

A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close & Carolyn Cowan

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NUMBER 2, WINTER 2012

# SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,  
GRACE & GRATITUDE



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE

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NUMBER 2, WINTER 2012  
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## SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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### A PUBLICATION OF THE **Okanagan Institute**

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

Email [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)

# INTRODUCTION

Readers of the first issue of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* will recall this journal is an active response to the dream of Thomas Merton:

"May we all grow in grace and peace, and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being. It is the voice of the creative self waiting to be called to speak."

You were encouraged not to just read us, but to participate with us. When a dream is pure in intention, it gathers momentum. Those of you who responded to that first call by reading and sending your suggestions and creative responses are helping forge the path to a greater expression of human potential. Feel the immensity of that.

Maximizing intergenerational activities which advance creative consciousness and honour the transformational power of creative expression is the goal of this journal. Diversity and intensity is boundless when minds unite with imagination and passion. Through generous collaboration, this journal can become an organic art piece.

In the early twentieth century Constructivism proposed that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. The movement advocated in favour of art as a practice for social purposes. It was a noble goal founded in the idealism of the classical period. Perhaps proponents of Constructivism were just a century too early. This journal embraces their goal as a possibility within the context of the World Wide Web.

The collective voice of you, our readers, can generate the momentum to create or 'Construct', the twenty-first century we deserve. Email your ideas and your creative products to [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com). Hear the call. Join the dream. Sage with Creative Spirit.

"It is not having experiences that make us wise. It is reflecting on those experiences that brings wisdom." – Jane Fonda

## Mission Statement

*Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* exists to honour the transformational power of creativity. We are a quarterly journal intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. We present 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 realization that to *Know Thyself* and contribute that knowing to our culture is indeed our highest purpose. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves.

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 artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination.

## Request for Submissions

**We would love to hear your comments, stories, poems or other forms of creative expression. Whatever your passion is, we encourage you to share it with us. Sharing inspires and connects us all at a heart level. Please send your edited submission (300 to a maximum 1,500 words) for our next issue. The deadline is March 1, 2012.**

**Please email your submission as an attachment in "rich text format" along with original photos to [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)  
We look forward to hearing from you.  
Create a beautiful day.**

# WHO ARE WE?



Ruth Bieber

## Ruth Bieber

Ruth holds a Master's degree in Education from the University of Calgary, with a specialization in Rehabilitation. Working with clients with multiple disabilities, Ruth discovered more effective therapeutic modalities. She shifted from traditional, verbal approaches to the power offered by the arts. In 1991, she founded InsideOut Theatre, a reflection of her own evolution from the therapeutic arts to the power of performance for people with a wide range of mixed abilities. Currently she is publishing a book about her experience as the blind Artistic Director of InsideOut Theatre and has begun to paint. Since her move to Kelowna in 2010, Ruth has added painting to her creative repertoire. [www.playwithperspective.com](http://www.playwithperspective.com)



Karen Close

## Karen Close

Karen holds a BA and BEd with specialist certification in the visual arts. She is a grandmother, a painter, author of two books, and an ardent arts advocate. Teaching English and Visual Arts for 30 years seeded her appreciation for the healing benefits of creative expression as the vehicle for discovering and sharing who we are. In 2010 Karen received federal funding from New Horizon's For Seniors to begin the program Sage-ing With Creative Spirit in Kelowna.

## Carolyn Cowan



Carolyn Cowan

For the duration of her working life, Carolyn was involved in business administration in its myriad forms. Her left brain got a full workout. Her right brain begged for equal time. Her only artistic outlet throughout life was writing. Still, it was not enough to balance the detail and analysis demanded by her work. Just over two years ago, she retired and moved to Kelowna, B.C. What a different 2,500 kilometres and freedom from, figuratively, a 9:00 to 5:00 job makes. In Kelowna, she is surrounded by beauty and determined to explore and express her creativity. She writes poetry and paints, often combining them on the same canvas.



Sandy McNolty

## Sandy McNolty

With over 30 years experience in the Wellness Industry, Sandy is a Personal Trainer, Aqua Instructor, Certified Counsellor and member of the CPCA. Sandy studied Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda at Deepak Chopra's University and became a Certified Vedic Master. She has since completed two more International Yoga Certifications and taught yoga in many foreign countries. Currently she teaches classes, workshops and Retreats in Kelowna. Sandy believes that the key to health, happiness and inner peace, is the mind, body, spirit connection and that laughter is the best medicine. Her creative passions include song writing, writing, traveling, and learning the guitar.

## Nanci White



Nanci White

Dr. Nanci White teaches for the English Department at York University in Toronto, specifically an online course titled Healing Fiction. The course analyzes the power of the written word and artistic communicating in bringing about physical and spiritual healing and renewal. She enjoys *out of her own culture* travel and lives in a small town north of Toronto where she reads, writes, paints and gardens. She has recently been appointed Inspector of Snowstorms.

**Together these women urge you, our readers, to make the leap into your own creativity and discover the new vision of you that awaits. The founders of this journal responded to their inner voices that said, "You need to be more." They believe children, communities and, indeed, the planet need creative nurturing to achieve the fullness of human potential.**

# DR. X'S LIFELINE TO CREATIVITY



## Sterling Haynes

Laughter has been a good part of my life and has helped me through difficult times in medicine and through most of my 83 years. A good chuckle can put things in perspective. When I was 70 and in retirement I had a stroke and my brain became re-arranged. It was then when I became more creative and perhaps funnier. My right creative side took over and I started to write poetry and humour. I was left with a paralyzed right foot but a writer's creative right brain. I think I got the better of the deal, but then I may be prejudiced.

The funny episodes in my life's medical experiences became hilarious. The sad, melancholy parts of my life's memories looked less bleak and I looked at and wrote about the brighter side of the panorama. When I wrote about those vignettes, magazine editors, newspapers and journalists bought my stories and published them. Some were even features in their publications. I wrote a poem, about this, years ago, that exemplifies my change in life style and philosophy. It is called

Life #2

"We write to  
taste life twice." Anais Nin  
I write to taste  
life twice and  
have a second  
belly laugh  
along the way

After my residency general practice training in Oakland, California, Jessie, with our infant daughter Elizabeth headed for the frontier town of Williams Lake, British Columbia, in our Volkswagen 'bug'. 'Willie's Puddle' was a busy town of a few thousand people with four doctors and we covered a huge area of hundreds of square miles. The local hospital of 40 beds was old and dilapidated but it supplied a need for loggers, ranchers, miners, locals and First Nations people. Three of our daughters, Melissa, Jocelyn and Leslie were born there. It seemed that when I first went to Williams Lake all the hospital rooms were lit with 40 watt bulbs except the operating room which had the latest in O.R. illumination. The other problem was – when people left the front door of the hospital open in the winter time the furnace would blow out. This could be disastrous if there were a dozen newborns in the nursery in January.

But we survived; the doctors worked long hours, made house calls, went

## I Don't Do Old

Sterling Haynes

there are things to do,  
 lilies to grow.  
 stella d 'ore's blooms  
 are my galaxy.  
 irises' blue... fill  
 my eyes with  
 ecstasy,  
 i don't do old  
 i do global warming  
 with Suzuki, Schindler.  
 and Al Gore's concern  
 with climates  
 in crisis.  
 my affinity is with  
 the arctic- ice, melt, water,  
 polar bears  
 drowning -  
 i don't do old.  
 god's creativity,  
 and ideas light  
 my spirit.  
 art, literature  
 can fill me  
 with awe.  
 life is sweet,  
 never, i will  
 never age out,  
 i don't do old.  
 kindness spins  
 my web,  
 altruism, a.i.d.s, h.i.v.,  
 world poverty  
 are my bonds...  
 entanglements of  
 laughter are the gossamer  
 threads that  
 tie my connections together...  
 i won't do old

out with the ambulance and flew to remote accident areas. Sometimes we received payment in kind. Before socialized medicine, there was little money set aside to pay the doctor. I was paid in hinds of beef, lamb and moose plus potatoes and turnips. On one occasion, a big game guide brought a four-point buck in for me. The dressed carcass was dumped unceremoniously, midday, in the centre of my waiting room. The deer was in payment for delivering a baby boy. This was the first son born to the guide and his wife.

My first practice in Williams Lake taught me how to be a real doctor. I learned to improvise, look at both sides of the problem and laugh with compassion. These attributes stood me in good stead when we moved first to Kamloops six years later and then on to Marion, Alabama, where I worked for the Health Development Corporation in Perry County and the U.S. Army at the Marion Military Institute.

My writing of stories of my practice days has kept my mind sharp. Writing zany poems have kept me bubbly and positive, even in winter. My fellow writers keep me buoyed up, they are so positive compared to some of my medical peers of the past with their melancholy ways.

