because they are ever changing. Much of the living world changes at a really slow pace. Mountains take millions of years to change.

**Clouds give material form to nature’s invisible forces like gravity and the wind. They break up the blank canvas of the blue sky with infinite possibility.**



Clouds

**Making change through painting and observing change by cloud spotting aligns us with the forces of creation. We align ourselves in harmony with Gaia, the living earth. She is self-creating all the time.**

Leaves, mushrooms and flowers change over weeks, but clouds seem to change on a scale and timing humans can relate to. They expand infinitely to the horizon on a space scale that humbles us while they change sometimes by the second on a time scale that we can connect to. They are big enough to make us humble yet tangible enough to be intimate.

Unlike painting a still life bowl of cherries, as artists we must dive in and commit in the moment to create with clouds (as long as we are not working from a photograph). New shapes and colours are being born all the time. Watching things being born was an original draw for me early on as a painter. I loved pouring water, fluid acrylic, matte medium and sometimes solvent based ink on a canvas and being mesmerized by the pulsing and blossoming of newly born organic forms. I felt I was watching time lapse photography like when a plant bursts out of the loamy soil over a week or two in seconds. Change is a quality of aliveness. Making change through painting and observing change by cloud spotting aligns us with the forces of creation. We align ourselves in harmony with Gaia, the living earth. She is self-creating all the time.

Maintaining this connection requires a dance of purposeful aimlessness. We must have the diligence to stay focused and the ability to flow with what is. If we hold on too tightly to our ideas about what is happening we miss the joy of surprise, anticipation, and the beauty of a dance filled with new discoveries. If we set an intention, then let go and stay present with what is there in the moment, we open to what is reaching out to us, and what is reaching out in us to be touched. According to Ellen Dissanayake author of *Homo Aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*, this is the purpose of art-making. It has an evolutionary role of connecting us into the living world and ourselves.

Like clouds, artists who move us spiritually make the invisible visible. For example British painter Govinda Sah Azad experiences clouds as a spiritual force and cloud painting as a spiritual experience <http://www.lifeartsmedia.com/the-spiritual-power-of-clouds-govinda-sah-azad/nggallery/thumbnails> Maybe it is due in part to the ability of clouds to let us



cloud watching

dream into them, see our hearts' eye on their many possible forms.

### Being Mirrored

We expect to find the world outside the window,  
 expect to find ourselves in the mirror.  
 But I am interested in what happens when we let the  
 world be our mirror,  
 go deeper into ourselves and find the world,  
 go out into the world and find ourselves anew.

(J Ruth Gendler - Notes on the Need for Beauty)

**To me the beauty of nature and ourselves lies in the beauty of connection. In the case of clouds, we can go out into the world and find ourselves anew; we can be mirrored by them. We can also see and feel clouds anew and be open to cloudiness. We can share our cloudy dark emotions with the light wisps of a painterly sky.**

I love this quote. What it describes is one of the core reasons I paint. It is also the core of what I teach and it describes why I love drawing and painting with clouds so much. To me the beauty of nature and ourselves lies in the beauty of connection. In the case of clouds, we can go out into the world and find ourselves anew; we can be mirrored by them. We can also see and feel clouds anew and be open to cloudiness. We can share our cloudy dark emotions with the light wisps of a painterly sky.

In his Ted Talk "Cloudy with a chance of joy", Gavin Pretor-Pinney [www.ted.com/talks/gavin\\_pretor\\_pinney\\_cloudy\\_with\\_a\\_chance\\_of\\_joy?](http://www.ted.com/talks/gavin_pretor_pinney_cloudy_with_a_chance_of_joy?language=en) language=en says we can keep our feet more firmly planted on the ground the more we put our heads into the clouds. The more time we spend in aimless activity like cloud watching, the more connected and appreciative we will be. He believes that we need to be doing less, at times doing nothing as a way to build in-the-moment presence, to balance the multitasking state we spend so many hours of our day in. He also suggests returning to the joy of childhood cloud watching, because it is like a Rorschach for our hearts. We can find shapes in cumulus clouds, they seem to be best for reflecting the power of the imagination, both human and cloud. We can better see and feel our place in the larger scheme of things. We can better see ourselves.

### An artful cloud encounter:

I love drawing and painting with clouds. There is something so satisfying about their ability to shape shift. When their movement is followed with a pen it is sheer joy. When their shape is explored with fingertips on the page, I feel like I am in their soft folds.

Creative expression with natural ease and heartfelt nature connection through art can be experienced as you watch clouds. You can shift from the planning mind into intuition, feeling and sensing. Drawing and painting with clouds certainly catalyzes this shift.

Just like you can imagine-in to a cloud as you gaze, you can image-in to drawing and painting with clouds. You can also dream into what you have



Top: draw clouds

Above: paint clouds



created. When you feel into a cloud, you see anew and see into your heart's imagination. When you play with, open and give time for the living world to enter your hearts, you enter hers. This connection simply requires a dance between purposefulness and aimlessness. You set an intention, then open to sensations, the in-the-moment experience as you keep track with drawing and painting. You simply access your child self, lying face up on the ground and imagine-in to clouds as you draw and paint without looking at what you are doing. You are so absorbed in the shape shifting clouds you don't even glance back at your lines and colours. Then when you are done, be in for a super surprise as you look on the cloud anew on the page.

You can also engage your cloud watching skills when you extend your artwork. Dream into your drawings and paintings, highlight line, deepen colour, bring shape into focus.

When you're finished a painting or drawing you can darken areas, colour in or pull out shapes and make lines around edges to highlight them. There is much you can respond and create with. Like an improvisational jazz duet, you and the clouds can co-create to good effect.

If you want to know more about both yourself and your world all you have to do is look up.

If you want to connect more deeply to the world and your heart you can draw and paint as you look.

The Cloudspotter's Guide: The Science, History, and Culture of Clouds – Gavin Pretor-Pinney  
 The Book of Clouds – John A. Day  
 Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why – Ellen Dissanayake, 1995.

Artist **Lisa Lipsett**'s work focuses on the transformative potential of hands-on art with Earth in mind. Visit [www.creativebynature.org](http://www.creativebynature.org) to see Lisa's courses, books, blog and fine art to inspire drawing and painting with Earth and heart.

# A DREAM FULFILLED

## RITCHCRAFT GALLERY AND FRAMING

### Cathy Biagi



Unlocking the front doors, placing the sandwich board sign on the sidewalk out front, pulling the chain switch for the neon “OPEN” sign is how I start my morning each working day. I have been doing this routine at Ritchcraft Gallery and Framing for nine years. The past three have been the most satisfying. That’s when the opportunity to buy the gallery came along. So I followed through with what was a lifelong dream.