On looking back on my life in medicine, on writing and laughter – I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

In subsequent articles, I will expand on my initial thesis and the many people who helped me in my writing, ideas and thinking. I'll expand my story, as it is ongoing.

*Please let me know if you have any questions regarding writing humour and creative non-fiction for book publishers, magazines, journals and newspapers. I'll try and answer them but I don't have much experience with e-books. Simple problems that you may have with marketing your poetry and your Haiku will, also, be answered in the column. Email Dr. X. at [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com)*

# CREATIVITY IN AGING – ITS MANY FORMS

## Jenny Sato

The following is a shortened version of a paper recently submitted by Jenny for a UBCO course on Aging.

In the 1950s and 60s, research led to the conclusion that creativity peaked by the age of 40 and for most, took a downward turn thereafter. The exception appeared to be the work of scholars who often continued to be creative into late life. One of the flaws about this conclusion would appear to be the premise that creativity and productivity were synonymous.

More recent research, in the past 10 to 15 years, suggests that creativity can have broader connotations. Furthermore, it has been noted that creativity can show a secondary peak in later life, although it has different characteristics. For example, when 1,919 works by 172 classical composers were studied, a pattern emerged. Their music was more concise, simpler and restrained. A secondary peak was also noticed in artists who display an old-age style. This old-age style may be attributed to visual impairment and compromised dexterity. The resulting works may be without the fine details previously produced and instead, give only the essence of their intentions. But it may not be only physical limitations that affect an aging artist's style. It was suggested by Martin Lindauer, a German behaviour scientist, that new ideas may result from an increase in knowledge, a greater understanding of self and others and a greater acceptance of self. Rembrandt's work is described by Jakob Rosenberg, a historian and Rembrandt scholar, as moving from "jauntiness, vitality, and even [the] arrogance of youth and early adulthood to the quiet, introspective, and intensely spiritual experiences of old age." Even with a changed style, the artists' works may appeal to a different, equally appreciative audience.

In addition to an old-age style, there are those considered to be late-bloomers. Sometimes it is due to circumstances that they are unable to actively pursue a creative avenue; perhaps it's a financial constraint or one imposed by family. Perhaps it's a community-imposed constraint, such as recession or war. Examples of late-bloomers are often identified by an apparent, sudden emergence of creativity. One of the best known is Grandma Moses, who was born Anna Mary Robertson in 1860. She had dabbled a little at painting in adulthood, but did not consider it seriously. She took up embroidery following the death of her husband but had to give it up due to arthritis and at her sister's urging, began painting in her late 70s. In 1938, her

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**Late-bloomers are often identified by an apparent, sudden emergence of creativity,**

paintings sold for \$3.00 to \$5.00 at the local drugstore. The following year, three of her paintings were displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Grandma Moses died at the age of 101. In November, 2006, one of her paintings from 1946 sold for \$1.2 million.

While late-blooming appears to be quite a sudden event, there may be other factors at play. Late-bloomers may have been quite creative throughout their lives. Who knows how they may have manipulated daily circumstances in creative ways, perhaps in the kitchen or in the workplace. Their adaptability, curiosity and openness to change could well have contributed to their apparently sudden emergence as artists.

Creative Age, authored by Dr Gene Cohen, provides perspectives on creativity that are broad, encouraging and can be universally applied. He lists numerous examples of achievements by people in their later stages, a few of whom are listed below:

- Arthur Rubinstein, who made more than 200 recordings during his life and was still performing at 88, and at 92 years, he wrote his autobiography;
- Charles Greely Abbot (1872-1973), an American astrophysicist who conducted research on solar radiation. Just prior to his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, he designed a device for converting solar energy into power;
- T.S. Eliot, Nobel Prize winner, who published 'The Elder Statesman' at the age of 70;
- Mary Barbara Hamilton Cartland, who wrote 26 books in 1983, at the age of 82.

**Dr. Gene Cohen shares his belief that the creative spirit is innate in everyone and has the potential to change our mind sets and our lives, no matter our chronological age.**

**ingredients necessary for creativity are life experience and a long view, which can only be accumulated over time.**

Although Dr. Cohen provides ample proof that creativity exists in us well into our 70s and 80s, for the most part, his examples are of people who spent a good part of their younger years amassing the knowledge they needed to continue as late as they did. He also shares his belief that the creative spirit is innate in everyone and has the potential to change our mind sets and our lives, no matter our chronological age. In fact, he suggests that ingredients necessary for creativity are life experience and a long view, which can only be accumulated over time and enhances the creative spirit.

### **Definition of Creativity**

Defining creativity is no mean feat. Many authors avoid definitions and choose to simply study it by looking at products of the process. The Random House Dictionary defines it as the "...ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.," "originality, progressiveness, or imagination, the process by which one utilizes creative ability" and "bringing something new of value into existence." To this last phrase, we add *which is of value and usefulness to the creator.*



## Creativity in Response to Loss and Adversity

Although the causes are negative, some forms of creativity result from the experience of loss or adversity. In late life, one of the losses commonly experienced is the death of a spouse. Regardless of the quality of the relationship, substantial, intimate time spent with another person implies that death will have a profound effect. Usually, one expects sadness and grief, although one widow in her 80s was heard to say, “Now I can get on with my life,” while her husband lay in his casket.

The end of a relationship is frequently followed by a period of grief, mourning and often, depression. During this time, without conscious effort, the bereaved begins the creation of a new self. This new self, of necessity, must learn new tasks and assume other responsibilities. Old ways of doing things may no longer suffice. How will this new self manifest? By volunteering, trying new activities, creating new relationships, renewing old friendships? The alternative, which also sometimes occurs, is withering, withdrawal and subsequent isolation.

Janice and her husband retired to Kelowna more than 30 years ago. Because his job had taken them to many countries, wherever they were, Janice educated herself about jewellery, gemstones and gold- and silver-smithing. Sometimes, it required learning a new language. At home, she created small pieces for her pleasure. When she was 78, she was widowed. Shortly after, a studio at the Rotary Arts Centre became available. Serendipity. Not only could this be a workspace but she could offer classes, to share her knowledge. She learned the business end of what she loved to do and learned to take professional quality photos to sell her creations online.

However, recognizing that this could not last forever, at 83, she moved to the U.S. to be closer to her only child. In her new environment, she began sharing again, first in her home and later, in the community centre. She reports that the positive response has been encouraging. Janice’s aging experience is a wonderful model of what can be.

### Benefits of Creativity

While the benefits of engaging the creative spirit have been touted, measurements of those benefits have not been obvious. Cohen, as the primary investigator, describes the outcomes of a three-year study in a report titled *Creativity in Aging - The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults*. The programs were located in Washington, DC, Brooklyn and San Francisco, with two groups at each site – one group of 150 was the intervention group, who participated in a weekly art program and the other group of 150 was the control who maintained their usual activities. The age range was from 65 to 100. The participants were interviewed three times, once at the beginning to establish a baseline, the second time at one year and the third, at two years. The intervention groups reported better health, fewer

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**Creativity intervention groups reported better health, fewer doctor visits and less medication usage. They also scored more positive responses on mental health measures and reported more involvement in activities overall.**

**According to the Alzheimer's Society in 2011, more than 103,000 Canadians were expected to be afflicted with dementia... It has been shown that there is the possibility of improving emotional health, even in those with dementia, by encouraging creative expression.**

doctor visits and less medication usage. They also scored more positive responses on mental health measures and reported more involvement in activities overall. The outcomes point to “true health promotion and disease prevention effects.”

Writing and story-telling also have benefits. Doing so presents opportunities to review life's path, to look at successes and apparent failures from a distance and perhaps see new meanings in events that caused joy and disappointment. This can be a time of healing and preparation for the final stage of life.

The subject of dementia will be mentioned here for two reasons: firstly, just as physical limitations need not necessarily interfere with creative expression, neither should dementia. Secondly, according to the Alzheimer's Society in 2011, more than 103,000 Canadians were expected to be afflicted with dementia (the majority by Alzheimer's and a smaller percentage by vascular dementia and various other causes). By 2038, more than 257,000 will be affected. Traditionally, care of those with dementia has centered on the maintenance of their physical being and less with emotional well-being. It has been shown that there is the possibility of improving emotional health, even in those with dementia, by encouraging creative expression.

Dalia Gottlieb-Tanaka, a University of British Columbia researcher, believed that dementia does not alter the desire for creative expression. Her initial study *Gottlieb-Tanaka, Small & Yassi* involved a small number, mostly women, with moderate to severe dementia. With an emphasis on the process, a number of activities were offered, including art work, poetry writing, music, dancing, reminiscing and discussion. The outcomes were process-related, that is, interaction, creativity and mutual encouragement and resulted in satisfaction as evidenced by responses such as smiling or laughing, making eye contact, touching and patting, and sharing feelings.