I have been a picture framer since I was 21 years old. I fell into the “job” almost by accident, as most framers will tell you the same. You don’t dream about framing pictures when you’re growing up. But when you fall into it by happenstance, it gets under your skin and it is hard to move on. A picture framer is almost always someone who has a background in the arts, in some form or another. As you can imagine, when you are making pretty pictures, there are one or two that need to be taken to the next level with a magnificent frame! That’s where the two parts of my life came together.

Creative expression exists in many forms throughout one’s life. Often, you don’t recognize this until years later when having a retrospective moment. I always knew since I was very young that “art” would be part of my world, thinking mostly that it was I that would be the sole creator of my visions. Or that I was bound to whip up a pleasing little painting each time I sat down with my paints.

I have laid down many watercolor washes on sheets of Arches with my attempts at a masterpiece. Or impressed my family and friends with a pencil sketch of a favorite celebrity or landscape. I have crocheted, knitted, cross stitched, painted. I have made paper, beads, prints, jewelry, sewn costumes.

What began to happen, though, after many years in the picture framing business, is that I got all the creative fixes I needed enjoying other artists creations and helping them take their pieces to that next level. The varied array of art, photography, crafts and other memorabilia that I have had the opportunity to work with over the last 29 years has been unbelievable and very satisfying!

Especially as owner of the gallery, I get the pleasure to meet a wonderful and eclectic mix of people every day that I am at work. I not only get a glimpse into their lives with the personal nature of the work I do, but sometimes I feel like I get a window into their souls and the souls of the artists works they bring in. For many years now that has satisfied my own creative urges that an artistic personality craves. Art by proxy, I suppose. Allowing me to be involved in the final design for presentation of an original piece of art in the

putting it all together





way of a mat and frame is an honor I take considerable pride in.

The gallery within Ritchcraft is another form of creative expression that I truly love. There are many talented artists in our community who do not always have a steady venue to show, share and sell their products and creations. Potters, jewelry and glass artisans, print makers and metal smiths. I wanted to be involved in helping those artists make their talents available fulltime to our community. Displays, setting up vignettes to show those products at their best has not only helped in artists sales but it's a lot of fun. And again, an endeavor that I take great pride in.

One day I will pick up a brush again. It's something inside me that demands that I do. I am not amazingly talented or gifted but I just have to continue, kind of like breathing. Creative souls understand this. You have to express yourself and you will do it with whatever happens to be around you at any point in your life. Right now for me, it's dealing with other peoples' creative expressions and talents, framing and displaying.

I feel incredibly blessed to be on this earth doing what I love and loving who I am.

Ritchcraft Gallery and Framing is one of Kelowna's hidden treasures. This gem is tucked in with other shops and cafes along Lakeshore Drive in Kelowna. Cathy Biagi, 'gallery guru', will help you find the absolute best framing options for your treasured artworks. More than just framing, the gallery is your one-stop spot for all things art in the Okanagan. Be sure to stop by, visit Cathy, and let her help you frame your treasure or find that piece you'll fall in love with. [www.ritchcraftgalleryframes.com](http://www.ritchcraftgalleryframes.com) [ritchcraft@hotmail.com](mailto:ritchcraft@hotmail.com)

Top left: you can frame anything

Top right: a pottery vignette

Middle: better together

Above: some things just work

# THE PATHS OF CREATIVE EDUCATION

## Angelika Jaeger



In seeking to pursue further development of one's artistic capacity and interests, a student of fine arts can follow their own inner voices and independently explore courses and mentors on their own timelines and on their own terms. Self-taught artists can elect to attend courses that interest them and to learn for the sake of learning rather than for a credit to fulfill a specific program. Such independent minded students could develop significantly through the sharing of ideas with their mentors and fellow artists, and may not ever feel the desire to fulfill an actual degree. They prefer to be free to expand their artistic capacities and expression through informal channels that remain unrecognized by academia.

The other way an artist may choose to pursue development may be through a recognized fine arts program at a College or University. These require students to attend traditional art history courses as well as technical courses in the studio. In some cases students are compelled to take courses which do not engage their interest, but are required as part of the degree program.

While the prevailing view within the art world and academia may be that traditional degree programs in fine arts develop better artists, this view is challenged by the many examples of artists who have developed independently, and created magnificent work while remaining unrecognized by either the art world or academia. Some see a more independent course of development as a better alternative to a formal academic degree program. The nature of art and creativity is free and should develop in an environment independent of any form of limiting restrictions.

Others in the art society challenge this view arguing that an academically trained artist is deserving of more respect and will typically create better art. However, formal education lays restrictions on artists' creativity and can become an obstacle for their future creations. Although the academic system is set up to be liberating, in many cases it can inhibit creativity by providing too much information and overwhelming the student's imagination. Remaining an independent spirit in the academic process, is difficult for many young artists who struggle for acceptance of their imaginations. Their own artistic instinct can be forgotten and overlaid by the influence of others. Some struggle to remember what at one time came naturally to them and inspired them to want to become an artist. Although the intuitive path has appeal it does require self-discipline. Deadlines need to be set and distractions avoided.



The benefit is that one can allow the intuitive self to become one with the art piece, but independents also miss the constructive criticism available in the studio or facility of production.

Access to various disciplines, being surrounded by the permanent stimulus of created art and the exchange of ideas and getting immediate feedback pushes the student into a realm of learning, that can be both very rewarding, yet overwhelming at the same time. The pressure to create art for due dates, achieve the required grade point average; degree deadlines, can hinder the process of creative intuition.

I'd like to share with you two of my own works. The first entitled 'Gracious Women' was created in 2004 before I entered the realm of formal academic education.

It is inspired by my relationship to my female ancestors, most of whom I never had a chance to meet and created before formal training. This art piece is a radial composition, which gives it a distinctive energy; the yellow to red color hues, create a warm atmosphere and serve as a metaphor for the bloodlines. The incorporated images display my late grandmothers and depict my mother as a child. It is the circular composition that displays the inter-connectedness of family dynamics. Symbols like a heart, an angel and letters support the notion of warmth and love. I also sought to convey a feeling of the search to belong and to be connected.

In contrast, is the piece 'Still not!'

This large 3 x 4 foot painting is the result of an assignment to explore the use of non-favorite colors and textural structures unfamiliar to my process. Gels got applied to give it texture and create depth, the paint was poured on and manipulated where it should settle. The piece was 'required' to do the 'intuitive work'. There is a lot of value in working in this way, when one does not have a predetermined outcome in mind. After the first unfamiliar steps and awkward moments of not having control over what happens on the canvas. There was fear of losing control as the process was so unfamiliar. Ultimately, after recognizing this insecurity, one starts to produce and work against this inner feeling of how the final painting might appear. Interestingly, through this process one learns to be able to let go and become comfortable to not force, while channeling the desire of control into acceptance of the creation.

Looking at the painting 'Gracious Women', now after a fair amount of academic training, I can see the flaws and difficulties in the attempted expression. While the intricacy is evident the composition does not express the initial idea. The piece did not find a balanced middle ground, a place to settle in and be content. The image was done very intuitively and the feeling



Top: Gracious Women

Middle: Still Not!

Above: 6 is a number



Top: untitled

Above: *There Is Still Value*, installation in the permanent collection at the University of British Columbia Okanagan

of loss and being disoriented overflowed the painting. I find the painting dissatisfying because neither the painting nor the relationship it was exploring is resolved.

The piece, 'Still Not!' depicts the struggle that I encountered after becoming more aware of technical skills and historical backgrounds in art. This awareness brought me to a wall that I am still trying to climb. The learning curve is steep and it always brings one to those immanent stops, mental blocks and challenges to be fought through. 'Still not!' presents a painting with no personal preconceived ideas about what the outcome should be. It was done to fulfill a course requirement.

After all these years of education, I still struggle to deal with the tension of the external influences fighting with the internal ability to trust and my desire to get results. The approach gained from formal education can instill confidence, and add knowledge of art history and theory, but the informal approach encourages the expression of your own voice and passion.

In comparing formal academic approaches to the study of art with informal approaches it is simple to recognize that both approaches have positive and negative aspects for the overall experience. Institutions provide the student with the facility and material necessary to learn the technical skills and time commitments. However, the skills needed to take your work to the marketplace involve much more than is taught in Art School. Some of the 'real world' occurrences can be prepared for by mentorship. The question as to which of these two approaches would best serve the interests of the artist is difficult. From my experience formal education should be seen as a stepping stone for one's own development. It is each artist's responsibility to use what is learned in the most effective way.

It is my belief, that the knowledge I gained at University will help me establish my own unique style in creating art. I am finding new confidence with the application of the academic input to my own creative voice, and I am trusting that this transformation will keep me on my path. Concisely expressed in Robert Frost's quote: 'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference.' My less traveled road of formal education weaves into my journey of self-discovery, and as long as the two paths lead me forward, the journey shall be mine.

**Angelika Jaeger** (aj) graduated in April 2013 from the University of British Columbia-Okanagan with her Bachelor of Fine Arts. She is a Member of 'Ars Longa' a longtime Kelowna Artist Collective in its 11th year. Jaeger has organized numerous art exhibitions throughout the Okanagan. She is a Mixed Media/Collage instructor at the VCAC in Vernon and has taught at the coast. As part of her commitment to her community, Jaeger has served for several years as the President of the Vernon Public Art Gallery and as Chairperson for the North Okanagan Chapter of Federation of Canadian Artists. More recently aj joined the Board of Directors, as Co-Chairperson for the Caetani Cultural Centre, an 'Artist in Residency' initiative in Vernon, BC. She is the Co-Founder of their annual fundraiser 'A Splash of Red'. Jaeger's work can be found in private collections in Europe, The Bahamas and Canada. She is represented by 'Ashpa Naira Gallery', Vernon, BC, 'Arte Funktional', Kelowna, BC and 'Headbones Gallery', Vernon, BC, and her work is made available in the Vernon Public Art Gallery through their Art rental program. [aj49@telus.net](mailto:aj49@telus.net)

# A PERSPECTIVE

## Bo Snarski



To write about aging and creativity is a tricky task. Life being what it is, it just happens, and - if I may quote Eckhart Tolle - “only in the present moment.” How then can one talk about something that no longer is and actually only happened in the relativity of one’s own projections, if you will, due to the ignorance of the person called me.

I daresay, without an ignorant mind there would be no creation or creativity of any kind. According to the eastern sages, our true nature is silence. In it, there is just the joy of being, with no need for any expression or action. This state of absolute happiness is quite similar to a deep sleep with no dreams. One exists without any projections or the need for them. And then, on awakening one says: “I am.” This identification gives birth to the whole world, one’s own world as we seem to see it.

Unfortunately, none of the expressions or actions of our beingness which we are inclined to manifest in our imagined reality - and that includes the arts - give us the lasting peace, joy or happiness we wish for. Goals seem to be constantly changing, even though one tries to achieve perfection in whatever one’s attention leads one to. Immediately our egos tell us that we can always write a better poem, compose a better piece, play a certain piece of music better or finish a painting only to destroy it later with the realisation that it didn’t fully express what we were trying to say. Sadly, most of the time one has nothing to say, yet keeps on talking.

As a little boy I was lucky enough to be left alone by my parents for long periods of time. They offered me the freedom to adventure around alone and I still remember being by myself on the shores of the Oder River. I watched grazing cows, listened to and caught grasshoppers, smelled, and even tasted, grass around me all while laying on my back and doing absolutely nothing (to date still my favourite thing to do). I was perfectly happy and at peace with everything. I remember being fascinated by the beauty surrounding me in the variety of the insects and birds, colours and scents of the flowers and the joy of happy dogs running around freely without disturbing anyone. At night, in the solitude of my room I could see the music and hear the light. Life was very, very good.

Later on, there were schools of different kinds and levels, and with them conditioning and beliefs. The given subjects included music, acting, international trade, sociology and business - not necessarily in this particular order. Each always led me to furious and long studies and practicing; that in turn would lead me into a total identification with whichever profession was being advocated at that given time. My drive was strong and brought many of my dreams into existence.

Early on in my career I was fortunate enough to see and work in various



The Factory exterior

**Bo Snarski** is an accomplished classical musician, and he is also the visionary and founder of The Factory, located at the corner of Ellis and Cawston in Kelowna. Bo's highly cultivated sense of aesthetics and journey of self reflection have led him to help others create external spaces that will nurture their inner states.

Bo views all aspects of home construction to be art, where every home is highly personal, beautiful and unique. As the owner of Scandinavian Hardwood Floors he recalls that childhood natural wonder by enhancing wood grains to art pieces. "The Factory offers unique products, exciting creativity and knowledge founded on experience for your new construction or renovation project."

See more at: [www.factorykelowna.com/about-the-factory](http://www.factorykelowna.com/about-the-factory)

concert halls and theatres in different parts of the world. I visited and lived in many countries, and I learned some languages, all the while experiencing a multitude of cultures. While this was happening - being interested in the totality of experience - I quickly discovered that no matter where I went everybody had a story of some sort, one that shaped their way of thinking, and way of seeing the world a certain way. Only a few were open or interested in questioning the validity of traditions they had absorbed from their families or countries, their religion or the rituals they exercised daily.