In Kelowna, The Village at Mill Creek began a painting group in September, 2011. Alicia King, the recreation therapist, had attempted such groups in the past but the approach had been to engage a teacher to present

formal classes. This approach was deemed a failure because the participants were not able to respond in a positive manner and their interest could not be maintained. The current group, at Village at Mill Creek, is comprised of four to eight residents with mild to moderate dementia. It began with input from Karen Close, an advocate of creativity in aging. Based on her experience with process painting, without a specific outcome in mind, the group donned vinyl gloves, applied paint to paper and were encouraged to proceed as they wished. The delight was obvious; some had painted recognizable objects and others created a page of free-form colour. Most were totally immersed in their work but as they paused, they praised each





**Creative expression is shaped by the need to leave a legacy, to take care of unfinished business and celebrate one's contributions. It is an affirmation of life.**

other and were visibly pleased. For just this hour, participants engage in productive expression. It is a positive contrast to most of their days, when they are often passive spectators.

## Creating a Different You

In response to adversity and loss, a different person emerges. But can anyone deliberately create a different self? In Eric Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man*, the seventh stage is of generativity versus stagnation. Career and family are the main focus of this stage. Perceived failures in this stage lead to self-absorption and a sense of having been unproductive. This hampers the move to the final stage. The eighth stage, ego integrity versus despair, proposes that looking back over one's life produces a sense of accomplishment – the outcome of a successful eighth stage is wisdom, whereas failure leads to despair and fear of death.

The above two stages have been expanded to four by Dr. Cohen. Labelled *Potential Human Phases*, They are:

- The Midlife Re-evaluation phase, occurring between the 40s and early 60s during which time people seek to make their lives and work more meaningful;
- The Liberation phase, approximately between the

60s and 70s, when there is a sense of freedom, both within and externally, as a result of retirement from work. Creative expression may come from a sense of If not now, when? There is a level of comfort and confidence regarding self-image and support from one's social circle.

- The Summing Up phase, occurring in the 70s and beyond, involving examining one's life and sharing the wisdom that has accrued. Typically, this phase is carried out by personal story-telling, giving of time and money and community activism.
- The Encore phase, which occurs around and beyond 80 years. Creative expression is shaped by the need to leave a legacy, to take care of unfinished business and celebrate one's contributions. It is an affirmation of life.

Unlike Dr. Erikson, Cohen does not present either/or outcomes. Cohen's phases represent optimal passages which people strive to reach. Ultimately, whether or not one wishes to achieve any of these stages or phases, time will take its toll and one will simply continue to age.

Current society presents obstacles to the successful completion of both Erikson's stages and Cohen's *Potential Human Phases*. In Age-ing to Sage-ing,

**Growing the elder within requires unleashing the creative spirit and invoking intuition. These actions, in turn, will help the elder to grow.**

**Dr. Robert N. Butler, a noted psychiatrist, says that older people must become self-teachers, take charge of one's own learning and transform the world in response to our own concerns and in the process, create something new.**

Schachter-Shalomi and Miller present a different vision for aging. They point out that in our youth-oriented culture, aging is seen negatively. Diminished and useless, the elderly are seen as non-contributors. However, these authors suggest that this image can be altered by a shift in thinking, instigated by those who are experiencing late life. They offer gerontologist Barry Barkan's definition of an elder, which shows that we can alter the image entirely. He defines an elder as a "person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to, the future. An elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy, and pleasure, and her or his birthright to these remains intact. Moreover, an elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations." The word *elder* is not readily used in our society. Its use is more often associated with older, established cultures. In Canada, could it be that, especially for first generation immigrants, there were no appropriate old-age role models? They had not witnessed a previous generation grow old and were therefore not prepared for the role themselves. That said, the positive aspect of not knowing meant that they had the freedom to create different models, more suited to their new environments. And with successive generations, there can be the willingness to alter the role as society changes and to create their own vision of aging.

Growing the elder within requires unleashing the creative spirit and invoking intuition. These actions, in turn, will help the elder to grow. While this process might appear to be cyclical, in fact, its evolution takes the form of a spiral.

Dr. Robert N. Butler, a noted psychiatrist, says that older people must become self-teachers, take charge of one's own learning and transform the world in response to our own concerns and in the process, create something new. By doing so, later life becomes a time of potential discovery and self-renewal, rather than a time of decline. What else can be done? Steven Dahlberg, with the International Centre for Creativity and Imagination, noting the plasticity of the brain, suggests in addition to engaging in the visual arts, dancing, singing and practising mental strategies can help. The goal is to alter or remove assumptions and habits that prevent the realization of creative potential. In other words, develop a broader pool of possibilities. This can be achieved by changing one's expectations of self. Instead of using statements that revolve around *should*, *could*, *is*, one's perspectives can be broadened by asking *How might I...?* Daily practice can result in more adaptable and flexible responses to greater challenges that one may expect to face in time. He goes on to quote Felicia Huppert, psychologist, University of Cambridge:

"One of our key objectives for the next century should be promoting positive well-being. This includes developing mental strategies to cope with the losses and disappointments that lead to depression, but goes further, encouraging a sense of fulfillment, capability, and pleasure. And the health

benefits of positive well-being are backed up by scientific evidence. We have shown in a national survey that happier people live longer, even when we control for their physical health. We have also shown that immune function is better in people who use humor to cope with stress, so feeling good is good for the individual and the community, and politicians should take note improving the mental well-being of the population will also be good for healthcare budgets in the future.”

While it seems unlikely that large-scale, government-backed improvements will appear in the near future, as individuals we may certainly begin the transformation ourselves. As Cohen suggests, factors that will support creative growth are time (as in retirement), sufficient financial resources to permit this freedom, the courage to try new things and the maturity to better understand yourself and your potential. And, one might add, a sense of curiosity.

## Conclusion

Historical perspectives of creativity in aging were limited to outstanding contributions to arts and sciences, without which our society would not be as it is today. However, if we accept that everyone has innate creative spirit, we can be more inclusive. Daily challenges, of a smaller scale, have always been met with creative solutions.

More recent research and subjective experiences have shown that encouraging the creative spirit can result in improved health and well-being. The current societal focus on youth and anti-aging are detrimental to the aging experience. One way to alter this situation is for those in their 50s, 60s and beyond, to change the images they have of aging and thus, change the images that youth have of older generations. Active role-modelling is more effective than simply narrative. A very real obstacle that may arise in the near future is that the boomer generation may not be able to instigate changes – they may not be able to retire at age 65 for financial reasons and thus, be unable to fully prepare for later life. It would be most unfortunate if their creative spirit remains at minimum levels because they do not have the time and the freedom to discover their full potential. However, there may yet be hope. Because of increasing longevity, labelling of the last third of life will need revision. At one time, a long life was 60 years; a long life is now considered to be 100 and more. Thus, the boomer generation may still have time to prepare for the realization of their full potential and make this time the most creative of their lives.

**Factors that will support creative growth are time, sufficient financial resources to permit this freedom, the courage to try new things and the maturity to better understand yourself and your potential. And, one might add, a sense of curiosity**

# HEART FIT

## Karen Close



Mostly with their eyes closed, but their hearts full, Sierra Clark and a close friend allowed paint to flow with their hands' gestures as they recalled Sierra's mother recently claimed by cancer.

Careful attention to this image will delight you as much as it did Sierra when she stood back to look. There is much to see. Mother and daughter had painted regularly together at heART Fit.

Mostly with their eyes closed, but their hearts full, seventeen year old Sierra Clark, and a close friend, allowed paint to flow in rhythm with their hands' gestures. The painting is a tribute to Sierra's mother whose life cancer had recently claimed. Careful attention to this image will delight you as much as it did Sierra when she stood back to look.

Art is the language of the heart. Its voice is eloquent when an artist submits mind to innate creative expression. Sierra painted this work on a return visit to heART Fit. She and her mother had painted regularly with this intergenerational painting group which meets weekly at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna, British Columbia.

heART Fit facilitates Spontaneous Process Painting as an act of faith. There are no instructions or rules. The process encourages allowing and trusting. When one acts, and paints, from the heart, rather than from a head filled with instruction, and judgment, the act of releasing and allowing, opens the participant to 'self', to the creative, healing energy that is within each of us.

"Creativity is not something we acquire, it is innately who we are. We don't work at being more creative; rather we look within to remember that it is who we are. When deep down we know this to be true, life becomes our canvas, our instrument of choice is the field of infinite possibilities and we manifest our reality effortlessly, moment to moment, with joy, compassion and purpose." CONSCIOUS CREATING

heART Fit is the product of my life's experience as a visual arts teacher, a painter, a writer, a keen researcher and now a grandmother. When possible heART Fit gatherings are intergenerational. Each generation has special wisdom to contribute. Community respect and understanding evolve when a variety of generations creates together. Our culture needs to relearn this way of sharing and 'being' together that was deeply integrated into primitive cultures.