I also had a story, a story that was mine only because I never questioned it deeply enough to understand that it too was a fake one. It was like a bandage on my need for understanding. It prolonged my agony of not knowing what is true and what is not. My story lacked the kind of knowledge that could not be gained through studies. It lacked the inner knowing and strength that can only be validated through a transcendental experience.

Once this weakness of the worldly persona was realised, there has been a strong need for unlearning, living fresh and spontaneously, more from intuition than anything else and without second thoughts. No names or labels, no preconceived ideas. It is not an easy task to overcome the conditioning of the so called person that was accumulated over time and then to find on top of that, space for the "new you" in your immediate surroundings.

The silence though is very simple and immediate, the formless basis of all creation is always ready to be discovered and as far as I am concerned the only thing that is worth discovering. Life gives us many clues as to what is real and what is not. It will express itself creatively in many ways to show and give us direction. By choice, we can look at our activities from a pure, unassociated place and eventually move on from constantly doing something to simply being. That is unlearning and undoing.

The name of the game is: Know Thyself. The way is a path of self-inquiry.

The one thing that remains constant throughout our life's activities is the call of our beingness to go back to silence, inner peace. We intuitively know that in silence there is the lasting peace and joy we so desperately seek in those places outside ourselves. Realising this need for silence and actually going into self inquiry, slowly but surely, one loses interest, even faith in the ever changing world of relativity. As one starts looking for something more stable then the script unfolding in front of us, the one we have authored and directed by the strength of identification with our ego, the creative play itself becomes less and less important. There is the realisation that this body-mind creature called "me", knowingly or not, is also only an actor in a drama of its own creation. The real "I am." is within, unconnected to the external drama we have been manifesting.

Influential sages in my life: Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Shankara, Sri Yucteswar, Sri Diviananda Sarasvati Maharaj, Fr. Thomas Keating, Ramana Maharshi, Sri Harilal Poonja, Mooji.

# UNDER THE ARGENTINE MOON



## “BLIND SPOT” RIDING IN PATAGONIA

**Ruth Bieber**

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO  
SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE AND GRATITUDE  
ISSUE 15, SPRING 2015  
[www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca)

Photo: Ruth riding Revenque,  
copyright © Criollo Films Inc.



Ruth Bieber

**The intent was to explore how blind people experience beauty within the extraordinary context of trail riding for ten days in Patagonia.**

In the fall of 2011, Ruth Bieber was part of the originating group who believed it important to present the stories of those who are *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* and so began this Journal. Ruth is a remarkable, courageous woman. She has a special way of seeing life. With an open heart she says “yes” to all she can touch, learn from and sage with.

About two years ago she received an email from a film producer setting out for Patagonia, Argentina with a unique focus. Criollo Films wanted to create a documentary called ‘Blind Spot; Moments Unseen’. The intent was to explore how blind people experience beauty within the extraordinary context of trail riding for ten days in Patagonia. The study would also observe the relationships that would evolve between blind riders and their horses and blind riders and their guides. Ruth’s response to the invitation was an immediate yes. “I saw it as a Vision Quest. I know a Vision Quest invites challenge for growth. I am always eager for growth.”

Over the past few years Ruth has set herself her own study of how blind people perceive. She has become a visual artist, eager to record with paint her perceptions. The artist Paul Gauguin believed to express sensation was more important than to give description. Ruth’s paintings embrace this challenge. When she returned home from her journey, Ruth turned the memories of ‘Blind Spot; Moments Unseen’ into six strong canvases of her adventure. This special supplement of the Journal is a written and visual diary of Ruth’s experience. ‘Blind Spot; Moments Unseen’ will soon be a CBC documentary with a film debut on the documentary channel. Readers of the Journal are being given an advance peek through Ruth’s lens. This article presents readers with a rare opportunity to become part of a creative process. Watch the documentary with your own eyes, rich with the knowing of Ruth’s perspective; it may differ from the film maker’s. Expand your understanding of perception. Decide how you think blind people see beauty. – Karen Close

It’s dark; almost 9:00 P.M. and our motley gaggle has at long last arrived at the property line of Estancia Ranquilco. The group consists of three film crew, three blind (soon to be equestrians), one film producer and a couple of local drivers, who don’t speak English. We’ve been on the road; well partly in the air as well, since 5:00 A.M., and suddenly the scene around us is transformed from the passive, seemingly endless hours of travel, to a totally surreal frenzy, that is our welcoming party. They’ve been waiting for us since mid afternoon, when the sky was bright with the autumn sun of South America, and the temperature was much, much warmer. After a botched arrival filming opportunity, resulting from a language barrier with our driver, we are greeted by T.A., trail guide extraordinaire and part owner (together with his Father Ashley Carrithers) of the ranch. We then spill out of the cars, scramble for luggage containing warmer clothes for the ride in. This is the first time I meet Stephanie, my assigned guide. Together she and I locate my suitcase, I don my rain gear and Stephanie hoists me up by supporting my left foot; I swing my right leg over a horse. We are ready! It is only at this point I learn it is a three hour ride to the actual guest ranch. A part of me slips into what can only be described as a hazy and profound sense of denial. Is this possible? Two solid days of travel from Kelowna, British Columbia, ostensibly reaching our destination and there’s still three hours to go; and on horseback? Is this possible? Not only is it possible, but now the magic begins. My horse’s name is Revenque and fortunately for me, he really knows his stuff. Stephanie and T.A. provide instructional prompts along the way, but it’s really Revenque who gets me to the guest ranch by the stroke



Under the Argentine Moon  
Mixed Medium, Acrylic on Canvas

The glorious and ever brilliant moon of South America provided endless entertainment, connection to the ancestry of Patagonia and comfort during virtually the entire trail ride. Its light offered companionship even during the darkest moments. A favourite memory is of Lulu taking

of midnight. The ride is three hours of navigating hills, stepping through patches of stones and traversing waterways. I slip into a comfortable rhythm, fortified by the thrill of the descending reality of the experience, ever accented by that most amazing Argentine moon. It is big and bright, but not yet full. She follows us the entire ride in; a true greeting from the ancient ancestry of Patagonia. I feel it.

Prior to Ranquilco, I had not really ridden a horse, at least not for a straight three hours, hence my surprise when I am able to walk after disembarking from Revenque. Like a well oiled machine Stephanie tends to our horses and T.A. sashays me into

the main dining room for a delicious and wholesome supper of pasta and apple pie. We're so late, I think to myself, but no one else seems to be bothered much by this fact. This is my first lesson in the relaxed and laid back life on the ranch. This, by no means is meant to suggest there isn't work happening. There's lots of work, but the attitude is one of flow and respect for the land. I love this about the entire Ranquilco experience. For the moment, however, I arrive, I dine and I am taken to my lodging, which I share with producer Leslie Haller, soon to follow. T.A. gives me a tour of Dossie's house; one of the best lodgings on the ranch and I am ready for my first night's sleep. Or, did I shower before resting my bones? I actually can't remember, but if I did shower it would only have been, because someone took time to build a fire in the bathroom in order that there might be hot water. I sleep and the brilliance, that is the Argentine moon, still shines down upon us all.

The next morning we are called to breakfast, and I begin discovering exactly who the 'us' consists of. There is some paid staff, but it is difficult to separate them from the volunteers. Ranquilco hosts a fabulous volunteer program that attracts people from all over the world, giving the ranch an international flavour. Many, but not all of the volunteers are young people looking for an enriching and maturing experience. Some of the volunteers come with riding or ranching experience, but not all. They stay for a short time or a long time, but it's always a good time. During our three week stay on the ranch, the volunteers range from 26 year old Victor, my loving guardian angel from Denmark, to tango lover Ethan from New York, who is of a certain age. Both of them have been on the ranch for several seasons, and each brings his own individual flair to the Ranquilco experience. Many young women volunteer as well, creating a fertile ground for romance. We, the 'Blind Spot' team are guests and comprise the balance of the group on the

guest ranch. There's nothing much happening in the winter months, so staff, volunteers and guests either go home, or find their way to another adventure until it is time to round up the cattle in the spring, plant the garden, and open up the guest ranch.

We are there in the autumn, and as if in response the garden, lovingly tended by the lovely LULU, is bursting with produce; apples magically fall from trees dotting the ranch yard. My horse in particular loves them apples! It makes me smile just writing about this fact, as I imagine Revenque stealing up to an apple tree to pull off the fruit. The little dickens had no shame when it came to eating apples, or wandering about searching for the greenest grass.

Perhaps no surprise, the most challenging day for me was the first day we practiced riding the trail, while still on the guest ranch receiving orientation. The film crew went ahead, while we sat on our horses in a rather confined grassy space waiting for them to set up for a shot. In retrospect, my sense is my horse and my guide got into a power struggle; Revenque wanted to graze, and Stephanie didn't want him to move. There was a ton of controversy the next day about what was actually happening, but all I knew was that I was feeling totally disempowered and unable to assess the situation. As if that wasn't enough, there was a communication breakdown, later that same day, between my guide and film producer/director Stefan Morel, resulting in a split second shock to my system while wondering if Revenque and I were about to tumble down an incline right on top of camera and film tech. By the end of the day I was stressed, such that my heart went into palpitation not unlike an attack of tachycardia; something I had experienced over 13 years ago resulting from a close-call dog attack. At the time of the original attack I was rushed to the hospital and received a shot of denizen, stopping the heart in order that it might regulate. This was after over ten hours of a heart rate of over 200 beats per minute. Now back at the ranch, "This can't be happening!" I think to myself. After about 30 minutes alone in my room trying to calm my palpitating heart I finally decide it is time to call on help. This is when I learn there are several experienced wilderness first aid people on staff. This in and of itself is very reassuring. What is less than reassuring is the fact we are hundreds of miles from the nearest medical centre, requiring the service of a helicopter; mind you, one that would need to be called in. T.A. Sofie and Ky attend to me with soft reassuring words of wisdom. They know their stuff, and before long my heart rate returns to normal, but now for the big decision. Do I attend the ten day trail ride, or after all the months of preparation do I call it quits? It was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made. With reassuring words from T.A. together with the first aid expertise of Ky and Sofie I decide to forge ahead.

I couldn't call it quits now? After all, this journey began in July of 2013 with an email from Leslie Haller inviting me to consider participating in the 'Blind Spot' film documentary. I was tempted to respond to the invitation immediately, feeling this was destiny. I decided to sleep on it. Next morning, my first waking thought was to reply favourably. From that moment on

**Ten days of sleeping in tents, or right on the ground, eating campfire cooked food and several hours each day of riding the moody terrain of Patagonia were before us.**



Bonk!  
Acrylic with mixed media

The day we descended a very steep and sandy portion of the trail known as the elevator. It was our first descent after reaching the summit of our ten day journey. I was grateful to be wearing a helmet that day!

training began. For months my focus turned to Patagonia and horses. I took several riding lessons at a local therapeutic riding farm, began researching Patagonia and telling everyone I knew about the trek. Arion Therapeutic Farm, its dedicated and thoughtful staff, and the half hour lessons served to mainly desensitize me to horses. There was one rather extensive grooming lesson, which was great, but there was no grooming of horses in Patagonia. The terrain is entirely too rustic to be concerned about grooming. I am grateful for the lessons, however, and would recommend them to anyone interested in learning to ride.

I set out to get my mind ready and decided to learn the words to 'Don't Fence Me In,' a song, that has since become my personal anthem. I then taught myself to play it on the ukulele. I love the ukulele! "Oh give me land, lots of land under starry skies above; don't fence me in. Let me ride through the wide open country, that I love. Don't fence me in." Did you know the rhythm of this song fits with the relaxed walking pace of a horse? The song is all about freedom, peace of mind and personal power within a vast expanse of possibility.

After four days of orientation and being pampered on the ranch, the first day of the actual trail ride was upon us and we were ready to ride out. Ten days of sleeping in tents, or right on the ground, eating campfire cooked food and several hours each day of riding the moody terrain of Patagonia were before us. The first three days were the most challenging for me, primarily because I worried about my heart. A pivotal moment occurred after a loving pep talk from Ky, assuring me everyone's hearts were working harder, because we were climbing. She also took my pulse, which was stronger than usual, and talked to me about arrhythmia, a condition I now believe I have. Arrhythmia is much more manageable than tachycardia, and from that point on I was free. The remainder of the ride is a swirl of no time and out of space, which can only be described in an expanse of experience, rather than a linear exposure.