When I studied psychology at university, I was intrigued by the theories of Carl Jung. After retirement, I returned to explore his ideas further, and to relate them to my own discoveries about creativity, my personal search for meaning and my commitment to age wisely and contribute to my community. Jung's words have guided me: "...the best way of dealing with the unconscious is the creative way". Authentic creative expression is an intuitive inner gift which facilitates deeper knowing.

In retirement, I read the theories of Gene D. Cohen M.D., PhD, who pioneered understanding the importance of creativity to the aging process. I found resonance and direction. I embrace Cohen's philosophy: "C=ME. Creativity equals me to a greater power. M equals the mass of knowledge



from all that I have experienced combined with E all the energy I bring to the act of creating”.

As an English and Visual Arts teacher I taught creative expression within our school systems for 27 years. I know the guidelines that structured how creativity should be taught, instead of nurtured. This emphasis is at the foundation of our cultural thinking and the many individuals who struggle with built-in societal belief barriers that obstruct one’s inner potential.

My dream is for a revival of the artistic beliefs heralded by *Romanticism* in the late eighteenth century. heART Fit invites participants to revisit *Romantic* painting where the emphasis is on nature and individual expression of emotion and imagination. The ethos of *Romanticism* stressed that artists should not paint for money or glory, but rather to release an inner sense of their being. In an obsessed pursuit and measurement of left brain cognitive knowledge of facts and scientifically provable results, we have neglected our brain’s subconscious healing resources.

heART Fit aims to open participants to a way of acting that is intuitive, sensate and in league with current and evolving thinkers:

In his best selling 2003 book *When The Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*, Vancouver MD, Gabor Maté advises: “There are two basic values that can assist us to heal and remain whole, if we honour them. The first value is our own creative self ... The gods, we are taught, created humankind in their own image. **Everyone has the urge to create.** Its expression may flow through many channels: through writing, art or music, through the inventiveness of work or in any number of ways unique to all of us, whether it be cooking, gardening or the art of social discourse. The point is to honour the urge. To do so is healing for ourselves and for others; not to do so deadens our bodies and our spirits ... **The great art is to express our vitality through the particular channels and at the particular speed Nature foresaw for us.**

The second great affirmation is of the universe itself – our connection with all that is.”

In *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel H. Pink, it is Pink’s assertion that the era of “left brain” dominance, and the Information Age that it engendered, is giving way to a new world in which “right brain” qualities such as inventiveness, empathy and meaning will predominate. In this book he examines how discovery of “a whole new mind” will influence the future and our sense of personal wellbeing and health. Surely this new world is the direction in which we want to lead the next generation.

In the movie *Dalai Lama Renaissance*, the Dalai Lama urges a new way of being. He suggests the peace we all seek will only come from each of us accessing our heart’s wisdom. “It’s a heart connection. That’s compassion. We have to achieve a new way to go. We all have to work, act out our own development. What is within each needs out.”

When one sits down to paint burdened, either consciously or unconsciously, by concerns or stresses, these thoughts impact the hand’s natural



gestures and thus the act of painting. By allowing one's inner state to guide the hand's direction while painting we can be taken into unconscious directions. Negative energy is released healing our spirits and indeed our bodies. The process is like dreaming on paper and presents a glimpse into the subconscious. The process allows what is within to come out.

Spontaneous Process Painting requires that one simultaneously embrace both the hope for a new expression that a creative act might produce, with the fear that this process may not work out. One allows creative chaos. Ease with hope and fear is the gift which allowing chaos offers the agitated mind. When one relinquishes the need to control, opens to acceptance, and allows happenstance, there is space for peace and joy.

In *My Stroke of Insight* by neuroanatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, she proclaims: "Deep inner peace exists at the core of the right hemisphere of the brain. Right brain function uses feelings." Expressing feeling is the essence of Spontaneous Process Painting and being heART Fit. It is our experience at heART Fit that often the youngest children most readily help the rest of us to understand the joy of Spontaneous Process Painting from the heart. Watching their curiosity and delight at the unexpected awakens adult awareness of stirrings and long forgotten urges.

Sierra's painting is a pure expression of the love and communion she and her mother enjoyed at heART Fit. This approach to painting was new to Sierra's friend who joined her in creating, but his description of his feelings while painting were a testament to releasing into the process. He allowed himself to feel communion with Sierra's creative energy.

### Postscript:

This fall after Sierra settled into her first year at McGill University she sent me the following email:

*What I love about heART Fit is that I felt immense amounts of support and encouragement. This helped me gain confidence to take risks with my art and to try new things such as different stroke techniques or mediums. It is a great place to cultivate creativity and to become inspired by the creative energies in the room. Really it is a rare thing today to do something without fear of failure and to believe that there is no right or wrong way to do something. I loved that each thing you do and every stroke can create something beautiful. It's just a matter of seeing it.*

Next I received this email:

Hey Karen!

*I just thought I'd email you and let you know that I brought a bit of heART Fit to my rez!!! I went and bought a bunch of acrylic paints yesterday and for two hours in our hallway last night a bunch of people on my floor did spontaneous process painting with me. It was really fun and now people want to make it a Tuesday night tradition. heART Fit is going transcontinental!*



# THREE GENERATIONS OF SHARED PASSION

**Dave Griffith**

Twice over the last two weeks. I had visitors from the other side of the world painting with us at the Rotary Centre, in Kelowna, on Tuesday morning. Possibly more important (depending on your point of view), they were my daughter and two granddaughters from New Zealand who have been visiting for a month. Three generations with a shared passion in painting.

If you think painting is a healing and restorative process (and it is), can you imagine the precious blessing it is to have three generations painting together at the shared "heART Fit" gathering. My daughter loves painting and as a result the two girls have been encouraged from very early to create, especially painting and drawing. Samantha, now seven years old, learned to paint with watercolours at 18 months when I last visited them in New Zealand. I have cards and paintings from her to prove that clean, even washes

If you think painting is a healing and restorative process, can you imagine the precious blessing it is to have three generations painting together.



of this most difficult medium can be achieved at any age and sent to Granddad as that special birthday card. I hadn't had the pleasure of meeting Sarah before. She is the younger granddaughter at five years of age now. I know that what gap existed (generational or distance) was bridged as we shared time and palette paintings together.

I have a sad problem starting Wednesday when they leave to return to their New Zealand home. I will have to paint alone. Or, rather, we will have to paint together across the globe on Skype.

Tuesdays at the Rotary Centre for the Arts have taken on a new meaning.



# CAREFUL SEEKING II

## Sandy McNolty

The following is a continuation from the Part I article started in the September, 2011, issue of *Sage-ing with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude*.

**SANDY** Since we talked last time how have you been doing? Have you had any more insights or ah ha moments?

**HAZEL** Well, I am learning more about myself as I express myself during my painting.

I have noticed that I get frustrated easily. I also think that everyone else's painting is better than mine. I feel that somehow I probably am improving in my self awareness, but am not really ready to admit that to myself? I am not really sure who "myself is".

**S.** I think over the years we have become removed from our true selves and have been taught to believe that we are our titles, experiences and thoughts. I am starting to realize that we have become attached to the old, distorted view of who we think we are and have lost sight of who we really are.

**H.** I think I am afraid that if I let go of my thought patterns what will replace them? Who am I without these thoughts?

**S.** The mind really does cause us all of our so called problems and pain. When we learn how to detach from our negative thoughts, our lives will become peaceful and effortless.

We need to become the master of our minds and not let the mind be our master.

I believe that the happiness of our lives depends on the quality of our thoughts.

Deepak Chopra said, "Every cell in your body is constantly eavesdropping on your thoughts!"

**H.** I know that at times my thoughts get very negative and I fall into a bit of a slump and seem to get stuck.

What about all of our good thoughts like romance? What would life be without romance? These thoughts make me smile and feel so good inside.

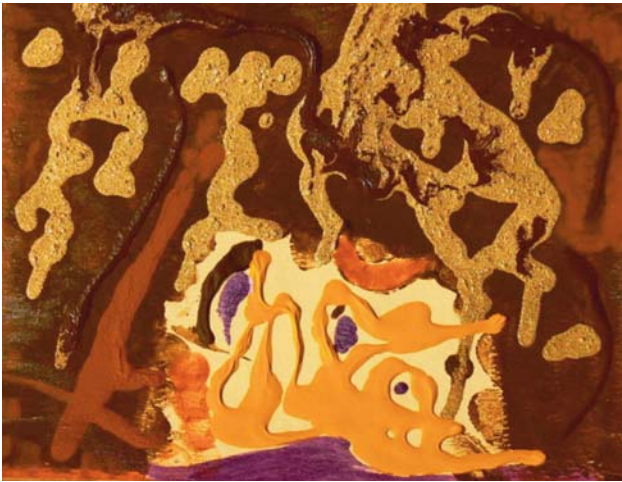
**S.** Ahh, romance! I think life is full of romance. Like the earth spinning at dizzying speeds on its axis and stars and galaxies that go on forever. Oceans and wave patterns that are constantly changing, not to mention the amazing life forms that live in these vast deep seas. Don't you just look at the sunset some nights and feel an intimate connection.

When we are feeling this intimacy, I believe we are connecting to our selves. How romantic is that! We are constantly making love to the universe.

**H.** It all sounds so good in the moment but then it all goes out the window!



**"Every cell in your body is constantly eavesdropping on your thoughts!"**  
Deepak Chopra



**The truth is that we really do create our own misery by getting lost in the mind.**

How can I start to understand myself a little bit better?

**S.** Have you tried to write down your thoughts in a journal?

**H.** No, that is something I have always avoided for some reason. I think I will make an effort to journal my thoughts even though it scares me.

**S.** Writing is an art form of self expression. Conversation can be, too. Really that's what we're doing. We're making a form of art and as you hear yourself, you can shift your perspectives as you purge the thoughts from your mind onto the paper. It is a kind of meditation. As you are in each moment, you begin a transformation. Buddhists call this living mindfully.

Julia Cameron says, "Writing is the art of a listening ear."

**H.** Maybe I am just lazy or not doing enough.

**S.** It sounds like you are doing all kinds of things to support your spiritual journey.

You are like a warrior, Hazel! Doing what you need to do even though you are scared and unsure.

That makes me think of the Warrior Pose in Yoga. It may seem strange to name a yoga pose after a warrior because yogis are known for their non-violent ways.

One of the most revered of all the yoga texts, the Bhagavad-Gita, is the dialog between two famous warriors, Krishna and Arjuna, set on a battlefield between two great armies spoiling for a fight. What this pose's name symbolizes, is the "spiritual warrior," who bravely does battle with the universal enemy, self-ignorance (avidya), the source of all our suffering.

**H.** What do they mean by the word self-ignorance? It makes me feel like I am stupid or ignorant somehow.

**S.** Yes, I know how you could feel that way. I used to feel that way about this word, too. Now I realize that it is just a word. We need to replace the word with the real meaning not the old belief that was attached to a particular word. Does that make sense to you?

**H.** Yes it really does and I am realizing how much power is associated with words. Everything in this life is affected by our perception.

**S.** Yes, it sure is. This is where we must look past the word, experience or perception and see the real meaning and truth. The truth is that we really do create our own misery by getting lost in the mind.

The key to our inner peace is learning to acknowledge, understand and have compassion for our minds and know that we are not our minds; we are the observer of our mind.

**H.** Who are we if we are not our minds?

**S.** I believe we already know who we are and as we learn how to align ourselves with the universal energy that we are part of we will remember everything.



**Sharing your journey with me and others you are helping so many people who are just as scared and confused as you are.**

One thing I know for sure is not to take ourselves too seriously. A good belly laugh is medicine for the soul.

Another way that is helping me to reconnect with who I really am is the regular practice of meditation.

Meditation has taught me to be more focused and content. I have also learned to be more pro active and to be less reactive.

Here is an explanation from Swami Sitaramananda of what the art of yoga and meditation teaches.

“Classical yoga teachings say that by restraining the thought waves of the mind we can rest in our own true nature. If we are not relaxing in our positive true

self we become restless, running here and there in the pursuit of illusory, external happiness. When practicing yoga you learn to still the mind. The asana’s, or yoga postures, are defined as steady poses. When the body is still the mind can also be still. When the breath is calm the mind can be calm, too. When the senses are calm the mind can more easily turn inward. The higher practice of yoga is the practice of positive thinking and meditation. One learns to constantly be aware of the thoughts and emotions of the mind and learns how to switch it from negative to positive, and at the end learns to transcend all thoughts and focus on the eternal and attain the supreme state of everlasting health and happiness. This is meditation.”

**H.** I do want to learn more about this. I guess one step at a time.

I thank you for these wise words and sometimes wonder why you bother with me.

**S.** Hazel, you are such an important part of my life and through sharing your journey with me and others you are helping so many people who are just as scared and confused as you are.

You have helped me to become a better person by seeing parts of myself that I have been denying. You’ve also taught me to be more compassionate and loving to myself and others.

Through relationships, we connect to our own spirits and this is how we will transform ourselves and our world. I am happy to be on this journey with you.

Fasten your emotional and spiritual seatbelt as the ride has just begun.

You’ve started painting. You’ve started writing. There is so much more to come. Let’s see where this takes you.

# NO EASY WAY. ONLY THE WAY IT IS.

## Carolyn Cowan



**Jean knew from a young age that she wanted to paint. Her first memory as an artist was at age 10.**

This is a story that can be told of millions of woman and men around the world. It is one of sacrifice engendered by the basic human urge to create, and to procreate.

Jean Monteith could not have been more committed to her art. She, also, wanted a family. The price she paid was less time devoted to painting. Had Jean been a man or a different woman, there would have less sacrifice. She would have exercised her dedication to painting, leaving others to work around her needs. Instead, as a woman marrying in the mid-1950s, her roles as wife and mother seemed firmly established by society.

## Life As It Was

Jean knew from a young age that she wanted to paint. Her first memory as an artist was at age 10, drawing portraits of her brother, unbeknownst to him.

She graduated as a teacher in 1945. During the summers, to gain credentials necessary to teach art, she studied at Queen's University and at the Toronto Department of Education. In 1981, to deepen her understanding, Jean studied Art History and Creative Writing at Carleton University in Ottawa. The Art History courses included some women painters; those who were not persuaded to stay at home.

Until 1955, life was filled with a singular passion for creative expression. She indulged herself with painting. The passion shifted when she married and eventually gave birth to three sons.

After her marriage, Jean worked part-time as a supply art teacher. She continued to work part-time as an art instructor for the rest of her working life. 30 years later, she and her husband separated. The sacrifices had undermined her creative energy.

Jean's husband was supportive, in his own way, but considered most artists to be "ding-a-lings". He said it was only art if it had perfect perspective. Jean struggled with her home life, trying to keep everyone happy, working part-time and stealing bits of time to paint. She never felt guilty about her need to paint. Over time, though, she began to feel desperate. She maintained the dutiful wife routine of meals and a clean house. She could do anything she wanted between meals. In time, when her children were older, she grew depressed and resented the need to parcel her time so she could paint.

One night, in anger with her men as they sat down to watch a James Bond



movie, she got out her watercolours in the kitchen. She painted her husband as a large piranha, the boys as other sea creatures and herself as a lack-lustre starfish at the bottom. She titled it “Family Portrait” and acknowledged that it was creative but unkind.

Tired from the unending routine, she enrolled in a night school art class. She sat for the first hour of each class doing nothing, including painting. Her intuitive teacher never pushed her. He realized Jean needed time to decompress each week.

She was inventive. While touring Britain, Jean, having packed, would sit sketching while the luggage was being loaded. Or, she remained outside the tea-room drawing sketches while, inside, the family ate scones with jam and clotted cream.

During that time period, she had the benefit of two generous friends. After dinner, one would quickly clear the kitchen table for Jean so she could open her watercolours while the two Scottish husbands took off to visit the local train museum.

Another friend introduced Jean to San Miguel de Allende, in central Mexico. After a short time there, the friend realized that San Miguel was perfect for Jean. This was in 1978. Jean found artists from Canada, U.S., Germany, U.K., in fact, from all over the world. Most of the ex-pats lived and created there full-time.

Jean was mesmerized by the town, the wealth of talent and depth of visual artistry. She felt happy there, a daily sense of celebration and *joie de vivre*. Over the next 20 years, Jean returned to San Miguel eight times to paint before her move to Kelowna in 1998. On her latest trip, in 2010, she took her granddaughter, currently studying at Emily Carr University. She fell in love with the town, like her grandmother 32 years earlier.

Jean became deeply discouraged about ever creating a significant body of work. One day, as she walked in frustration to the fireplace ready to toss in her paint brushes, serendipity intervened. The phone rang. It was the Ottawa Art Association telling her she had won first prize for her painting of the Laurentian ski hills.

In an unexpected set back, Jean discovered she had breast cancer. She had already booked a painting holiday of Monet’s garden in France. Instead, she was fast-tracked through the medical system, followed by radiation and chemotherapy. She went onto a macrobiotic diet to rebuild her health and strength. She had, already, sent out invitations to a gallery exhibit of her paintings. Not wanting to miss it, she arrived a week after the operation with a hidden drain bag strapped to her body.



### Art is in the Doing

For most of her 86 years, she has had a constant need to paint. As a woman, she was expected to make more sacrifices than she felt were necessary. She was happy to nurture her family but felt a similar urge to nurture herself.

The following notes reflect some of Jean's accumulated knowledge of life as a painter.

- Be true to yourself is a key to life and creativity, whether it's painting, writing or communication. Trust your own instincts above another's opinion. Stay aware and responsive to nature and to people.
- Learn to *see* and grow with that knowledge. *Seeing* becomes second nature when you stop, look and appreciate design elements and details: to see patterns in line, shape, colour, texture, temperature; to note contrasts like light and dark, warm and cool, bright and neutral, rough and smooth, positive and negative, soft and hard, near and far. To *see* people means to notice more than their appearance. Note their mood and character. Open your eyes. There is a wider vision available.
- *Seeing* these elements helps the artist in any creative art, whether writing, photography, acting or painting. Regardless of the medium, the artist draws on landscape design features, i.e., main directional lines of horizontal, vertical

## San Miguel de Allende

Jean Monteith

I came to her in the night  
Where she lay, half asleep  
Beneath a blanket dark,  
Bejewelled and aglow.

My presence sensed, she stirred,  
Lifted up her tawny arms,  
And brought my head to rest  
Upon her ancient breast.

Contentment so complete  
I wanted nothing more  
Than this warm embrace,  
This rapturous retreat.

Daybreak brought bright delight,  
In colour I was wrapped,  
Earthy umber, purple, pink.  
Burnt sienna, orange, red.

Church bells rang, then roosters crowed,  
Dogs barked hard and small birds sang.  
Straw brooms swished, on wet tiles.  
Fireworks flared. Demons fled.

This rhapsody removed all cares.  
I was transported, chose to stay,  
Where, my dearest, San Miguel,  
Let me live and love, each day.

and diagonal. On layering, consider foreground, background and middle ground. Once you've absorbed the design feature, add your own inventiveness so the art speaks with your unique voice.

- It's never too early to develop a critical eye toward your painting. Don't criticize and dismiss the whole piece. Instead, isolate a section you like or a section that doesn't work for you.
- Determine your painting's focus. Use composition to draw in the viewer's attention and direct it to where you want their eyes to end up. Determine what you want to say in the painting. Add to it only to illuminate the primary subject or focus.
- As a generality, if you are a newcomer to painting, you can expect the first 26 paintings (arbitrary number) to be throwaways. Keep a few as an indicator of your artistic progress. Clip sections that you like for use in a future collage.
- Most important, don't have expectations. Art is in the doing.

## Common Pool

Jean believes in giving back to the common pool. What you take out of the art pool, you are obliged to put back in compensation.

As a supply art teacher in Ottawa, one job was to teach art to special needs children, in their own home. These were kids who had suffered serious illness or injury. The causes of their injuries were heartbreaking: one had been run over by a bus, others suffered broken necks from football, broken backs from hockey, cars and motorcycle accidents. These kids were amazing. Those with terminal illnesses were determined to complete their artwork. The ill and the injured brighten with delight at their art making.

She recalls a student from grade 13. He felt proud and one-up on his school mates because he had been taught to *see*.

Today, Jean teaches seniors in her retirement community in West Kelowna. The seniors come for the sensation of creating art using only paper, paint and imagination. They change as they experience creativity at work and recognize that their ability to *see* is expanding.

## Today

At the age of 86, Jean Monteith still paints, teaches and directs plays.

Jean's painting has slowed as she ages, although in early December, she painted two watercolours. One was intuitive. She painted it in 20 minutes. It was loose and wet on wet, just the way she prefers to paint.

Perhaps, ageing does affect our ability to create. Perhaps the sacrifice from painting with 30 years of constraints during the middle of your productive years does take a toll. It seems logical. Jean's concern is that she is no longer possesses the energetic spirit for painting. This may be true but I am more persuaded by her admission if she lived in San Miguel de Allende, right now, she'd be painting every day.



# NOT ON THE FRIDGE

**Mary Jo Schnepf**



Two mothers found a way 'to play in paint' that engaged their 15 year old sons.

**Spontaneous process painting – push aside your conditioning and your desire to control a situation – any situation, and just let it be. You bet.**

**Colours flew. Laughter was the music. Intensity was exhibited**

In the spirit of play, what better than ... paint, personalities, and the open air welcoming canvas with nine perspectives, each wishing to splash their creativity upon it. Did I mention south east Kelowna, brushes, cans or paintball guns? What about Ponderosa pine needles, or the piece de resistance – particularly for the teenage boys – the mountain bike? Needless to say, the rule of the day was indeed play ... evoke YOU onto the canvas. Try to put more paint on that surface than anywhere else. ENJOY.

A gorgeous summer day presented itself in the Okanagan. Three questionably mature adults, and two teenage boys spread the canvas onto the drop sheets, and began to set up the creative space. Paint was stirred, the hose was at the ready, and the toys and tools were being laid out. Who is to lead? No one.

Spontaneous process painting – push aside your conditioning and your desire to control a situation – any situation, and just let it be. You bet. A splash of green spanked the canvas, and mid-air the yellow and red criss-crossed. A brush, a rake, a tin can was spun upon it. Squeegees oozed their way across. A teen lifted the canvas and let the paint finger its way down. A section of the canvas angled itself as we folded a corner to a neighbouring corner. Was anyone having fun yet?

With squeals of laughter, two younger girls, the older having proudly reached the age of 10, joined our motley paint-speckled group. Toting rocks and paint scrapers, and a desire to drizzle paint upon the canvas, they addressed the canvas. A reflection of the same, though 10 years older again, two university gals, primed and ready for a day at the beach, were easily drawn into this spirit of play. It was only for a minute, but an unforgettable one.

Colours flew. Laughter was the music. Intensity was exhibited, yet with ease and comfort. No *tightness of being* experienced here. A car drives by, slows down, curiosity abounding; loving our creative stage overlooking Kelowna. It was a moment of connection.

The desire to share ourselves on another layer of the canvas, but what was needed? Paint ball guns! In the hands of the youth, of course, a natural. In the hands of the women peaking way past 40, the canvas was a toy of unbelievable potential. A release of sorts? Splat. Dadadadadada. "OOOOhhhh". An art form had just been discovered. Howls of laughter, with a supportive edge, abounded.



Whether adrenalin infused, or the gentle summer winds cooling our backs, we knew something else was needed. As lovers of sport, the repeat patterns of a mountain bike tire, paired with the youthful energy of a bike underway – became the final connecting piece. Add in a short piece of eaves trough with jet black paint, two willing teens and a desire to bike across the canvas, weaving and skidding as desired. A thing of beauty. Of intergenerational play, at its best.

Summer days come and go. This canvas, which has a place of prominence in one of our homes, reminds each of the Group of Nine what joy and exhilaration we felt, together, while we were simply being ourselves.

## My Path

Shellie Gleave

### Part One

Reality a road  
Destiny designs,  
Who knows  
What I will find?

Many things I could have  
Been and done.  
Dreams dwell cherished  
But undone.

Due to fear and  
Its limitations,  
I do not fulfill my aspirations.

Sacrificing self  
Surrendering soul  
The need to be freed  
Takes its toll.

### Part Two

Reality a road I design  
Who knows what I will find?

Many things I will be and do  
Dreams I cherish will come true.

Through facing fears and inspiration  
I will fulfill my aspirations.

Knowing myself, feeding my soul,  
I will be free  
This I know.

# DINNER TABLE DISCUSSIONS

## A Form of Intergenerational Creative Activity

### Shellie Gleave

Growing up, dinnertime at our home was always an opportunity to discuss various matters. Cultural and political issues were prevalent topics at our table. As children of the sixties, our parents shared with us a history rich in examples of both exploitation and liberation. We learned about bureaucracy, bigotry, greed, and about movements for change.

From them, I developed a strong social conscience, and a deep gratitude for democracy and equality. I learned that knowledge is power, and that positive change is possible through unity and conscientiousness. Their stories inspired me to create and investigate alternatives.

It is only recently that we've had such easy access to information, and it keeps growing. I feel obligated to share the information I learn. Sharing of memories brings us and keeps us together. Our traditions, skills, attitudes and opinions are passed down through the generations. My siblings and I were encouraged to question and to lead through example.

Our parents, now grandparents, spend a great deal of time interacting with their grandchildren who listen intently to their stories. The comedy, tragedies and all of the adventures that have brought us here are passed down through the lips of loved ones.

With so much still to learn from one another, from our personal victories to our irreversible mistakes, our dinner table discussions will continue to inspire our children to be informed, creative and empowered.

# WISE WOMAN TABLEAU

## Ruth Bieber

What is a tableau? A tableau is a still life representation of an idea. In this case, the idea is a wise woman. The date is September 17, 2011, and I am presenting a drama workshop at the Wise Women's Festival held in Naramata, B.C. for the past 15 autumns. There are approximately 200 women attending this event! I am feeling particularly nostalgic, because the date marks my first anniversary of living in the Okanagan Valley. When I moved here I knew a small handful of people, most of whom I hadn't seen for years. Now, here I was presenting a workshop at a well-respected festival in one of the most beautiful locations in the world.

I was also feeling much gratitude toward the four courageous and eager women who signed up for my workshop. The idea of learning how to act / perform is daunting for many, and few people make the connection between the theatre arts and spirituality. A primary focus of the festival relates to spiritual development, so I began the workshop with a few minutes of explanation, showing that the link between drama and spirituality relates to the exercising of the functioning of the right brain. We activate the imagination using a creative activity, and then we talk about how the activity makes us feel. This builds up the network between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and away we go!

There's really no point in further expanding on my thesis here in this article, because, as I tell my rehabilitation students, the knowing is in the doing. The definition of drama is "a thing done," and talking about creativity will never result in an understanding of its transformative power.

So we begin to do "the thing", and it doesn't take long for my small group of self-proclaimed scaredy cats, to feel their confidence grow. After a few basic drama games, designed to promote safety and group cohesion, I introduce the tableau. The theme (idea) we will explore is a wise woman, and I begin by crossing the room with a powerful, head held high, stride. Once on the other side, I confidently turn to face the others, and I declare, "Wise woman!" My body freezes in a "don't mess with me" stance. It is now time for the others to join, one by one, adding their own association to the theme. Jolanda is next. She floats silently towards me energetically lifting her body as she glides across the room. She turns, connects with me, as is one of the requirements of tableaux, makes a wide circle with her arms above her head, and says, "Moon." At this, there comes the subtle sounds of women expressing understanding; no actual words are needed. The second woman, Leslie, begins to cross toward Jolanda and me. She is the youngest member of our

**We activate the imagination using a creative activity, and then we talk about how the activity makes us feel. This builds up the network between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and away we go!**



Wise Woman Altar to Kuan Yin – Goddess of Compassion

**Culturally speaking, the resistance to growing older is the foundation of no doubt billions of dollars of advertising scams. There's nothing wise about that!**

mighty, small group. Calmly and stealthfully she comes towards the growing tableaux, turns around and stands behind me placing her hand gently on my shoulder. Once in place she states: "Compassion." How wonderful, I can feel the others thinking, as Kuan Yin, Goddess of Compassion, is honoured at this festival. She freezes in place. The third woman, Beth, begins to cross the imaginary threshold from observer to actor. She is walking slowly, and a bit hunched over. She arrives, turns, connects to compassion, and states "old."

Later, during our post tableaux discussion, she said she wasn't sure why the word, "old," popped into her head. My original instruction for the tableau exercise to the group was to use the first association that comes to mind after I declare the theme. This is important, because it allows for spontaneity. It takes a lot of courage to stick with our first idea, because the judging portion of our brain loves to jump in and remind us just how stupid we really are, or how silly we are going to feel if we are honest. "Now that is really stupid!"

We live in a culture where people are so afraid. What are we afraid of, you might ask? Well, essentially, we are afraid of

everything. Just pay close attention to each advertisement you come across in a day, and you will get a good dose of a myriad of our fears. In this case, however, the fear is about being ridiculed. It's the old fear of rejection trick, used to control the masses. In my drama workshops, I use a list of ground rules, and one of them is that there are no wrong answers. So, first I commend Beth for having the courage to stick with her first thought, even though she doesn't believe only old women are wise. A fruitful discussion ensues, and results in some understanding, that wisdom does come with age, but this doesn't mean young women can't possess wisdom, as well. We, also, further discussed the taboo surrounding the word "old", which actually was the real heart of her challenge. Here again, culturally speaking, the resistance to growing older is the foundation of no doubt billions of dollars of advertising scams. There's nothing wise about that!

Finally, the last woman, Michelle, who remains standing alone at the observer's side of the room, is suddenly transformed into the one being observed. Naturally, the longer this goes on, and it goes on for only a few seconds, which seem like hours to the lone woman, she cries out, "blinking, I am just blinking!" No problem, I assure her with my director's hat on tight. "Just go with it, it's always perfect. If you are blinking, just make that your word, and live it; come on down!" Now this is where some real magic happens. She slowly walks toward us like a zombie, with a totally blank expression on her face. She connects with the group by falling at my feet in a foetal position and says, "Blank." Before I share the rich discussion, which follows her contribution, I must pause for one brief moment to honour this scene, (our tableau creation) which I trust some of my readers can imagine.

**Isak Dinesen in her riveting story titled, “The Blank Page,” tells of how the empty page, or canvas for that matter, offers the greatest level of possibility. Every artist knows the truth of this fact. It is the heart of the creative process, and the reason why each act of creativity takes courage and a measure of risk.**

**Oh my, isn’t she brave” is a comment I often receive. Well, I suspect the truth is the person making the comment is actually the brave one.**

We are still, just feeling for a few seconds of reflection. Then someone, actually more than one, cries out, “where’s the camera?” The creation is no doubt beautiful and heart-felt for certain. Then I softly count to three, and we all declare the theme in unison; “Wise Woman!” The group breaks and we shake out our bodies, energetically spreading the remnants of our collective creation out into the room. But now, back to “blank.”

Isak Dinesen in her riveting story titled, “The Blank Page,” tells of how the empty page, or canvas for that matter, offers the greatest level of possibility. Every artist knows the truth of this fact. It is the heart of the creative process, and the reason why each act of creativity takes courage and a measure of risk. Furthermore, when we gaze at nothing, and now I am speaking of everyone, the imagination kicks in and we are provided an opportunity to fill in the blank with our own imagining. This might not seem like a big deal to many people, but for those of us who value individual expression, it is a very big deal.

Beyond this reality, and now I will indulge in a bit of author’s creative license, as a blind, wise woman, I have become increasingly aware of the stares and subsequent projections of many around me. How do I know people are staring at me, I can just hear you thinking? Well, as a 55 year old woman, who has traveled the world, often independently, I have the pleasure of being guided by countless numbers of people. As a result, I can’t tell you the number of times my various guides tell me just how unabashedly others are staring at us. It is almost as though the person staring doesn’t realize my guide can see. Many of my sighted guides have even gone on to test the limits of this curious phenomenon by staring right back. Apparently, this makes little impact on the curious onlooker. I suspect this is because the person staring is steeped within their imagination, forgetting that it is not just me who can’t look back.

So, as a blind wise woman, what does this say about my experience in the world? First of all, if people are staring at me / us when I have a sighted guide, I am quite sure they are staring even longer when I am alone. I am simply and acutely aware of this fact. There are several examples I can share within various other social contexts, but that is another entire article all on its own. For the moment, I am referring to the reality that when eyes can’t look back, much like the blank page, people feel justified in their desire to take a long hard look, engage their imaginations, and sometimes even turn it into a judgement about my life and even me as an individual.

Upon some superficial investigation of this staring behaviour, I have come to appreciate that the judgments others make about me based on what they see in me are no doubt projections of their own reality. “Oh my, isn’t she brave” is a comment I often receive. Well, I suspect the truth is the person making the comment is actually the brave one. Another comment I frequently receive is “Your life must be really hard”. Again, I suspect the sender is the one with the hard life.

And so it goes, but now here I return to the Wise Women’s Festival,

**These were women, many of whom could see the beauty in all of the Mother's creations. These were artists who used every opportunity to share the creative process with each aspect of the festival.**

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where, for three days I was surrounded by a cast of wise female characters, who no doubt took a good look from time to time. My feeling, however, is this was no ordinary group of human beings. These were women, many of whom could see the beauty in all of the Mother's creations. These were artists who used every opportunity to share the creative process with each aspect of the festival. The Great Hall was adorned with alters which were stunning to the eye, and spiritually inviting. The food was nourishing, and prepared with love and culinary creativity. The workshops were plenty, and inspiring to say the least, but don't just take my word for this one: consider registering for the 2012 gathering! The organizers of the festival truly care about our planet. I am saying they mean it! Participants are asked to bring their own drinking cup, and if you don't, you can buy one. These, too, are pieces of art, which can turn into a treasure, but there wasn't a Styrofoam cup to be found. Even the name tags were artfully designed, true artistic momentums.

Finally, there were the women themselves. I have attended many similar events, which were always useful in their own way, but commonly filled with woes and wounds. The tone of the weekend in Naramata, from my perspective was one of power and healing. I am not even referring to the kind of healing that takes place for women as individuals, although there was, no doubt, some of this as well. I am talking about the kind of healing that takes place as a collective for the benefit of humanity. The women at the WWF were largely very conscious of the need to heal the planet, and when we heal ourselves, the ripple effect is palpable. This kind of awakening is beautiful, if not critical, at this time of evolutionary consciousness. There is little doubt, that when the women at the festival took a good look at me, many of them could see how I am surrounded by brilliant colour, dancing specks of light and fascinating geometric shapes. The women who attend the festival in Naramata could, I suspect, see that the angels are my eyes.

So, was there transformation at this festival? Indeed there was, both within my workshop, where non-actors turned into performers, and throughout the entire festival where women were awakening, by countless means, into their creative power. The festival was a true joy to attend, and a testimony to a reason to be hopeful about the future.

### **Wise Women's Festival Tableau:**

Mother's Creation; Artists; Nourishing; Plenty; Inspiring; Treasures; Artistic Momentums; Power; Healing; Consciousness; Awakening; Moon; Compassion; Old; Blank

# WORDS FROM THE HEART

## Obsession

Carolyn Cowan

For some of us,  
Obsession rules our life.

A state of mind is constructed from  
Dreams, beliefs and hopes that  
Our brain convinces us  
Is reality.

Like any addiction  
We recover again and again  
From earlier failures, now  
Wiped clean from memory.  
We wrap ourselves in the  
New object of obsession.

Paradoxically, obsession smothers and  
releases us  
In a wholly self-constructed world.

Inevitably, reality seeps in  
To sit firmly on our imagination  
And squeezes out the unreal.

Soon, though, as the truly addicted,  
We eagerly grasp hold of the  
Object of our next obsession  
Forever floating one step ahead of us.

**“I have never started a poem whose end I knew. Writing the poem is discovering.”  
Robert Frost**

## An Artist's Way

Karen Close

Vision held in gratitude  
Embracing quietude.  
Breaths of Joy:  
Enthusiasm, patience, grace.

Sighs of Faith ... Acceptance.  
Light, Dark ... Duality.  
Eternity waiting ... Evolution. Inspiration  
expands. Vision exhales.

I will  
Seek, Create, Erode

Alternate

Legitimate -

Estimate

Originate  
Find what is

Infinite.

## Me Creative?

Brenda Valnicek

Fear ... try it anyway  
Judge ... there are no mistakes  
Product ... process

Look, love, allow, rest, remember: safe  
timelessness

Fear ... choice  
Judge ... what do I like  
Product ... for whom?

Curious, at ease, playful, trusting,  
connecting – my mirror, my healing

Someone's coming ... courage,

Let it go  
On wings of its own.  
Bridges forming,  
New possibilities,  
And I thought I knew.

Me Poet?

**“You should write, first of all, to please yourself. You shouldn’t care a damn about anybody else at all. But writing can’t be a way of life - the important part of writing is living. You have to live in such a way that your writing emerges from it.”**  
**Doris Lessing**

**“Do you know that Old Age may come after you with equal grace, force, fascination?”**  
**Walt Whitman**

## **Blessed be**

**Lesley-Anne Evans**

Blessed be the unwashed bag lady, shopping cart stacked with tainted treasure  
 for she will have her basic needs met.

Blessed be the man standing outside Great Canadian Superstore, hands out, eyes down  
 for he will be fed.

Blessed be the sixteen year old abused daughter living with another hard fist calling the shots  
 for she will be loved.

Blessed be the business man in the new beemer driving home to an empty house  
 for he will find enough.

Blessed be the neighbour with the barking dog and all night weekend parties  
 for she will be shown grace.

Blessed be the cashier with dark eye circles stuffing groceries into righteous cloth bags  
 for she will be given a kind word.

Blessed be the old woman’s slow crosswalk shuffle during rush hour  
 for she will receive patience.

Blessed be the smart ass tough guy dealing from his high school locker  
 for he will be given a second, third, and fourth chance.

Blessed be the snot nosed kid screaming murder in the grocery cart, and his mother  
 for they will be seen through eyes of understanding.

Blessed be the new Canadian struggling with his pronunciation  
 for he will be a trail blazer for future generations.

Blessed be the middle aged mom breathing deep and hugging her daughter  
 for she will be a rock in this hard place.

Blessed are you when you are weak, hurt, without answers, taken for granted, displaced and overlooked because of what you believe and what you are learning. Rejoice and be glad that you are unwrapping peace, empathy, kindness and love. Epiphanies often bright burst from dark places. Extend what you have received to those you meet each day, and the Kingdom of God will come near.



# ART IN TRANSIT

We look at a Turner, Modigliani or Rembrandt and marvel, Isn't it sublime? Yes it is, but their art emerges from one of the greatest works of creativity: ourselves. So often, we forget that as members of the human race, we are genuine works of art, infinitely more complex and interesting than any created art piece.



*Art is Transit* pays homage to the beauty of human face and body as we emerge and evolve through time. Everyone is *in transit*. We look to you for photo submissions of faces from all ages, as long as the photo is interesting and of good quality. For this issue, we selected children.

# FIND TONGUES IN TREES

**Karen Close**



Seeking to clarify and rise above the twisted, tangle in which my emotions seemed rooted, I became a hiker. I sought wisdom in trees. My pilgrimage began in the woods near my home in Ontario, but it deepened when I moved to British Columbia. Tree trunks and root formations became my first friends and my mentors.

For me the tools of photography, painting and writing are microscopes for self examination. I study my surroundings through the lens of imagination. My projection of a resemblance in structure, between tree parts, animal and human forms suggests to me a common origin and meaning. I feel integral and I journey with all whose way has been to find wisdom in the solitude of nature.

“And this our life exempt from public haunt,  
Find tongues in trees, books in running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

William Shakespeare



Historians record The Green Man as an ancient symbol of human *oneness with nature*. His human head appears in chance configurations of leaves or moss. When I first glimpsed him, in Cathedral Grove on Vancouver Island, my journey with nature intensified. The power of experiencing this photograph continues to fuel my imagination.

I painted this translation to explore my understanding of The Green Man. I needed to feel his power in me.

As I entered my sixth decade, I wanted to express the shedding of old layers and the new found freedom I saw in the imagined torso and exposed heart of this Arbutus tree.

With a willingness to expose who we are, we don't fall apart, we gain wisdom and courage. We come into the light.

Gaia is the ancient Greek earth goddess. Today's popular culture has recalled her name to symbolize the unified complexities of the biosphere, that part of the earth's crust, waters, and atmosphere that supports life. When she exposed herself to me in this tree root, I felt the pain and courage of unseen sacrifice. Gaia is the eternal feminine, the energy that gives birth, nourishes and allows the strength to manifest *being* in the physical world. I saw her begging for understanding and I felt compelled to respond.

Hiking remains my source for renewal. For me there are tongues in trees and I want to listen. Aboriginals say trees are the tallest teachers. My spirit

Top: Cathedral Grove, Vancouver Island  
Above: Pierced By the Green Man



Top: Arbutus Trunk  
Above: Out of Darkness.



Right: Homage To Gaia  
Far right: Knox Mountain, Kelowna



soars when my gaze moves up a trunk or through a twisted root. Slow looking ignites my imagination, but the personal wisdom comes when I translate the experience through painting. As I sage, my imagination and my connection to nature give me the strength and courage to grow into the fullness of being human and a part of nature. I don't paint trees; I feel with trees.

"Everything you see has its roots in the unseen world. The forms may change, yet the essence remains the same. Every wonderful sight will vanish; every sweet word will fade, But do not be disheartened, The source they come from is eternal, growing, Branching out, giving new life and new joy. Why do you weep? The source is within you And this whole world is springing up from it." – Rumi

*For our spring issue, consider submitting an article on how nature inspires your creative urges.*

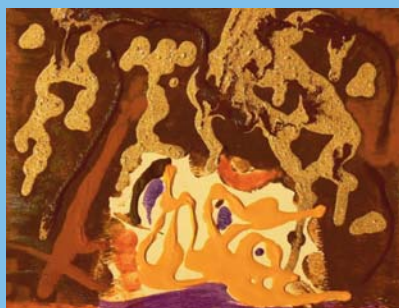
# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

## A Journal of the Arts & Aging

Edited by Karen Close  
& Carolyn Cowan

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Readers of the first issue of *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* will recall this journal is an active response to the dream of Thomas Merton: "May we all grow in grace and peace, and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being. It is the voice of the creative self waiting to be called to speak."

You were encouraged not to just read us, but to participate with us. When a dream is pure in intention, it gathers momentum. Those of you who responded to that first call by reading and sending your suggestions and creative responses are helping forge the path to a greater expression of human potential.

Maximizing intergenerational activities which advance creative consciousness and honour the transformational power of creative expression is the goal of this journal. Diversity and intensity is boundless when minds unite with imagination and passion. Through collaboration, this journal can become an organic art piece.

In the early twentieth century Constructivism proposed that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. The movement advocated in favour of art as a practice for social purposes. It was a noble goal founded in the idealism of the classical period. Perhaps proponents of Constructivism were just a century too early. This journal embraces their goal as a possibility within the context of the World Wide Web.

The collective voice of you, our readers, can generate the momentum to create or 'Construct', the twenty-first century we deserve. Email your ideas and your creative products to [sageing4@gmail.com](mailto:sageing4@gmail.com). Hear the call. Join the dream. Sage with Creative Spirit.

"It is not having experiences that make us wise.

It is reflecting on those experiences that brings wisdom." – Jane Fonda