Early on I recall wind; something I had worried about. As blind riders we rely on being able to hear the instructions of our guides. Wind in the ears makes that difficult, if not impossible should the guide be riding ahead. My bright pink and purple silk scarf under my helmet and over my ears certainly

helped; a strategy known by blind people, but the wind in Patagonia is like nothing else I have ever experienced! Moreover parts of the trail were ravines bordered by narrow ledges, that a startled horse could actually slip and fall into. After one day of wind, I called upon the Ancestry of the land to ask if perhaps something could be done about the bluster? From that point on, there was little wind save for the pass on top of the world, which wouldn't have been a problem but for waiting with the very hungry horses while the film crew went ahead to set up yet another shot. Now that was intense. I feel great gratitude toward Lulu for holding on to Revenque, while we waited. The disorientation of the wind was mind numbing. Beyond this, I was profoundly grateful for the calm days of riding; I'm sure it saved my heart.

The loss of independence while on the trail was a challenge; coupled with the phenomenon of filming. It meant we three blind riders were constantly being watched, probed and interviewed. Terry and Carly both live with partners, but for a live-alone introvert such as myself, there were days when I just went to bed early, because I knew I would at long last be alone in my tent. "Let me be by myself in the evening breeze; listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees. Send me off forever, but I ask you please; don't fence me in." Besides, I could still hear the music if there was any, while taking a final turn at gazing at that winking globe in the Argentine Sky. I actually chose to sleep right on the ground a few nights just to be able to peek out a time or two, and say hello to my waxing friend. We were lucky with the weather generally. Ancestry supported or not, for me, the nights I slept outside, I felt a true nurturing from the Mother, in spite of the frost brought by morning's light encircling the opening of my sleeping bag.

After the first three days on the trail, all became increasingly rhythmic. I no longer worried about my heart, the wind was virtually past tense, and I figured out how to manage Revenque with more confidence by holding his reins a bit tighter. There's only so much instruction that can be given while learning to ride. After that it's just you and your horse. It felt good to figure out the reins tightening strategy myself, and I believe Revenque also felt my growing confidence. For me personally, the best days were the ones with the least amount of verbal instruction from my guide.

Not that Stephanie was the only person giving advice; not at all! I recall many situations when someone would be riding by me; notice my stirrups were uneven or my saddle was crooked, and an adjustment would be made. On one occasion, Ky gracefully floated by me on her horse, and said "pivot from the pelvis." That simple phrase completely shifted my understanding about what was needed when descending a steep decline while on a horse. On another occasion, while passing by, T.A. subtly said, "Grip with your thighs." This was another sage bit of riding advice. Team work was the name of the game.

In my own experience with travel in groups where blindness is not usual, I have found it is best to draw on the support of all other travelers for a short stint; half day, or full day of sighted guide for example. This strategy serves

**As a blind person, my fingers are often my eyes. The cold mornings, and often evenings, resulted in numb fingers and diminished my ability to distinguish personal items.**



Wade in the Water  
Mixed Medium, Acrylic on Canvas

Traversing water ways often resulted in a steep decline, getting riding boots wet, then another steep incline. I loved the dance, that was crossing a river! Often my horse Revenque would take advantage of a well deserved drink. I'll never forget the day he scooted out of the lake, leaving the trail, settling on a precarious ridge. Revenque, what were you thinking? Only I know.

two very important purposes; it gives an opportunity to organically get to know others on the tour, and avoids burnout, that can very easily occur for the blind traveler and/or a single sighted guide for the duration of an entire trip. Compatibility, a good sense of humour, and a good dose of sensitivity are paramount. I've traveled to Israel, Peru, Europe and the Maya using this strategy with great success. I was always the only blind person on these travel excursions, and by trip's end many people in my company said how much more s/he got out of the trip while guiding me. Having said that, some people possess a natural ability with respect to guiding a blind person, but not all. For this reason, even though we were assigned riding guides for the duration of the trail ride, I would often request assistance from whomever might be available. By doing this I really got to know many of the other team members on the trail and I love that.

There were opportunities for some independence, of which I did take full advantage. Stephanie was a whip at putting up my tent; sometimes being helpful means knowing when to stay out of the way. However, once my bags were off the pack mules, I was on my own. The inside of my tent was my precious private domain, and I took pride in being able to organize my things accordingly. Many blind people, myself included, rely on consistency in order to maintain organization. Living alone, having raised two sons and being a lover of travel has provided many opportunities to develop my organizational abilities. Besides the privacy factor, if I had been sharing my tent, it would have likely been an exercise in stress management keeping items separate. The only challenge I faced while tenting on the trail, was the frozen finger phenomenon. As a blind person, my fingers are often my eyes. The cold mornings, and often evenings, resulted in numb fingers and diminished my ability to distinguish personal items. This was exacerbated by the fact, that everything needed to be enclosed in plastic. I had no idea plastic could get so cold, making it difficult to identify the bag with the socks from the one with the t-shirts. Normally, these items would be a breeze to distinguish from one another without opening the bag. Having a clear mental memory of where my frozen things were became critical to a fluid morning routine and sense of wellbeing. However, it should be said here, that cold plastic is better than dusty clothing and personal items.

I must have managed quite well, because I always got myself to the early morning campfire to enjoy one of my favourite daily rituals; sharing of the



Do You See What I See?  
Mixed Medium, Acrylic on canvas

The brilliant colours I could see in my mind's eye while on the trail were nothing short of spectacular! These exciting and dynamic colours can only be described as an expression of pure Grace.

maté. This was a peaceful and beautiful ceremony, that starts the day off on the right foot. There was usually soft spoken Spanish around the morning campfire during this sun rise routine, which I couldn't understand, but that didn't matter. It was like listening to poetry; it was an immersion into a mystical coming together with the sharing (from the same cup) of a very health supporting herbal drink. I came to love the dance, that was the greeting of another grand day in the Argentine Andes! Besides, the ritual provided a most effective method for thawing my fingers in time to enjoy a

delicious hearty bowl of homemade granola - yummy!

The other times the cold fingers were an occasional challenge was when I was making one of my many raised line drawings. Most of the time while riding the days were warm and sunny, but I didn't master the ability to do art making while riding a horse. Often by the time we made camp, enjoyed one another's company over dinner and wine, it was time to head off to my tent. By then it was too cold to bring out my slate and drawing paper. There were a few occasions when we stayed in camp for more than one night, however, so that did allow for some art making, ukulele practicing and playing in the water, when there was some. These precious free hours were occasionally interrupted by an interview, or filming op, which admittedly were not always fully welcomed.

The many layers, that made up my equestrian marvel through Patagonia, can hardly be given credit in an article of this nature. Having said that, I would be remiss if I didn't at least try to describe the profound connection I made to the land of the Argentine Andes and my horse Revenque. The heart connection I experienced might best be shared through one or two stories.

We had set up camp, and were enjoying some free time (as best as I can recall) when a rider suddenly presented himself among us. The local gaucho was greeted and Spanish translation began. Turns out he had been confined to his home for a few days, because his eyes were so light sensitive, that he couldn't ride, very necessary for tending to his animals. Now I'm not quite sure how the mountain grapevine works, but it seems pretty synchronistic to me, that he was able to share his timely story to a group of gringos: three of them blind. He was in desperate need of sunglasses, which were promptly and joyfully presented to him by Carly. It is true, that the sunglasses were her back-up pair, but take it from someone, who is desperately photophobic, this was a generous offering. I wish to explain, if you've never experienced it, that the discomfort derived from prolonged light sensitivity is distressing beyond

**The hues I am seeing rarely coincide with the physical environment around me. In Patagonia, however, the colours were almost right on.**

understanding. The generosity of Carly was only superseded by the gratitude of the gaucho. Furthermore, as there are only itinerant doctors in them mountains, we were able to make that connection once we returned to the guest ranch accordingly. How's that for magic?

The other mystery I would like to share is less temporal. In other words, there isn't really a beginning, a middle, nor an end. Rather, this story reflects my own phenomenology, where blindness is concerned. As previously mentioned my level of legal blindness is referred to as 'light perception only.' This is the least amount of residual vision a person can have before total blindness. Many people are surprised to learn, that only about 5 or 10% of registered blind people are actually totally blind. As a point of interest, Terry Kelly is totally blind, Carly Grigg (during the time of our trail ride together) possessed 4% residual sight, and I'm somewhere in between, but closer to totally blind as I only perceive light. "Does anyone else see that big fat full Argentine moon?" It is important to note, that the degree of remaining sight can quite profoundly colour a person's life experience. Significantly, for us our sight differences also handily mirrored the fact, that the three of us were very different people generally. The public seems to like to create a kind of homogeneity where blind people are concerned, but believe me we are all quite different. And speaking of colour, this is where my story gets even more interesting, because about fifteen years ago, I began seeing colour in what I describe as the energy field. In other words, I have long since lost my ability to perceive colour in the physical realm, but I do see many and varied colours around me at virtually all times. It's beautiful - a true gift, and I love my colours! Normally, however, the hues I am seeing rarely coincide with the physical environment around me. In Patagonia, however, the colours were almost right on. Stephanie would suddenly ask me, "What are your colours now?" I would tell her and almost without fail there would be consistency with what she and I saw. Not only that, but they were vibrant, stunning and totally captivating colours. If what I was experiencing personally is anything like what sighted people enjoy, the Argentine Andes are outstanding in their breath-taking impact!, "Just turn me loose; let me straddle my old saddle

underneath the Andes skies. On my kayos; let me wander over yonder till I see the mountains rise!" It was pure vision quest magic!

Then there was the day our group was gifted with a condor feather. It was at our final resting spot, and possibly the last day, but most certainly one of our last days on the trail. Our trip had been graced by the presence of the mighty condor many times over-all, and I can safely say I felt imbued by the energy of these majestic birds.

Ruth and Revenque





Horsepower  
(acrylic with mixed media on canvas)

Sometimes a painting is rendered favourite, because it evokes a special memory. This is the case here. It captures my sensations in March, 2014 in Patagonia as part of the Criollo Films documentary called 'Blind Spot: Moments Unseen'.

Now I know many of you are thinking, 'condor' and 'majestic' don't belong in the same sentence, but that would only be because of a lack of understanding regarding the symbolism of the condor in shamanic tradition. South America holds the condor as the brave and efficient entity, that gets the final stages of the job done. Have you ever tried to finish something in your life only to find that the last bits are just too hard and you end leaving unfinished business hanging over head, nagging? Well, try calling upon condor for help, and see what happens. The fact that we were gifted a condor feather at the end of our time together was a brilliant message from the ancestry of the land, applauding our success. I felt so lifted up during our final day's ride into the guest ranch

yard, that words cannot describe. I suppose that is why I mostly sang all the way.

"I want to ride to the ridge where the west commences; gaze at the 'moon' till I lose my senses. Can't look at hobbles, and I can't stand fences! Don't fence me in."

The final hurrah truly belongs to my horse Revenque. Having said, it is nearly impossible to find the words, I now understand that Revenque perceived me better than I understood myself. He was always one step ahead, and it is only upon reflection I am able to acknowledge the psychic power, that is horse. Back in Kelowna, the day it was confirmed the project was a go, I recall experiencing a swirling vision of a herd of horses. My sense is that I was already then receiving a loving welcome from Revenque. I felt imbued by the power of horse coupled with the support and strength, that was Revenque. He understood when I was novice, and became wisdom, he understood when I was out of sorts, and became the soothing force of calm, and he perceived my ultimate confidence, and joined me in our joyous conquest. What else can I say? The details are many, but too private to share openly; Revenque knows.

In closing, there's more, so much more, and perhaps in time I will make a further attempt at writing more. In the meantime, the question begs: why blind equestrians? It is a good question, and one which might best be answered by Stefan Morel, director and driving force behind the project; or perhaps with the airing of the 'Blind Spot Moments Unseen' film documentary in 2015. For the moment, I feel it is safe to say if we three very distinct



Falling Leaves; Falling Rain  
Acrylic and found object

Final day on Estancia Ranquilco I called upon the Ancestry requesting some rainfall. During the night a great wind storm blew countless leaves from the trees onto the rooftop of Dossie's House. The noise woke me up; sounded just like pouring rain! The ancestors have such a sense of humour I thought to myself. But then the next day, during our three hour ride out, it rained the entire trip!

blind riders can do it, then anyone can. During our time on the Estancia Ranquilco we met many people, who said s/he had never been on a horse before riding the trail with T.A. and his team. The attention that went into the ten days of our trail ride is reflective of the same, that is afforded any other guest. I would recommend this extraordinary experience to anyone interested in a spirit filled connection with nature, heart filled adventure, and of course getting to know a horse!

### Post Script; Under the Argentine Moon

After returning to Canada from my extraordinary visit to the Argentine Andes, I admittedly found myself adjusting (with some difficulty) to the re-entry into the concrete world of urban living. Keep in mind, that Kelowna nestled in the Okanagan Valley is one of the most beautiful places in the world. The point is I missed sleeping on the ground, smell-

ing the earth, hearing the sound of running rivers and feeling the embrace of the brilliant Argentine Moon. Over time I gradually slipped into the rhythm of my old life, but not without the support of three very important gifts given to me from the Ranquilco journey. First, there is the poncho; a gift from the 'Blind Spot' production. For weeks when I entered my condo after being away I could smell the pungent odor of my horse Revenque in the room - the poncho preserved him for me. I can't explain just how much comfort and solace that gave me, and how saddened I became when the smell gradually dissipated. The poncho now still holds a prominent place in my living room; burned fringes and all. I love it! Second, as a practicing shaman, the horseshoe given to me by my Guardian Angel Victor from the left hoof of Revenque has become an important part of my mesa together with the lock of his mane. These items keep me spiritually connected to the land of Patagonia, not to mention connected to the power of horse. The horseshoe also has become an integral part of an art series I've started depicting the various terrain we traveled over the jagged and moody trail of the Argentine Andes. Then of course, I have my writings which have become influenced by my experience, such as the article above. I am so grateful for these sustaining gifts.

**“Blind Spot; Moments Unseen” will be broadcast on CBC’s documentary channel early in 2015.**

**Ruth Bieber** holds a Master’s degree in Education, from the University of Calgary, with a specialization in Rehabilitation. Prior to obtaining this degree, her professional focus was as a Counseling Therapist, working with clients with disabilities. This work challenged her to discover more effective therapeutic modalities. To this end, she shifted from traditional, verbal approaches, to the power offered by the arts.

In the early 1990s, she founded InsideOut Theatre, which was a reflection of her own evolution from therapy to theatre. Ms Bieber was the Artistic Director of this ground breaking, integrated Theatre Company for seventeen years, and in 2012 published the book “Disability Theatre From the InsideOut”. The book is both practical and theoretical; plus holds great human interest.

Ms Bieber has received numerous awards for her specialized work including, YWCA/

Global T.V. Woman of Vision (2004), the Euclid Harry award for Leadership (2006), The Donald Norman Award for contribution to the Theatre Arts (2008) and The Spirit of Kelowna for inspiration in promoting diversity within the visual arts community (2011).

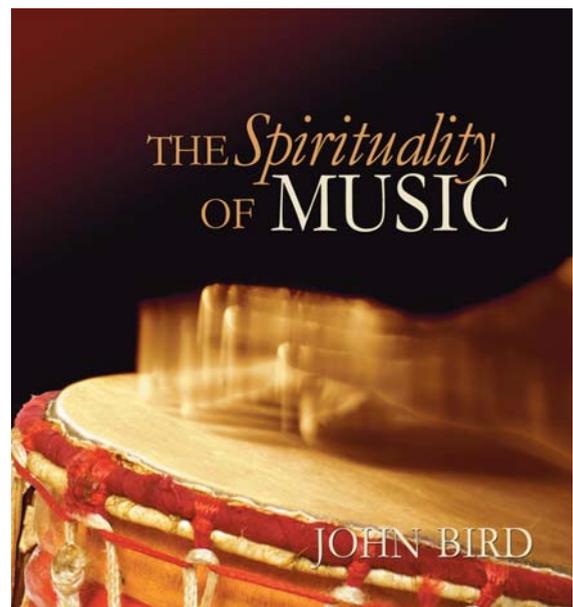
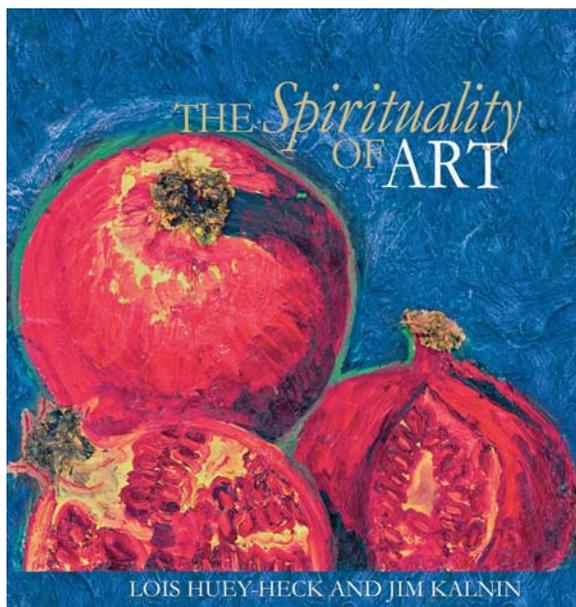
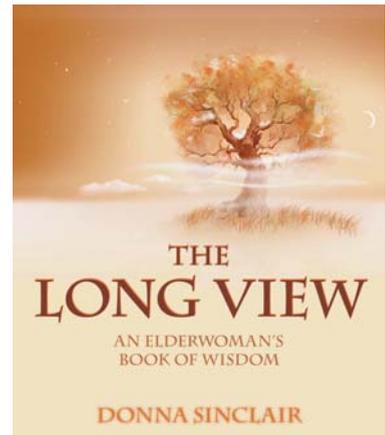
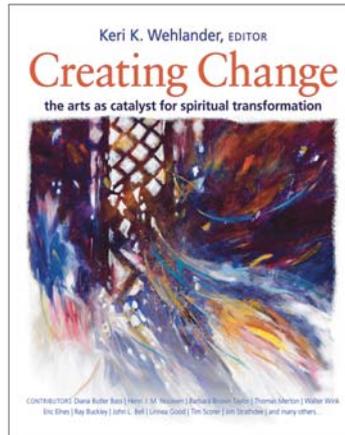
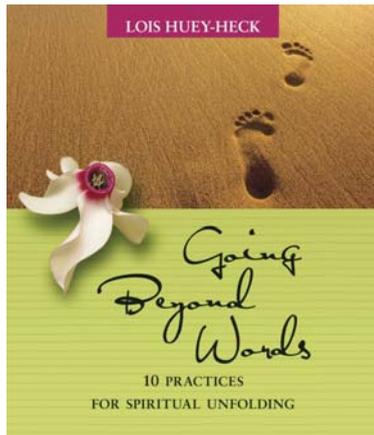
After relocating to Kelowna, Ms Bieber took her creative inquiry into the visual arts. She began to paint and established a gallery appreciation program for people who are vision impaired. This project, modeled after the Art Beyond Sight program in New York City is in conjunction with the Kelowna Art Gallery. In 2013, with the Kelowna Art Gallery, Ms Bieber curated an exhibition of works by blind and vision impaired artists titled *Just Imagine*.

See more about Ms Bieber by going to her website:

[www.playwithperspective.com](http://www.playwithperspective.com)

# Creative Aging Books

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# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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[www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca)

Sage-ing with Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude exists to honour the transformational power of creativity.

It is a quarterly journal intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. It presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement. We invite all ages to contribute their discoveries.

Sage-ing is about seeking - satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to *Know Thyself* and contribute that knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and well-being for the individual and to our culture.

This journal exists for all those serious in exploring their creativity, in a chosen expression. It is a forum for publication and exposure to other artists, both novice and established. This journal is an easel for any form of artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination.