

CELEBRATION (OR . . .)



Dawn is a celebration that happens every day, and it's always dawn somewhere!
Celebrate the dawn of every new day and the promise it brings with it . . .

A ZINE BY THE QUIRK-E ZINERS

QUIRK-E 
Queer Imaging & Riting Kollektive for Elders

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> River Glen.....	3
<i>Dancing for Joy</i> Don Orr Martin.....	4
<i>God Don't Make No Junk</i> Garth McIver.....	5
<i>K.D. And Me</i> Annie Newman.....	6
<i>Minor Pain For Major Gain</i> Cyndia Cole.....	7
<i>Kindness Is A Rule</i> River Glen.....	9
<i>Lucy, The Cat Back On Santa's Knee</i> Lorri Rudland.....	10
<i>The Gift That Finally Came</i> Farren Gillaspie.....	12
<i>Changes</i> Ellen Woodsworth.....	13
<i>It's The Best Day Of The Year</i> Cyndia Cole.....	15
<i>Kris Kringle</i> Farren Gillaspie.....	16
<i>My Ancestors Arrived by Meteorite</i> Paula Stromberg.....	18
<i>Kind-Heartedness: The Balm</i> Adriaan de Vries.....	20
<i>Peace</i> Paige Seburn	20
<i>Paying It Forward Because of A Backward Glance</i> River Glen.....	21
<i>Kindness</i> Val Innes.....	22
<i>The Fall</i> Ellen Woodsworth.....	23
<i>Reclaiming And Maintaining My Holiday Joy</i> Farren Gillaspie.....	24
<i>Arabian Memories</i> Garth McIver.....	25
<i>The Secrets</i> Jan Bruce.....	27
<i>Colours</i> Ellen Woodsworth.....	28
<i>The Holidays</i> River Glen.....	29
<i>Bright Blue Eyes</i> Marsha Ablowitz.....	31
<i>Our Battle For Words</i> Cyndia Cole.....	33
<i>Our Climate Is Getting Hotter And More Extreme</i> Lorri Rudland.....	35
<i>In Counterbalance to December's Overload of Religious Celebration</i> River Glen.....	38
<i>Maya Angelou</i> Sheila Gilhooley.....	39
<i>Art by Judy Fletcher</i>	40
<i>1963-1969 San Francisco</i> Pat Hogan	40
<i>What Do I Celebrate</i> Val Innes.....	42
<i>Queer Organization Contacts</i> River Glen.....	43

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We are grateful to be living and working on the unceded and stolen land of the Coast Salish people, the First Nations. We acknowledge the responsibility we have as colonizers to reconcile with and support Indigenous Nations. Canada stole their land and their children and still operates under the oppressive Indian Act. We must do better.

INTRODUCTION

River Glen

Dear readers, we Quirk-es share writings with you as we take stock of 2025 as it eases towards the winter solstice. We write as individuals and as part of our diverse queer collective. If you are familiar with our previous Zines, you'll know both the personal and the societal are very important to us. We seek to contribute to 2SLGBTQIA+ culture and to advocate for equality and justice. We are committed to addressing the climate crisis and enduring peace and security around the world. No less important is our owning the right to self-expression through the written word, imagery and performance.

Some of our members think there is a demand for more hope and light in this world. There are so many ways of appreciating and celebrating the good and the beautiful, be it personal joyful events in our lives or sharing different cultural traditions that are important to us. How can there be peace in this world if we are all in individual bubbles? Knowledge and exposure builds bridges and enriches with delights like specials celebratory foods for example, which can eventually find their way to fusion cuisine in our own kitchens.

When different rituals and ceremonies are understood, it is a step towards discovering others' humanity. Being a minority group, with our Trans family members particularly persecuted, and the Right still up to book bans and trying for more regression of rights, we can see how making our own humanity known is crucial. We can shout and parade our beautiful lives, or do it more subtly simply by living a good happy life.

Or. . . Yes there has to be room for the other side of taking stock of 2025. Not all are in good health, have enough resources, have supports, live in safety, or feel optimistic about the future, and we have the stomach and heart to go there as well.



QUIRK-E DECLARATION

The Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders hereby declares its adherence to the Canadian and BC Human Rights Codes, including, but not restricted to, prohibition of discrimination in publication or speech, because of the Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or age of that person or that group or class of person.

DANCING FOR JOY

Don Orr Martin

I am the only man in a jazz dance exercise class of ten women. Most of the women are over fifty, a couple are thirty-somethings. I am 74, and maybe I love it just a little too much, doing pliés, chassés, and jazz hands. My classmates get a kick out of my shoulder rolls and swirling hips. I can see them smiling in the dance mirror at my bumps and grinds. Or is it a smirk?

Sometimes I wonder if they view me like that guy in the YouTube video of the aerobics class on the beach in Waikiki—paunchy and bald, in a much too revealing speedo, totally rocking out, dignity be damned. He has a certain grace, and he's got the steps down way better than almost everybody else, but I remember thinking I bet he never got that lead role in *Grease* in high school because he was a little too 'femme', and now he's got something to prove. Do I have something to prove?

Well, I don't let it bother me, either. But honestly, after months and years together, our class has become a kind of family. Not only do we get sweaty and winded together, we know a bit about each other's lives. I talk to them about my husband. We share news about weddings and children and travel and medical procedures. We miss our classmates when they are away.

It's challenging, but I love the jazzy routines and rigorous ballet calisthenics. We have to be syncopated and ready to change direction on the half beat. Because the class uses the latest popular tunes, it helps me stay current on new music, too. We dance to Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift and Bruno Mars and Michael Buble. It's a total body and mind workout. It keeps me strong and balanced. I go full out, jumping higher and stretching farther than classmates half my age. I concentrate on technique, but have to tell myself to slow down. I'm not 35 anymore.

I've been doing an aerobics class like this for 40 years. One hour, three times a week. Back in the 1980s I used to wear colour-coordinated outfits, a head band, and leg warmers—which I loved because they made my legs look so shapely. Our class would go to different events and do demonstrations or aerobic competitions. My technique was flawless. It was always easy for me to learn the routines. I was often, though not always, the only male.

Now, as an old man and after a recent hiatus because of a bout of sciatica pain, I've reduced my jazz workout routine to two days a week. My flexibility and endurance were slower to come back, but I've noticed this thing happening several times over the decades, and even now, I get this sensation of increased strength. I feel rejuvenated; my body vibrates with vigor; I stand taller and don't groan as much when I bend down. It's like I acquired a super power. I skip home, humming songs and rehearsing the steps in my head.

Most men do not feel comfortable with my kind of routine. For a while I had a handsome male instructor, whom I adored, and who really motivated me. And I have a male friend in another town who is still doing these classes at age 85. He's amazing.

So, here's my advice: find a physical activity you love to do, that you can make a priority, that gives you joy and confidence, and stick with it. You're never too old to dance.



Don doing aerobics in the 1980s

Photo supplied by Don Martin

And always a story of self-acceptance and appreciation of our LGBTQ nature is a celebration, so read on . . .

GOD DON'T MAKE NO JUNK

Garth McIver

Forty odd years ago and in my thirties I sought the help of a counsellor to untangle all my years of shame, fear and hiding that many gay men of my era have known. I had given up the crutches of alcohol and drugs, and now the naked me had to deal with my issues. I didn't know me, or at least I didn't know the real me. I still wasn't comfortable with being gay, and I was filled with self-doubt. After several individual sessions, my counsellor recommended that I also attend group therapy.

It was at one of these early group sessions that I heard a participant say "God don't make no junk". It probably wasn't original, and I've heard it several times since, but it was the first time I remember those words registering with me. That message, that day was meant for me. It was such a profound statement. It was the beginning of my journey to self-acceptance.

At my next individual session, I was excited to tell Anne, my counsellor of my recent insight. She was delighted. She told me that now all I needed was self-compassion and self- acceptance and self-worth would follow. Anne guided and prodded me for the next several months. She would always say let's get this or that elephant out of the living room, and despite how fearful I was to deal with an issue, I learned to trust her counsel.



During this time, my two brothers and their wives were coming to New Orleans to attend a conference where I was living at the time. When Anne heard of their visit, she said "Let's get this "gay thing" out of the way with your family. When you pick them up at the airport ask them to do something for you that's important. Ask them to attend a session with you at my office. Then write a letter to them that you can read at the meeting. Tell them about your fears of rejection; make amends for your past behaviours, your distancing yourself from them, and tell them your hope to be a better part of the family again. Speak openly and honestly. I fretted over that letter, I fretted over asking them to come to my counsellor's office, and I was nearly a wreck the day of the meeting.

The afternoon came. I stumbled through my letter, and asked for their understanding and hopefully they could forgive my years of running and hiding. I told them that I was working hard to be a better brother and member of society. My counsellor asked if each would like to respond. One of my sister-in-laws started off saying, "what a relief, we all know you are gay; we thought you had asked us here today to tell us you had AIDS". My eldest brothers said, "yes, in the past you just "pissed me off", but I would like our family together again". And so it went, with everyone having a chance to share their anger, frustrations, fears and hopes for the future. It was a beginning. All the stress and tension was worth it. I got my family back that day. It was one of the best afternoons of my life.

Anne taught me how to begin my journey. A journey of accepting the person I was meant to be: a journey that has meant facing my reality, making amends for past behaviour and finding acceptance and a sense of worthiness.

We don't always see what others can. Many of us are blind to our self-worth. Anne jump-started me into finding my value and my right place in the scheme of things. Over the years I have come to the realization that God really doesn't make junk. And I have learned to accept, appreciate and even love His design for me.

Photo supplied by Garth McIver



K.D. AND ME

Annie Newman



She lifted me off of my seat when she sashayed into the bar. How could she not! She did that sassy country swing which made her skirt twirl around her cute green trimmed elfish boots which matched the jazzy fringe on her shirt. Her brunette hair was buzz cut on one side with stylish V-shaped bangs. She had a gentle but seductive smile, aah, mesmerizing. Sequined, cat eyed glasses with narrow and pointed frames with no glass! There I was, in my mind's eye, using my soft, sweet lips to croon the tunes with her, as she started to sing. Together, while I imagined us dancing on the stage, batting my eyes at her, her winking back. I swivelled my hips as we rocked pelvis to pelvis, moving deeper into the movements of the music. Oh, my gosh! I had a crush on k.d.!

At the time, I was dating a young man just before attending massage school in Sutton, Ontario, and it was a plain, boring, flat affair, no heart or pulse in it at all. Well swivel my hips! That totally changed when I saw k.d.

My excitement for her confirmed to me that I was truly gay. I always thought so! But I had kept pushing aside the urges that would arise as reminders. Now here I was, sitting with my buddies, Dolores and Jane, at one of many dark, cavernous pubs, at a typical round beer stained pub table in the Albert Hall, on Bloor Street, in Toronto, in the cool spring of 1982. The place was almost deserted. I was visiting with them at their old communal mansion down the street, on the weekend for one of my big city holidays. I was a Massage Therapy student studying north of Toronto, next to Lake Simcoe, in Ontario. Oh how I would have loved to offer KD a massage!

And then there was her incredible singing that encouraged my images of seducing her! Her voice was strong and husky in the lower notes, and clear and sweet as she sang higher. She was a mezzo soprano, reaching between an alto and soprano. Her voice was rich, bold, and she used her slim, muscular body to move the music through her and over to the audience. Kathryn Dawn Lang, would eventually receive the Order of Canada (OC). Born on November 2, 1961, known as k.d., her stage name. She was a magician, being able to create moods and emotions, as soon as she started singing. She was with her band the Re-clines, which was formed in 1982. She kindled my fires, and I liked it!

Being a Massage Therapy student helped me get much more attuned to my body and was making my awareness more acute. In addition, I was in my late twenties and had had enough romantic experience with men now, that I realized I was extremely bored sexually and emotionally. It just wasn't working for me, and it wasn't fair to them either. Being with my friends in Toronto, who were erotic dancers, emphasized my interest in women. I noticed how free they were with their bodies, at work and on a daily basis. I watched them dance at the clubs they performed in and experienced how they turned the process of taking their clothes off into an artistic performance that celebrated their physiques. They were exuberant in their performance, and they said they enjoyed it. At home, I noticed how comfortable they seemed to be in their own skins, whether they were stretching, walking about, or laughing. I could feel my attraction for them grow, and they let me know the feeling was mutual. It felt so liberating for me to be with them. I felt electrified and alive. We maintained our friendships only, because I still wasn't quite ready to take that next big step. Time would show that I would need more guidance first. The sexual energy remained however.



Back to k.d. and the pub performance. The Re-clines were a Canadian country-swing band that performed with k.d. until 1989. The Re-clines were a Canadian country-swing band

The band was originally a tribute to Patsy Cline. The band members played keyboards, drums, guitar, and bass. This Patsy Cline Tribute band accompanied k.d. so well they were seamless together throughout the years, and so it was all that night while we listened. It was a delight immersing ourselves in their music. The band, k.d. especially, and her music and magnetism were surprise finds for us. We had them almost exclusively to ourselves. Only a few people dropped into the pub from Bloor Street that night.

k.d. and I did not meet until the very end of the show, as I walked towards the door of the Albert Hall in Toronto. The light was low when she whispered a "Hello," in the smoky, low light of the room. Her eyes were a lovely blue-green. She had this enigmatic, sexy smile, as she looked at me in greeting. I smiled back softly and said, "You're going to reach the stars, k.d."

MINOR PAIN FOR MAJOR GAIN

Cyndia Cole

One of my Buddhist teachings refers to ordinary troubles as *minor pain for major gain*. I think it's trying to teach me that overcoming ordinary troubles leads to the self-development and resilience that we aim for and call *human revolution*.

I first shared the phrase *minor pain for major gain* with a specialist who was seeing me for multiple visits. I was going through the long process to get a dental implant to replace a missing tooth. He laughed when he heard the phrase and said he should frame it and post it over his door. I was pretty stoic through all that work on my mouth and have been rewarded on my six-month check-ups with my regular dentist. She admires the implant every time, then tells me I don't need anything beyond cleaning and x-rays. The dread I felt in visiting the mean misogynistic dentist of my youth has become a distant memory. Major gain.

For my upcoming MRI, I repeat *minor pain for major gain* to myself, hoping to quell any anxiety. Since the test is scheduled three months in advance, there are plenty of moments to choose this mindset. I am not ruminating on the results of the MRI. I fully expect it to give me a clean bill of health. And I am deeply grateful for a medical system that bothers to monitor me closely after resolving a previous health concern. It's the experience of the procedure itself that I am working to reframe.

The first time I had an MRI, I had a breezy attitude. Two folks close to me told me about their experiences. Expect to go into a close tube, hear loud noises and hold perfectly still while it's happening. No big deal, I tell myself. I am not afraid of small spaces. I can wear earplugs to block the noise. Doing yoga has taught me how to be still. I am not a fidgeter.

What actually happened was that the tray moved me up and down several times, presumably to focus the machine over different parts of my body. Each time it moved me I thought, *Oh thank goodness! I am getting out of here. I really want this to be over.* But it wasn't. When I finally got out, I was not emotionally well regulated.



This second time in the MRI machine will be different, I tell myself. Of course, the staff are very professional, brief but kind. They accept me yelling, "I can't understand what you said" when they give me instructions after they watch me put in the earplugs. They repeat, and I get it. "Don't move your jaw!"

How I get through anything hard is by using my Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Normally, we do this out loud, but doing it silently is more appropriate sometimes. Now I realize I can't even mouth the words while in the MRI or my jaw will move. That's okay, I will just say it in my head.

Right away I realize I also have to keep my eyes closed. This time, I can't look at the white tube directly above me and imagine I am not boxed in. I can only achieve a sense of spaciousness by going deep into my memory. I am calling up the very best experiences I have had being in huge and beautiful rooms, making the beautiful noise of chanting together with hundreds of others. This helps me to breathe freely and to feel good inside.

Hell is the subjective experience of feeling trapped, hopeless, stuck in suffering with no way out. I remind myself of more Buddhist concepts. In a higher life condition, we feel open, free, connected with the universe, unlimited, at peace and timeless. I am remembering this experience, one I have had in the special times in the big beautiful rooms with others of like mind. The loud and irritating noises of the MRI machine morph into the sound of chanting that I can only enjoy inside my head right now. The tray moves me but this time I know the test is not done yet. I will get out when time is right. It's okay. It's okay.

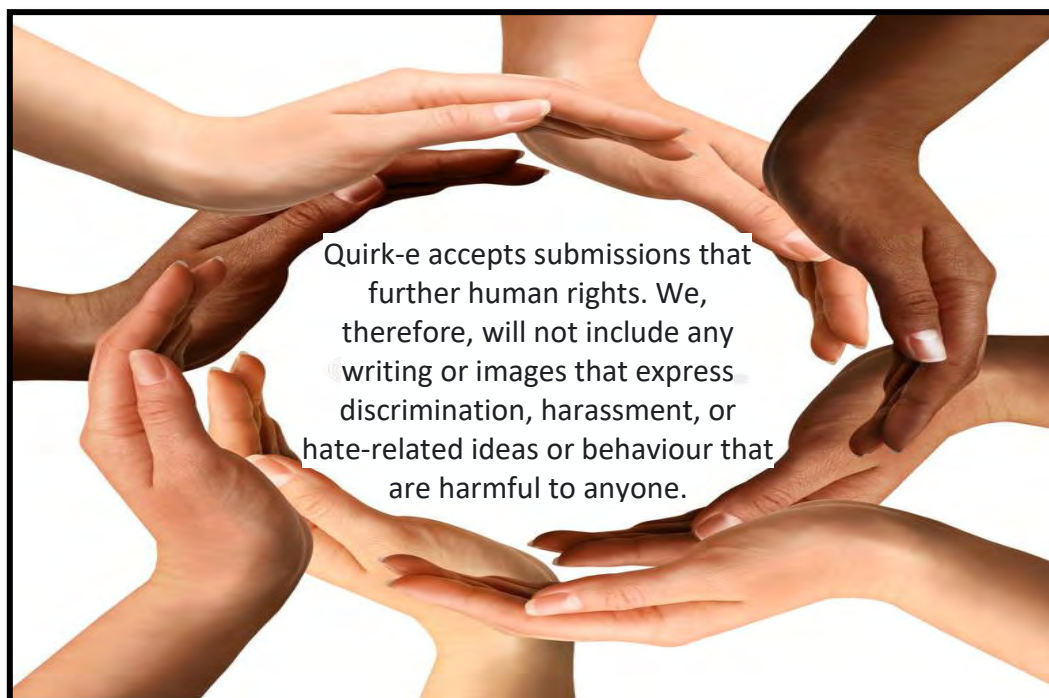
When the tray does slide me out of the MRI tube, it's an effort to open my eyes and come back to awareness of the room and the kind technicians saying words I can't hear. I take out the earplugs and try to hold onto the good feeling I had deep inside. I notice the clock says I have been here for 45 minutes.

After I change back into my clothes and walk into the waiting area, my partner offers to drive us to brunch at a favourite spot. When I say, 'I survived it,' the man who is waiting looks at me anxiously for a sign of reassurance. I want to share all my tips with him but can only find the words to say, "It takes longer than you might expect. Even so, it's minor pain for major gain."



Garden at the SGI-UK
Buddhist Centre, Taplow
Court, 2015

Photo by Cyndia Cole

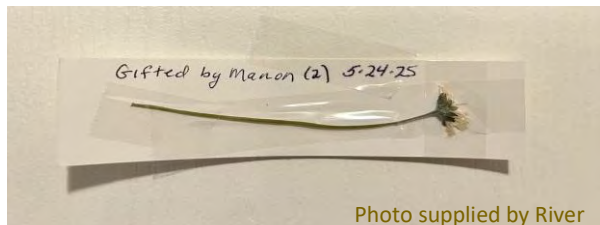


Quirk-e accepts submissions that further human rights. We, therefore, will not include any writing or images that express discrimination, harassment, or hate-related ideas or behaviour that are harmful to anyone.

KINDNESS IS A RULE

River Glen

Kindness is recognition of mutuality and a sense of responsibility for a person or even people in general. The responsibility is to see the other's wellbeing as important as your own. It may only be a friendly smile for a stranger, a gift you know someone will appreciate, a helping hand or simply an ear to really hear someone.



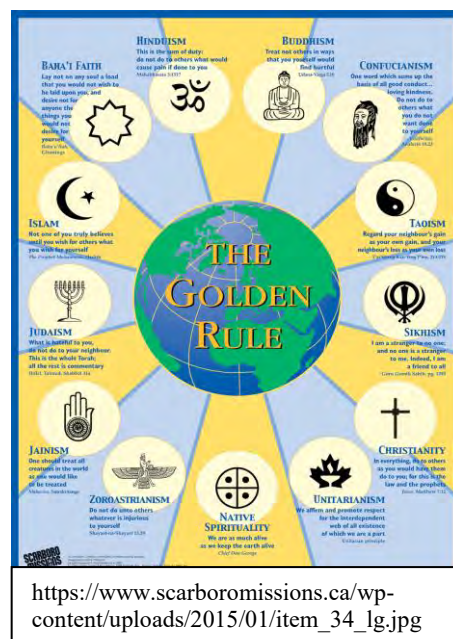
My 2 year old granddaughter gave me her first gift, a dandelion flower, and then ran off to play. I took it home and preserved it as a keepsake. Maybe in a year or so, I will show it to her, so she can see how much a small gesture can mean.

The other day on a very crowded bus, a family got on, and I made room for a delightful six year old to sit beside me. I know lots about her now. She kept asking me so many questions, I had to turn off my story on my headphones and give her my full attention. We talked about the Skytrain being built outside the bus window, her family and being on holiday from Winnipeg. She named probably ten family member's names and asked me if I had pictures of my family. Of course, I don't have to be asked twice to share about my grandkids. Before I got up to leave, she asked if she could hug me. I said I really was a stranger, so didn't think I should, but I hugged myself and said that it meant she had hugged me. Her mother looked me deep in my eyes as I squeezed passed and said thank you for being so kind to her daughter. I said thank you for having such a treasure of a daughter. Because immigrants are under pressure these days, I will add here I believe they were beautiful people who looked like people I have seen from Somalia.

Every week I make a trek to visit my 90 year old friend in a care home. I get so much love, appreciation and kindness from her; I want to do it over and over, forever. When I admitted I was bit distracted by pain, she made me recline on her bed, while she sat beside me and did a Reiki treatment on my leg. Of course, it worked, maybe not on my leg exactly, but her intent, her genuine concern and care not only warmed my heart then, but every time I think of it, it always will help.

Yes, kindness is medicine; it's heart to heart connection. It can be altruism where a group's needs inspire action. I think of the unhoused, the addicted or mentally ill, the prisoner or people scapegoated because they are transgendered. So a political response is elicited, and we use ethics of nonviolence and peace as a basis for domestic policies or international relations and push hard against the opposite of kindness. Marshalled kindness for social justice will always be the right thing to do.

I think kindness operates on the rails of gratitude and service. After raising my kids, I finally discovered being kind towards myself. Once I am taken care of, I put forth my care and hope towards life and lives that touches me on this fragile planet. Yes, I hope I am living with kindness for the natural world using it gently. My belief system is very simple . . . the golden rule is central to my values, ethics and boundaries . . . do towards others what you would like in return.



LUCY, THE CAT, BACK ON SANTA'S KNEE

Lorri Rudland

"Lucy, come. We've got a Xmas date with Santa at the mall." Lucy, a black and white tuxedo cat, sighed. She could hear her owner, Jane, singing *Santa Claus is coming to town*. She sang it last year, too, and that song is scary. "*He knows when you've been bad or good.*" This Santa guy knows everything. How does he do that? Last year Santa said he hoped for a better report this Christmas. But Lucy was afraid it was going to be worse. As they waited in the line-up to see Santa, Jane smiled down on her and said, "Not to worry; just tell the truth." That's what had Lucy worried, the truth.

When they reached Santa, he patted his knee and said, "Jump up Lucy," while Jane looked on nearby. Lucy jumped up and sat quietly on Santa's knee. She looked worried and Santa looked serious.

"Well, Lucy, how did you do this past year?"

Lucy looked down, and said, "I might have made a few mistakes."

"Oh, and what would those be?"

"Do I have to tell you?"

"Yes, Lucy, you have to be honest with me."

"How about if I start small," Lucy said.

"Start wherever you want, Lucy,"

"I can open every cupboard in the condo. Under the sink, Jane stores pots and pans, and the one beside it has the garbage. That always smells interesting. And I like climbing into the shelves of the two towers on either side of the TV stand. I have to knock over Rosie the Riveter to make some space, but she doesn't break. It's hard getting those cupboard doors open. One of them opens on the other side from the other one. It took a lot of clawing for me to figure it out."

"You're a very smart cat, Lucy. But I wonder if Jane minds it when you root about in the cupboards?"

"Sometimes she yells at me to get out of the cupboards. She doesn't want me to knock things over."

Lucy thought, oh, no, so far my report is not too good, and I really wanted a new cat tunnel for Christmas.

Santa said, "Lucy, what else do you have to tell me?"

"Well, nothing too bad, really." Lucy hoped for the best and said, "I like to jump up into the linen cupboard, and have a little nap, especially when she's just put away the clean laundry. I like the smell, so fresh. I also like sleeping in the newspaper box and another good place for a snooze is the dirty laundry basket."

"What does she think about you napping all over the house?"

"You know Santa, I think it's alright with her. Except perhaps on the fresh laundry - she complains about my black fur. Oh, yes, and another thing. I like to nap with my head in one of her slippers and my paw in the other one during the day, so I can smell her lovely scent."

"You mean the smell of her feet," said Santa.

"Yes, they smell so good to me."

"Ah, perhaps you could stick with the newspapers and the dirty laundry for your naps. And, of course, her slippers. Have you told me everything, Lucy - you're a bit restless and your eyes look kind of shifty," Santa said.

I think I'm talking too much. Lucy wondered if Santa would come at all if he hears what happened. What will Santa think when he finds out I broke a prize rock in Jane's rock collection? Maybe I can keep quiet.



The cat looked away for a moment, and then came to a decision. "Oh, all right. I'll talk; I'll talk. You know it all, anyway. I don't know why I love to swipe things onto the floor, but I do. Last week I jumped from the high tower into Jane's rock collection, which is off limits. When I jumped, I accidentally bumped into a coloured rock. It fell on the floor and broke into many pieces. Wow, was she upset. You'd think she would thank me, because now she had a bunch of rocks instead of one large one. No such luck. I was in the 'doghouse' for a while."

Jane spoke up and said, "Yes, you were Lucy. That was a beautiful slab of rainbow fluorite and it was my favorite rock."

"Ah, now we're getting to the real problem," Santa said. "You know you're not allowed in the rock collection, but you jumped there anyway."

Lucy hung her head, "I can't resist it. Three shelves of rocks to knock over."

"But Lucy, if you love Jane, why would you break a beautiful piece of rock?"

"I didn't mean to break it. But watching the rocks fall is very exciting for me. I discovered I have the power to move things. I also like knocking over the two pictures of other cats on her end table. They make a satisfying smacking sound as their faces slam into the glass."

"Are you jealous of the other cats, Lucy?"

"No, I just like slamming the pictures down."

"When you jumped up on my knee, Lucy, I wondered how much you would tell me. There's been some mischief again this year." Santa frowned.

"Yup. But Santa. This year I only knocked down a few rocks and the things I knocked off the coffee table. But I didn't upend any flower vases or any full cups of coffee. I think I've improved, although there was that coffee spill, on the new carpet."

"How much coffee Lucy?"

"Only half a cup. Last year I knocked over a couple of them."

"Hmmm. Is that everything?"

"Yes, Santa, that's the whole truth." Jane leaned over and patted Lucy on the head to reassure her she was still loved. Lucy looked up at Jane and purred.

"Little one, I know swiping things off the coffee tables and knocking things over is what cats do, and you have definitely shown an improvement from last year. I'm glad you have been honest with me. But Lucy, you know the rock collection is important to Jane."

"Yes, I understand. She put a really big bowl on the tower between me and the rock shelves. Frankly, I don't know if I can get at them again."

"That's probably a good thing. Well done on the improvements you've made. Santa might be dropping in on you and Jane. Since you're sitting on my knee, what would you like for Christmas this year?"

Lucy's eyes brightened and she purred. "Santa, I want a new cat tunnel. The old one broke."

"Why did it break, Lucy?"

"I kept running through it back and forth as fast as I could and then springing out, and it just fell apart."

"A new tunnel. That could be on your Christmas list," Santa said. Lucy quivered all over with excitement.

"By the way, why was there a bite out of the cookie that Jane laid out last year?"

"Whoops. Oh, Santa, it was my favorite - oatmeal. I did leave most of it for you."

Jane spoke up. "Lucy, I can leave out two cookies, one for you and one on a different plate for Santa."

Santa said, "Lucy, you heard Jane. You may eat your own cookie, but try to leave mine alone. No bite marks and definitely no licking the oatmeal. Can you do that?"

"OK, Santa. I'll try."



"You and Jane have a very Merry Christmas, and Lucy – stay away from the rock collection."

Lucy sighed with relief. She was pretty sure that Santa would be dropping in this Christmas. She purred for Santa and Jane, while she slowly crossed her paws and hoped for good luck in the coming year. Jane smiled too and secretly crossed her own fingers behind her back.

Photos supplied by Lorri Rudland

THE GIFT THAT FINALLY CAME

Farren Gillaspie

"I hate Christmas, sorry, but I just do. I dread December, and by the end of the first week I feel I will just throttle the next person who gushes and says, 'happy holidays!' Yeah, right, sure, and I just go off, in a huff." Jim took a deep breath; after sharing like that, his tense body seemed to relax a bit. His deep brown eyes were glazed over as he stared straight ahead, looking at no one in particular. There

was a barely noticeable quiver at the corners of his mouth. The rest of the group was quiet, but their eyes were focused on Jim. There were nods of understanding and occasional tears forming. Some were just blank, probably as they were remembering their own history.

This retreat was on Bowen Island. Byron had offered his waterfront home as a weekend get-away. The wall-to-wall fieldstone fireplace was crackling and comforting. At this point, since Jim had already started sharing, he continued in the sharing circle with twenty other gay adult children of alcoholics, ACOA. Before his turn, there had been too few people who had shared that this was a magical or warm fuzzy time of the year. Sadly, most people found it a struggle to keep a positive attitude throughout the season. Some were tormented by memories of a drunken parent; some had to draw from memories of a happier time before alcohol had been involved, or before they had come out to their families. Fortunately, a good number of participants had resolved some of the gay issues with their families, and some alcoholic parents had sought recovery. It was amazing going around the circle how alcohol and homophobia appeared to be two of the top causes of distress during the holidays. They seemed so separate. Everyone in the group had suffered from at least one of the two and many had dealt with both.

Mary spoke up with a very gentle voice. Her eyes were red.

"Jim I would like to hear more if you are okay sharing more? I think some of us have some buried feelings of our own that you might be able to support us in finding words to express that."

There were murmurings of agreement around the circle. Don spoke up, "thanks Jim for being so honest; I always feel guilty when I can't jump on that wagon of glee with everyone else, and, you know, besides feeling guilty about that, lately I have started feeling resentful, to tell the truth."

"Thanks, you guys. I have never shared this before. If there is such a thing as Christmas spirit, being here with you guys is about as close as I have gotten. So I will share. Since I can remember, Dad would always drink his way through the holidays. He was more of a weekend drunk except for the month of December. It was like clockwork, starting December 1st. As long as I can remember, there were never any gifts. Mom had passed away when I was five. Now I realize my Dad was suffering and resentful of being left alone to raise me. He was sad, and drinking was the only way he knew how to deal with his loss. I kept hoping that my father would just get me even one small gift. I would hint at things I might like, but finally I just gave up. I started lying, my first day back to school after Christmas, about the gifts I had received while



others bragged about their gifts. It took a lot of skill to lie. I had to be very careful about my lies, because I had nothing to show for them. To make my lies more believable, I would say that my father did buy me things, but gifts weren't a big thing for us, so Dad usually kept things pretty simple. I even managed to half-heartedly dredge up the saying that we preferred presence over presents. Of course, I never had either. So I just have hollow memories of every Christmas waiting for that gift that never came." His voice had softened as he ended his story and he lowered his head as he looked down. His friend Danny put an arm on Jim's shoulder. There was a slight shudder through Jim's body. Janie reached for the Kleenex box, pulled one out and passed the box around as people dabbed their eyes and blew their noses. There were nods of understanding and support from people around the circle.

Everyone had been moved by Jim's story. At break, as Danny was comforting Jim, people started talking about how they could support Jim. Byron even suggested asking Danny if he might make up a reason to visit Jim on Christmas Eve and try to sneak a small gift in to leave somewhere in Jim's home. Jim never had a tree. He did have a few Christmas figurines from his mother that he had managed to save, and he would put them out at Christmas time as a reminder of a face that had mostly faded from his memory.

Everyone agreed that was a great idea, and everyone even wanted to chip in something, so the gift would come from all of them. Danny, his friend, could decide what the gift would be and on the, 'to' part on the label he could write "The Gift That Did Come!" There was a combined good feeling of satisfaction, but one person had another idea. Cindy was a master greeting card maker herself. She said, "why don't we give him a card for each of the years he missed getting a gift. I don't have my card making materials with me but I could slip into the village and pick up a bunch of blank cards. We could back date the cards and draw an age appropriate gift on them. I'll put them together in one package and ask Jim to just open it on Christmas morning, which by the way is only one week away!

Danny shared at the next meeting on the mainland what had happened. When he went back to Jim's on Christmas Day, he found Jim sobbing. There were a lot of deep breaths with Jim holding on to Danny. When he managed to regain his composure, he explained that he now realized there is always a special magic at this time of year. For him, it started with gratitude for the love and safe space that Danny and the group provided him. "Not sure about the Christmas tree thing," he said but next year is still far away. I feel a lot can happen in one year!"

Photo supplied by Farren Gillaspie



CHANGES

Ellen Woodsworth

A brilliant red Japanese maple leaf stops me on my daily walk along the mighty Fraser River, with a memory of fall in Japan with Nina, our long strolls along the river in Kyoto after a visit to a local bath house. Nina left her body last year, but sometimes I still talk to her. Today, I picked up her old hand-woven indigo and white woollen scarf. Her Dad must have brought from Kashmir when he escaped. I lay it over the back of my chair to comfort myself with thoughts of our adventures. We met in Kobe in Grade 11 at Canadian

Academy and began our long walks down Ryoko Mountain to her home, where her Japanese mother warmly welcomed us with hot tea and snacks, and her dad's smile said he was eager to talk politics. How I long for her wise company and the twinkle in



Nina and Ellen

her eyes as we discussed world issues, even then agreeing that the U.S. was dangerous. She would be as excited as I am that Mamdani won the New York City Mayor's seat. I wish I could call her.

I am aging and, one by one, my dear friends and family are leaving me, even the cats are aging. Yoyo's jet-black fur is losing its sheen; Coco staggers from room to room, crying as her eyesight dims. My closest neighbour across the hall lies in a bed at St Joseph's Hospital. The service for Chris Morrissey was only two weeks ago.

November's grey sky and stark branches are here; the dahlia bulbs are waiting to be packed in the dark dry basement until spring, with only the garlic patiently waiting to be put in the damp soil and some tulips and daffodils. I will put them in the empty pots the dahlias have left, and then I am done gardening for this year. These simple tasks signal the end of the year, yet they give me some hope for the spring. The bright pink sun sets through the clouds along the dark river. The moon will be full tonight. Tomorrow the sun will come out.



I used to love winter which brought huge drifts of soft snow, my warm coat, cozy sweaters, mitts, and heavy pants, with my strong boots just waiting for my snowshoes. I would head up the mountains to make my track in the deep white powder, the crisp air so energizing. These thoughts cheer me up, my emotions so shattered by world news each day with some unbelievable dangerous new utterance from the US President or some new vicious genocide in Gaza. Today, Trump threatened he would deny New York City funds if they elected Mamdani Mayor. Last week he announced, just before he met with the President of China, that the U.S. would start testing nuclear weapons. Maj-Gen. Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, Israel's top military chief legal officer, has been arrested for supporting the release of a video showing Israeli soldiers brutally raping a young Palestine boy.

I stir the chicken stock and sniff to shake off the tension that fills my belly. Maybe some of this year's garlic and some ground pepper will do the trick. This afternoon, I will join a peace rally to protest the Federal war budget, paying attention to my emotions: don't hide, don't run from the fear:

allow it space *pause*,
 allow hope *pause*,
 feel my cold feet *pause*,
 go change the laundry *pause*,
 put on socks *pause*,
 hug Joy *pause*,
 pet the cats *pause*,
 feel each moment.

The world is changing: there is hope as well as despair, agony, insanity, and the arrival of a cold winter facing us all. Yoyo walks cross my page; my emotions shift, and I laugh. I hear the end of the laundry cycle; our clothes are clean. We are constantly changing. It's okay to cry as well as laugh or scream. It is the ying and yang of life. I will reach out to Margaret in her hospital bed. We can share the cycles of our lives. There is always hope that she will come home again. Write, just write and keep writing.

Photos supplied by Ellen Woodsworth

Now read on for something more to celebrate . . .

IT'S THE BEST DAY OF THE YEAR

Cyndia Cole

No, by Golly, it's not a Holly, Jolly Christmas. It's the day after Christmas, glorious December 26, known in Canada by the curious name of Boxing Day. To appreciate this, you must understand that I grew up in the you-es-of-eh where this Best Day of the Year did not exist. Of course, there was a day after Christmas, December 26, but I never heard of Boxing Day until I arrived as a twenty-year-old in Vancouver. It was a great discovery, though too late in life to make those magical childhood memories.

That's not really a problem though, because Boxing Day is a thoroughly adult Best Day. Before I explain why, let's examine the name. I quickly learned it had nothing to do with the so-called sport of Boxing. That's Good! Although I admired Muhammed Ali's political stance as well as his fancy footwork, I could not abide intentionally injuring another person or watching someone get beaten up. And I don't watch sports on TV. If Boxing Day refers to boxing up gifts, aren't they all opened before the 26th? Boxing Day seems to pre-date the concern for recycling all the boxes. Despite my curiosity, the Canadians I met neither cared what the name meant, nor felt the need to explain it.

For some of those Canadians, the day itself meant a second family gathering, this time at the in-laws or grandparents. Some liked the second go round of time-honoured foods, but many squirmed at the awkwardness of time with relatives-seldom-seen or with those who abused substances or people. And some of the bingers were nursing nasty hangovers in classic day-after fashion. As an immigrant, I didn't have relatives, let alone distant relatives, to visit or to avoid. So, Boxing Day held no obligations, no expectations.

The TV loudly told me that Boxing Day meant Big Sales and waiting around for hours outside in bad weather to get a "Once in a Year Deal". I never actually met anyone who celebrated this TV Boxing Day. I think all who do have become colonized by American corporations and kidnapped to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. At least, the TV seems to have created these new Buy! Buy! Buy! Holidays.

So, if it's not sports or boxes or relatives or deals, why, you are waiting to hear, is Boxing Day the Best Day of the Year? I guess you need to know that I am a person who always has a 'program.' I greet each day with a mental To Do list. My current program is abbreviated as 1-2- 3- 4-5. There are five things I plan to do each day that involve both self-care and connection. At night, I review them and the various add-ons and feel I have created some value with my day. I would rather be over committed than bored, so sometimes the To Do's get out of hand.

The entire Holiday Season can definitely pile on the To-Do's, especially because I like creating

handmade presents and cards. Despite the fun and satisfaction, it can get a bit exhausting. Like the Christmas Eve my sweetheart and I didn't get a minute of sleep before heading out on the 25th to her gigantic family gathering with 20 adults and 20 kids. We spent the entire night sanding and finishing the display cabinets she built to hold her nieces' medals and trophies. She'd made them from oak with sliding glass doors, etched with their names. I attached thick forest green velvet to the backs to show off the silver and gold. We dissolved into sleepy hysterics as we struggled through the night, but we finished them just in time to make the long drive out through the Fraser Valley. And the cabinets were magnificent! However, with only half a glass of wine, I snoozed through dinner and the forty-person gathering, too tired to talk to anyone. The weeks-long build up to December 25th's



Angie in her sleep mask



Card by Angie Joyce

crescendo quickly devolved into mountains of ripped paper, leftovers and dirty dishes. Fortunately, I wasn't called on to help with the clean-up. Everyone could tell I was too pooped.

So now you come to see how Boxing Day is the Best Day of the Year because it is literally the one and only day that I do absolutely nothing. And when I was working, I even got paid for doing nothing. Wow! Do I need a day like that! Doesn't everyone?

Photo by Cyndia Cole

KRIS KRINGLE
(INCLUDING AN UPDATE OF THE KRINGLE DYNASTY TO 2025)
Farren Gillaspie

The year 2019, had been a tragedy! While on his pre-Christmas Eve test run, Santa got shot down when he ventured into Russian air space. Everyone was devastated. All the reindeer perished except for one. Rudolph was found bobbing in the ocean, his red nose blinking like a beacon. It was Greta Thunberg who spotted him from the sail boat as she made her way back to Sweden. Mrs. Claus was beside herself, crying constantly. She slipped on the melting ice at the North Pole as she made her way to the toy shop and was now permanently in a wheel chair, mumbling incoherently about climate change, politics, losing her husband, and now losing the very snow paradise she was living in.

China took full advantage of the situation to mock Russia and the U.S.A. They released several blow-up Santa sleighs. The ones they directed remotely into Russian airspace had blow-up figures of Donald Trump and Melania in the front seat. Melania was resplendent in her Russian fur coat, hat and muff. Donald was staring fiercely into the wind, scalp glistening, hair blowing about wildly. Eric and Donald blow-ups were in the back seat riding shot gun, literally! The blow-ups they directed into U.S. airspace were manned by Putin, bare-chested, flailing a long whip, and swearing loudly. Alerts were going off all over Russia and the U.S., but really, that is a whole other story by itself.

Meanwhile, back at the North Pole, things were changing. Now the toy shop was on stilts to keep it dry and out of the glacial pools. The elves traveled between their quarters by gondola now. Unlike the Hallmark movies, sadly Christmas could not be saved that year. But there was change in the air. Kris junior, who had been in his father's shadow his whole life, was ready to step forward. He and his consciously-coupled partner, Samantha, had children of their own. Kris was a striking specimen, handsome, and pumped, with a stylish coif and impeccable skin. His partner was beautiful in a very androgynous way. She preferred red pants like Kris's, and preferred her hair cropped short. Her preferred pronouns were they and them. The couple identified as gender fluid. Their eldest boy, Cameron, was a mirror image of his father, already developing a swagger that had the elves, male and female, distracted. His gender preference was clear, but he did like to tease the male elves. There was a set of twins a year younger, a girl called Skye and a boy called Star. They both had angelic faces but were as different as night and day. Star was very artistic and spent a lot of time designing new toys in the toy shop. He had also been responsible for redecorating the toy shop and his parents' home. Skye was very mechanically inclined and had helped put together a totally electric sleigh that would be ready to go by next Christmas. Reindeer would no longer be commandeered for the grueling task of pulling the sleigh, except for Rudolph who would simply sit on a platform at the front of the sleigh. He was currently caught up in red tape. Greta would not release him until she was assured he would not be forced into labour and would only be a token reindeer. The youngest sibling could not



decide who they were. They had a double wardrobe, one with more masculine clothes and one with more feminine clothes. No one seemed to be concerned about what clothes were worn, or when.

It was a new day and the Kringles would be ushering in a new era!

Moving forward to 2021, the North Pole was becoming a smooth operating machine. All of the buildings were solar heated now. Gondolas were still necessary, but they had small electric outboard motors. More elves were hired working four day work weeks. They got paid holidays and sick leave. Meals were supplied by an onsite kitchen that only handled vegan and vegetarian cuisine. There was a fully equipped gym with machines that could accommodate vertically challenged people. Elves could no longer be referred to as just elves. Their individual names had to be used.

Cameron had negotiated with Toys R US to make toys for them year round. All profits went into maintaining the North Pole and profit sharing for the elves. Greta seemed to be quite smitten by Kris junior. She visited the North Pole quite frequently but always under the guise of checking up on Rudolf.

Skye and Star worked together to create new toys. Star would come up with an idea, and Skye would work with the elves to bring it to fruition. Their patents brought in large amounts of capital, and now a committee of elves and the Kringles were having meetings about how to wisely use the funds. Greta had asked for a seat at the table as well. Future planning involved talks about tourism, buying up tracts of the Amazon rain forest, and tracts of old growth forests all around the world.

The North Pole was becoming a role model for many countries. Business flourished for a few years. Then the tariffs hit! The world was thrown into a frenzy as they jerked back and forth like string puppets at the whim of the deranged orange man leading the United States. The Kringle work force could no longer afford to buy raw materials for their large toy manufacturing plant.

Kris junior and Greta had become quite a power force in addressing climate change issues. Profits had dwindled in the Kringle dynasty, so they couldn't donate money any longer to Greta's cause. But never fear, Greta was still hard at work convincing countries to move to greener safer energies for the planet. She worked with start-ups, run by women mostly. Earlier, she had invested in small labs around the world (with help from the Kringle Foundation) to develop exciting new technologies, and now they were introducing their finds and discoveries to these small start-ups. Poor Greta was stretched pretty thin with the embargo against Gaza. Kris Junior had made a late night run with supplies to Gaza but was shot at in the process. So that endeavour proved too risky, but Greta had other plans up her sleeves.



Greta did manage to connect Kris Junior with some suppliers and buyers throughout Europe, India and Africa. He took a page from the Canadian play book and started developing new sources throughout these regions. He dropped his connections south of the Canadian border, as that country fell deeper and deeper into chaos. The Kringles started slowly pulling out of their own struggles, and things were starting to look better. Projections were looking very good for 2026 and 2027.

The North Pole itself started looking like a United Nations. As business grew, there was an influx of vertically challenged refugees coming in from oppressed areas all around the world. Cacophonies of tempting cooking smells started coming from the huge North Pole kitchen, which was manned by many of the refugees. Toys were representative of all ethnicities, gender and sexual orientations around the world. The head of war in the States and the orange man's Maga colleagues were outraged and discussed ideas about bombing the North Pole. Finally, the United Nations started pulling their weight and created a special place for The North Pole under its umbrella to protect it.

All in all, the North Pole was becoming more independent and stable. Star came up with a design for a flag for the people there. It was a simple flag all white with a large head of Rudolph, nose glowing brilliantly to light the way for many other nations.



MY ANCESTORS ARRIVED BY METEORITE

Paula Stromberg

I am Canadian, a resident of Turtle Island who is grateful to be living on unceded First Nations land. However, it took a journey in 2024 to the Meteorite Museum in Chile's Atacama Desert to shift the embarrassment whenever I heard the First Nations blessing, "All My Relations". That ritual invocation, spoken at gatherings in my British Columbia homeland, did not stir feelings of kinship. I wanted nothing to do with my ancestors. My family's legacy is intergenerational trauma and darkness.

Adding to that embarrassment, I am a descendent of white settlers who farmed First Nations land in the Saskatchewan prairies. My family, a product of their time, were colonizers. As their child, I too benefited from government-authorized land grabs. All my relations? I don't feel proud of my family. I cringed from acknowledging "All My Relations" — there were so many reasons to feel separate. Until that astonishing museum visit in Chile.

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At the *Atacama Museo del Meteorito*, I paid 4,000 Chilean Pesos (*about \$6 CAD*) to enter the two tarpaulin-covered domes in the remote town of San Pedro. Inside, glass cabinets displayed dozens of meteorites (including rare carbonaceous chondrite ones, a term which I will explain shortly). I took photos. Practiced lifting metal-heavy meteorites hanging on security chains. Read the laminated posters.

The museum was sweet. So small, I could methodically devour the posters'

scientific explanations of different material that arrived via meteorite from beyond the Milky Way. The meteorites were all found in the remote Atacama Desert, parts of which were covered by ocean for millions of years. I was being schooled!

But the last display made me gasp: the poster said the aforementioned *carbonaceous chondrites* contain all five 'nucleobases' that compose DNA, and *cytosine, thymine and uracil* combine with sugars and phosphates to make up the genetic code of all life on Earth. Whether these basic ingredients for life first came from outer space is still unknown, but the discovery suggests life's precursors came from distant galaxies.

I am not a scientist, but I still felt a thrill learning that the building blocks of life were delivered to early Earth via meteorite. Were scientists now confirming the many First Nations origin stories that ancestors originated from celestial beings or star people? Did this confirm new age and other cultural beliefs from around the world that, indeed, humans do come from the stars?



I was awed at the thought of my own DNA arriving by meteorite. This radically reframed how I understand ‘ancestors’. The dreaded phrase, *All My Relations*, suddenly seemed radiant with belonging. My lineage is not only terrestrial, but cosmic. This revelation was so thrilling, I determined to keep it close to my heart. In the museum gift shop, I purchased a nub of magnetic rock guaranteed to have arrived from the sky — my own meteorite.



Back home in Vancouver, I keep that meteorite, a carrier of life’s molecular alphabet, on my pagan altar. It beckons me to step into the sacred — to consider the cosmic inheritance from all my relations. And to be honest, I’ve also noticed the guilt beginning to soften, guilt at my own recoil from troubled relatives.

We Must Laugh

My ancestors are not just the flawed family I fled, but include atoms, minerals extracted by lichens on rock, elements transported by mycelium around the world, woven into fungi and forest, yielding nutrients including the oxygen I breathe. My DNA carries traces — not just of my parents, grandparents, and more distant generations, but of trillions of organisms that ever lived.

After all, without ancestors, none of us would exist. So here’s the funny part: if I *really* pay attention to water cycles for example, my exhalations, sweat, cranial fluid and also my pee are proof that I, too, am a part-time glacier, a carbon element, a former rain cloud, maybe even a trilobite’s body fluid. It’s like a cosmic game of tag. “You’re it” says a molecule that once belonged to mushrooms and snowflakes and cyanobacteria guts . . . we chase each other across eternities.

Cycles of Carbon, Nitrogen, Water

This is blessed biophysics. Elements, recycled by nature’s processes over millennia, bind us to Earth, and to each other. The Atacama Meteorite Museum, that temple of cosmic fragments, opened a portal. Holding my meteorite, I contemplate my own temporary assembly of atoms. Instead of feeling separate, I breathe into the flowing continuum of ancestors — elements in soil, water, rock, air, and cosmos that are interlaced with my DNA.

Hey, I had to find something uplifting given our current climate! I’m a lesbian activist. Our world is crumbling. Many of us have quit watching the news. Wars. Global warming. We humans have a lot to apologize for. Collapsing environment. Food insecurity. Wildfires. Capitalism. Corporations allowed to poison our air and water for profit. Patriarchy — the legacy of recent generations: hoard that wealth, fence off the commons. But my meteorite encourages me to take a longer view, to savor stars, laugh at cosmic jokes, and rest in the grace of elemental ancestry.

I now believe something brighter persists within the unbroken chain of carbon, nitrogen and water cycles. Life began long before us humans — and many forms will continue after. Our planet will recover as soon as a few billion of us die off, eventually recycling ourselves. So meanwhile I treasure connection to *All My Relations*, even the human, messy ones — we, whose bodies are only the latest assembly of atoms. Perhaps the next meteor shower will deliver more fragments of possibility, diverse life forms, so new stories may bloom.



Paula stargazing

KIND-HEARTEDNESS: THE BALM

Adriaan de Vries

Kindness is a vital nectar of life, the very essential of emotional well-being and resilience in a world that often seems or feels to LGBTQ+ folk as hard boiled in the brutal oils of rancour, competitiveness, superiority, and hate brewed from looking at us as different, unacceptably different. The most toxic oil in that killing brew is that of being seen as different, from possibly a 1% difference from 99% other essential and the same human qualities, characteristics and DNA. The insecurity is hatched from the hatred of homophobia, beginning more often than not from a fear of how they feel about a same gendered person, fearing they might love. And all of this reaction is seen as part of the social norm. As a straight friend once observed, “Sexual orientation is just like eye colour, something we are born with, something we accept as part of the wonderful diversity of nature. I don’t understand why some people make it such a point of difference, fear, and hate.”

make
people
feel
loved
today

Kindness in the face of this is a soothing balm, not unlike the biblical “balm in Gilead”. Kindness, gently applied, is a full embrace, is complete love, platonic, and more. Kindness removes and seeks to remove all judgment, to dissolve all doubt about loving and caring. It bestows the fully enveloping and soothing existence of total acceptance.

Kindness is the soothing touch, relief and comfort, smoothing a gentle salve on a child’s bruised knee. Kindness is that visual glimmer of acceptance and agreement when the whole room full of others is against the speaker. Kindness is a gentle touch on my hand when I am distressed. Kindness is an unsolicited token of appreciation. Kindness is being able to step into another’s shoes, especially when things are tough, supporting by letting them know you get it and have got them. Kindness is support. Kindness is a Dad hugging his son and saying “I am so proud of you!”. Kindness is the acted-on knowledge that all are equal, that all deserve to be content, to be happy, to be accepted and to be free. Kindness is awareness of how you live, how you impact self and others, how you treat your home, and our home, Mother Earth. Kindness is the full, undoubting embrace of life and love to all, endlessly.

May I be thoughtful at all times and exude kindness wherever I see it is needed in an often cold world. May I remember to be kind, effortlessly and sincerely.

Photo by Clay Banks

PEACE

Paige Seburn

This stone monument bears inscriptions in English, French, Mohawk and Anishinaabemowin. Its message, a quote from Soka Gakkai International founder Daisaku Ikeda, reads: “Peace. Nothing is more precious than peace. Nothing brings more happiness. Peace is the most basic starting point for the advancement of humankind.”

<https://niagaranow.com/news.phtml/niagara-parks-unveils-peace-monument-overlooking-where-niagara-falls-was-born/>



Dave Van De Laar

PAYING IT FORWARD BECAUSE OF A BACKWARD GAZE

River Glen



Grandma Fritzie

My life has more seniors in it than any other demographic. That has a way of happening, through our lives, birds of a feather flocking together. As a child, I had the usual adults in my life, all in their prime, especially before peers became more important. However, a few old women definitely made impressions. There was frail Grandma Fritzie, my father's mother. One could say a lot of unflattering things about said Dad, but I give him credit for his affection toward stray cats and the deference, even gentleness, he showed his mom throughout my childhood. I mean it was ironic, as misogyny and sexism were his default. I know teenage me modelled that softer behaviour towards Grandma, even when I was rebelling towards the other adults in my life. Towards the end, I remember gently holding

her ninety-plus old hand in mine as I looked down on the mottled skin, blue veins and fingers misshapen by arthritis. I was filled with love, so that hand looked so beautiful to me. Her thoroughly wrinkled face, where bright blue eyes still sparkled, showed me her delight in my simply taking the time to be there. Thank you, Auntie, for caring for her. Thank you, Fritzie, long rest in peace.

Mrs. Cross was someone who took time and energy to be there for little girl me. She lived next door all my childhood. She lived with her only daughter, Connie, and son-in-law, Paul, who never had had children, so I imagine she might have had some granny feelings towards me. While our home was chaotic, the home next door was neat as pin and very, very quiet. They grew a vegetable garden; her daughter was a seamstress, and the husband made furniture. I remember my mother's cooking was made better by the recipes shared from their kitchen. When I was ten, Mrs. Cross taught me how to make bread. When I was twelve, her daughter taught me how to sew. Though, by thirteen or fourteen, I was heading towards being much more interested in sex, drugs and rock n roll even if too young to go to San Francisco with flowers in my hair or run away to Woodstock. I did increasingly make myself as scarce as I could from my parents, but I was never-the-less imprinted by what happened after Mrs. Cross's stroke. My Mom was hired to be her caregiver during the day when Connie and Paul went to work. I guess I assumed it was what neighbours did for each other. This went on for some time, but I remember I was eighteen and planning to go away to Europe for the summer, and I went next-door to say goodbye to Mrs. Cross, and somehow I knew I would never see her again, and in her eyes I saw her thinking the same thing. The day she died, I knew it; I just knew it had happened.



Only pic of Mrs. C. taken over our common fence. She always wore her hair in a bun.

Peggy L. Well, jeeze, if there was a greater contrast to the sweet old ladies above, it was that legend in her own time. I was in high school when Peggy and Chile moved in across the street. Outwardly they were your typical empty nesters, except Peggy was in a wheelchair. Back in the day, nothing was made 'accessible', so although they built a ramp in the back, the only time Peggy got out was for medical appointments. She soon was calling on my Mom to run errands . . . many to the liquor store. Mom, Chile and Peggy pretended she wasn't a drunk, so staying in the chair kept Peggy and him from fighting. I was told Chile was in retirement. From the Sicilian mafia, maybe? He did shoot his gun into the sky on New Year's Eves. Then another story was that her leg had been broken by him, for being a loose woman, which led to many surgeries and her being wheelchair bound, so perhaps that's why he was so devoted? Such gossip did serve to make them the most interesting people on the block. If I didn't have much vocabulary before, once I spent even an hour with Peggy's advanced tongue, I had enough for the rest of my life. I don't remember her being crude or vulgar enough to shock me, but she dyed her hair red and had a fiery

temper, that's for sure. Another thing I remember was that while I was channelling being a hippie, her granddaughters wore beehive hair and liked cars with big fins; this was a totally different low-rent culture than mine, so it was fascinating. I did hold some resentment towards Peggy because she was always looking out her window and reported to my Mom every time I lit up a cigarette walking down the street. Of course, over time, Peggy got sicker and sicker and rather demented. I really can't remember how it ended. But my Mom being a good neighbour through the thick and thin does stick with me.

These days, I guess I have a 'Pay It Forward' sensibility, drawing from youth formed values, yes, but maybe even more from my Mom dying suddenly at fifty-five, so I never had her as an elderly parent to care for. Unlike me, my brother had not moved to a different country, so the end care of our aunt and our father was on him. On him for years! I so wish I could have helped him, and I did appreciate all the good things my aunt had done for me. She deserved care. And there is the significant piece that made it so hard for my brother; Auntie had a martyr's complex and did it with a nun's passion. She'd say to me over the phone how everything was fine. I would have helped, but I had four little kids, a farm and no help myself.



Decades later, here I am, and I try to make a difference where I can, surrounded by oldies, except when I am with my kids and grandkids. I'm hoping the young ones get all the intergenerational exposure they can. With our blended families they have a couple of grandpa figures and more than a few grandmas and aunts and uncles showing up to our family holidays. That makes me happy for them. If in the end some remember you fondly, it is a lovely thing.

Photos supplied by River Glen



KINDNESS

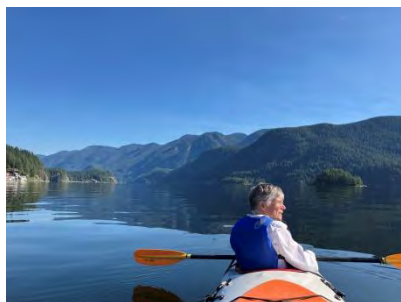
Val Innes

There's a sweatshirt I wear which says "In a world where you can be anything, Be Kind." In a world that often isn't kind these days, this has become a mantra for me. What we can do to meet the grim news of the day – Russia's war on Ukraine and the threat of World War 111, Israel's genocide in Gaza, and Trump's unhinged behaviour in the USA – is treat those we know, those we meet, and those we see with kindness, with a hand held out and a thank you for who they are and what they do. It usually doesn't cost anything to be kind but your time and attention, but giving those is priceless.



Kindness. The cashier in Superstore, who looks tired and as if she'd like to be anywhere else, straightens her back and breaks into a surprised smile, when she's thanked for what's she's doing. A small act of kindness near the end of her shift, something to take home with her perhaps. The elderly woman in a nearby house, grimacing with pain as she tries with sore arms to lift her empty recycle box and drops it, is practically in tears of gratitude when her neighbour comes up and lifts it off the driveway, offering her an arm to lean on, while she takes the woman and the box to her door. The driver of a car coming along the road who sees you waiting, and so he stops to let you cross. Small acts perhaps, but not insignificant. They lighten a day and maybe linger. They make a difference. Kindness. Practice it. Celebrate it!

Photos by Val Innes



THE FALL

Ellen Woodsworth

"Dip dip and swing, dip dip and swing, my paddle flashing with silver, follow the wild goose flight, dip dip and swing, dip dip and swing." I chant, as our kayaks glide through the cold ocean water at Deep Cove, the sun barely warming the mountain air. Fall has arrived. The Canada geese, heading south, honk adieu for this season. A turkey, carrots, beets, potatoes and other vegetables are baking in the oven waiting for our return. We will share the wondrous Thanksgiving spread with the Masuhara clan and their pies. The maples are laughing in their fall splendour of reds and gold splashing across the North Shore forests. Quarry Rock is packed with hikers waving at Joy and I to join them.

Tomorrow Marsha and I will hike up to Cabin Lake on Cypress to test the waters for perhaps one last exhilarating swim or maybe just sit on the ridge to share our lunches and view with awe the spectacular northeast mountain ranges. I take a leisurely walk along the Fraser River to enjoy the colours and delight in the colourful variety of birds darting from bush to bush, snatching the last orange or red berries as they prepare for the winter. It is cold. There is a dusting of new snow on Mt Baker.

I am resisting the fading of the summer's warmth, the nights already dropping to below 5 degrees. I dread the coming darkness, the cold forcing me inwards. I reach out to family and friends to fill my heart and ease the despair of these times. We exchange the last of the summer's harvest of garlic, onions, beets, potatoes, goji berries and pumpkins. I pick the last dahlias but leave the red roses to comfort my eyes. I bring in the Christmas Cactus, laden with buds. The white dahlias are magnificent in our Japanese vases. I fill them every day with new blooms. At the community garden, I haul wheelbarrows full of horse manure, digging it in to prepare for the November garlic planting. I check our supplies as if I was still in Toronto preparing for a snowstorm.

Today, in the October fog and rain, I am sad, grieving all that I have lost and will lose, and I am only 77. Coco staggers out of the bedroom crying. With shock, I realize she is almost blind. I lower my hand to gently stroke her soft belly; her sister Yoyo is curled quietly in my lap as I write. They, too, are aging. I have lost so many over the past year, and I realize we will lose so many more. I despair as wars destroy entire nations, and the environmental chaos bringing fires, heavy rains and drought.

I dread the dark cold damp winter ahead, but for the moment it is a sunny cool fall day, and I am warm enough.



Ellen's photo supplied by her



WINTER CARDS by Cyndia Cole and Angie Joyce



RECLAIMING AND MAINTAINING MY HOLIDAY JOY

Farren Gillaspie 2020

It seems like maintaining my holiday joy can sometimes take a lot of effort. So why do I bother? Well a good part of it is that I am stubborn, but also I knew that joy as a child on the farm. My cousins and grandparents all owned farms around us, and for a time we would all congregate at one of our homes. We children would sing carols while the moms were unwrapping and prepping their contributions to the feast. The hostess would cook the turkey. Smells of dressing and hot cider blended with the scent of evergreen boughs and a large tree harvested from our farm's forest areas. Getting the trees was an adventure in itself. The dads would get together and would take the children to the forest in a large articulated sleigh pulled by two huge Percheron horses. There were three dads and four children at the time. I guess these were times that imprinted in my young mind the joy of Christmas.

The families grew, and we gradually started having Christmas without all getting together. Mom began to fight her own demons involving her tragic childhood. When everyone was together, I guess it was easier for her to keep her trauma at bay. Despite her depression and eventual alcoholism, she would always cook a fabulous dinner. She would sink into despair, and we would have to eat dinner alone without her. I was the eldest, and I left home at seventeen. I rented a beautiful two story old brick farmhouse. I worked at a farm machinery dealership just down the highway. Christmas came around, and I filled the rooms with cedar boughs and got a large pine tree. That was the time when multicoloured huge balls, tinsel, and garlands were the fashion. In subsequent years different styles came along. There were red and green lights, copper coloured lights, blue lights, and so on. That Christmas was a bit lonely because I was determined to start my own traditions. That meant not getting drawn into the sad vortex at home, but it also meant not being with my younger siblings.



iStock

In my twenties, I moved to Calgary. My job in mental health was demanding, but it allowed me the means to buy a house with a friend who was about my age. He worked for Shell Oil as an accountant. With two lucrative incomes, we decked our house out in style, and through the month of December on weekends our home was alive with laughter, food, friends and alcohol. I could never seem to manage a relationship that would last. There were many parties, and I tired of being the lone wolf. One year, I met someone in November. We weren't romantically involved but were both in the same situation. We agreed to be each other's date throughout the holidays. New Year's day our agreement would come to an end, and it did.

After seven years, I moved to Vancouver and had an apartment in the west end. I was really alone but excited. As I unpacked my ornaments, a heaviness came over me. Some of these decorations were from the time when mom showed up unexpectedly, raging and drinking; some of these were from the time when I had just broken up from a relationship that I thought was the one, and these were from the year my best friend died! I realized I had to break free from these memories. I repacked them and put them back into my locker. I found a fallen branch from an Arbutus tree in Stanley Park, painted it white and brushed it with silver glitter. I went to the Bay downtown and bought some crystal and glass ornaments and white mini lights. The result was my Happy Tree! I meditated at length on the meaning of Christmas and the word that kept coming to me was love! A few years later, when I had some distance, I took out my old ornaments and set up a regular tree. This was in the eighties, and it seemed I was losing a friend a week to AIDS. My two trees comforted me.

My time in Vancouver presented me with many opportunities to grow spiritually. Religion just didn't fit for me at all, but I wasn't prepared to give up the holidays. For a while I refused to reference the word Christmas at all, insisting on happy holidays as a greeting. One of the most stressful things about the holidays was gift giving. Always worrying whether the receivers liked their gifts or if I would have to pretend

I liked what I received. So one year I just told my friends I would not be giving gifts, and I wouldn't receive gifts anymore. Some friends were angry, but I think most of them were relieved.

I felt strong, and one year when I heard my family in Ontario had stopped celebrating Christmas, I flew back. Mom had died several years before. I tacked boughs all around our veranda with lights and ribbons, packed large vases with boughs throughout the house and got my brother to go with me to get a tree from our property. Neighbours started dropping by to see what was happening, as our neighbours would often do. My father, would say, "oh that's my son from Vancouver. You know he really likes Christmas!"

For many years now I have worked Christmas Day, so my staff could be with their families. When I eventually did have a partner, we would celebrate together with the residents at work. Well this year I knew I would be retired, so we would have an extraordinary Christmas. Then Covid! It will still be special. We will zoom and phone our friends. We will have holiday drinks and fabulous food. Most of all we will have our pack, Jen, myself and our crazy rescue dog, Beckham. Oh and Love!



Photo supplied by Farren Gillaspie

ARABIAN MEMORIES

Garth McIver

My story begins in 1979 and takes place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Jeddah is a trading port on the Red Sea and at the time was Saudi Arabia's largest city and capital. Riyadh, the future capital, was just beginning to be built. Jeddah was a bustling ageless city that still maintained the pale yellow brick structures characteristic of Arab architecture, and with the exception of the new and sprawling walled palaces of the oil rich royal princes, I doubt it had changed much over the last century.

Although Saudi Arabia was becoming a very rich country due to its vast oil reserves, it was still struggling with infrastructure and providing its population with the benefits of the oil windfall. But things were changing fast. The great road builders, the Italians, were quickly building a network of impressive highways linking the country's communities. The Manitoba Telephone System which knew a bit about connecting remote areas was building their telephone communications. The Americans were providing a modern hospital and recruited western trained healthcare workers. I was one of the recruits.

Whittaker Corporation, out of California, had the contract to provide the personnel and services at the modern MODA hospital. MODA stands for Ministry of Defense and Aviation, and this hospital was located on the outskirts of Jeddah and within the secure confines of a Saudi army and air force compound. The hospital was the finest in the kingdom at the time. It served not only military personnel but the many princes and princess of the extensive royal family, sundry VIPs and the staff of the various embassies. The contract with Whittaker stipulated that 60% of the doctors and nurses had to be American or Canadian trained. There was no medical school in the kingdom at the time.



I had seen the full page advertisement in the Canadian Journal of Medicine recruiting for Saudi Arabia, and the rest is history as they say. The monetary compensation was much more than I could ever hope to obtain in Canada, and the possibility of paying off my university loans in as little as a year was too

tempting to ignore. Whittaker flew me to their Los Angeles headquarters for an interview and briefing. I was hired, needing only to wait for the travel documents and visa to the kingdom.

I was hired as an emergency room physician for the MODA hospital. The emergency room at the hospital was large and busy with two physicians and eight nurses. Next to the emergency room was the VIP room where the privileged, the princes and ambassadors, were seen and could relax with a cup of tea in comfortable chairs and sofas. It was also where the physicians were permitted to take their breaks. I met some interesting people in this room and none more so than in 1980 when I met Idi Amin.



Idi Amin had been the president of Uganda from 1971 until he was overthrown in 1979. His dictatorship is known for being one of the most brutal of its time. He was a corrupt, cruel man known for ethnic cleansing, and it is estimated that up to 500,000 individuals were killed under his regime. Idi was a Muslim, and after he was overthrown, the Saudi Royal family allowed him sanctuary. He lived close to Jeddah, about 50 miles away in the cooler mountains around Taif.

Idi had several wives and perhaps 50 or more children. But one particular daughter was said to be a favourite. Unfortunately, this daughter was involved in a head-on car collision. It was law at the time that anyone involved in a car accident was first taken to the police hospital, the Bab Sharif. She was determined to have internal injuries and doctors had performed abdominal surgery. Bab Sharif had a terrible reputation. It was a decrepit building, poorly run with filthy rooms and overrun with vermin. The staff were poorly trained. The poor girl did not do well at Bab Sharif and not only was not improving but was in danger of dying. Idi Amin used his influence to have her transferred to our hospital. Once she arrived, she was found to be feverish and failing fast. She was taken back to the operating room where our surgeons removed a sponge that had been left in her abdomen.

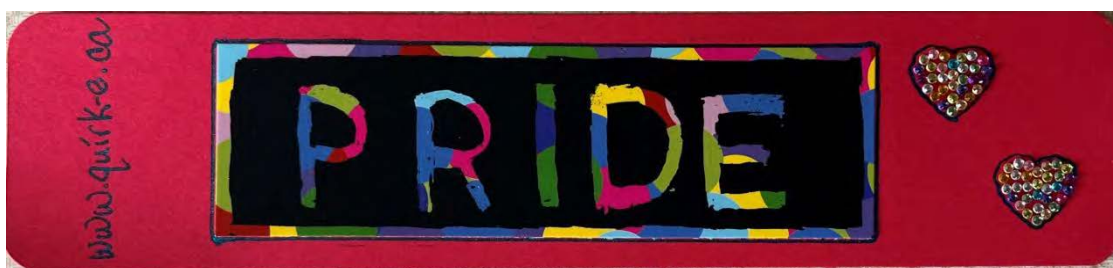
Idi's daughter had a long and slow recovery. Most days Idi would visit, usually with one of his wives and maybe one or two of his children. He would always stop in the VIP room for refreshments. On occasion I was taking my break at the same time. I remember my first impression. Of course, I knew his reputation and was more than a little intimidated to be in the presence of a man who had overseen the mass murder of many, and sent even more into exile.



He was very tall, well over 6 feet and although overweight appeared powerful for a man in his 50s. He was soft spoken, and although he spoke English, we did not have a speaking relationship. On occasion I would overhear a few snatches of his conversation with others. But I had only his deportment from which to form an opinion. He engaged easily with others and despite his fall from power and grace, he was always the dominant presence in the room. He was the focus of attention, in command and control. And, although I searched, the tyrant never genuinely revealed himself. This icon of evil -- who sat across the room from me, sipping tea.

Idi Amin died at Jeddah in 2003 at the age of 75.

Photos supplied by Garth McIver



Cyndia Cole

THE SECRETS

Jan Bruce

I could hear my grandmother packing my things, readying for my departure. "I've packed all your things. When you're finished your nosh, wash your hands." My grandmother was my mom's mother, and she used several Yiddish words all the time. But when my mom and uncle were kids during World War 11, she sent them to Catholic School. Grandma's Yiddish words were passed down in her family for generations, a trickle-down effect.

During my stays with my grandmother, I would accompany her to the nearby Anglican Church. As she swept and washed the floors, I was given a rag to wipe the pews. When we were done, we'd walk home and have lunch with my grandfather. After washing the lunch dishes I'd go down the basement stairs to play with Markie. My aunt named this little Maltese Terrier Mark Anthony, but we called him Markie. I was the Lion tamer, bravely lunging at him with a small chair in one hand and a tea towel cape in the other. I would lunge and reprochee, taming my little white lion.



As I grew older, I wondered why my grandmother always volunteered to clean the church but didn't attend Sunday services. As children, my sister and I had little spiritual guidance. When the hospital clerk or doctor's receptionist asked about our religion, my mother answered that we were Anglican.

It wasn't until I was 40, that my grandmother worked up her courage and asked me to share some Jewish traditions with her. I was living in Montreal, doing my postgraduate (Nursing) studies. This was the first time in my life that I was exposed to my grandmother's Jewish heritage. I was intrigued by the rich culture and traditions. I asked my grandmother why she lit the ritual candles. She replied that she remembered her grandmother lighting the Menorah at her house in rural Nova Scotia. When my grandmother finally asked me to light the candles with her, there was pleading in her voice. I sensed shame in her eyes as she made the request. I was bewildered, and then the dominos began to fall into place. Was this why my grandmother volunteered to clean the church but never attended Sunday services? Did she need to keep secrets?

Grandma's family, the Eisens, originally lived in what is now Germany. Pre 1800s, they immigrated to the New World. They settled on the east coast of Canada and the USA. They populated an area called Ships Harbour, Nova Scotia. In 1910, my grandmother's parents decided to leave Ships Harbour. They bundled up their kids; grandma and her seven siblings and trekked by horse cart and train to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Sadly, within 6 months my great-grandfather was dead. To support her children, great grandmother Dean rented out rooms at the top of the house to "boarders".

At age 90 my grandparents and parents decided to explore their roots. They traveled to the east coast looking at tombstones. They found Grandma's house and her grandmother's house. Eisens dotted the area. My parents knocked on strangers' doors looking for living relatives. They were happy to find a few cousins. Upon their return home, I told my mother what Momma, my grandmother, had told me. My mother adamantly denied that her mother, hence, she, was Jewish. She had genetic testing through 23 and Me which proved she was incorrect. She never wavered. My mother is 93 now, and blurted out to me a few months ago, "why didn't she tell me we were Jewish". Many answers popped into my head. I replied, "I don't know".

Funny how family secrets can alter the lives of generations. I'm grateful to know my Jewish heritage.

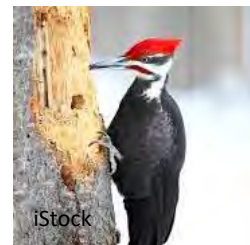
Photo supplied by Jan Bruce

COLOURS

Ellen Woodsworth

Joy was so worried with my grief that she gave me a huge box of coloured pens. What an act of kindness. My summer became a healing of colours. Sundown over summer's hazy golden hay fields, the orange sun barely visible and the horizon filling with pink pastel clouds. The blue, green and black of the open forest surrounding the cottage become increasingly intense as the sky turns to grey and another August day vanishes. Each morning the blue green filtered light stirs me. With trepidation, I lift the old worn-out yellow bedroom curtain just a crack, to peer out at the day.

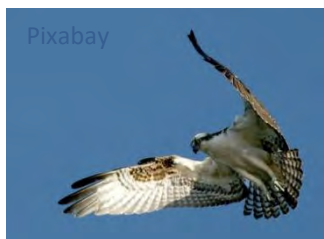
Today, I can hear the red headed pileated woodpecker at work on the dying elm trees as the sun surfaces over the hill. The brilliant white swans are honking at each other, waking me up to admire their beautiful formation swooping down into the blue bay below the cottage, framed by the green of the tall maples.



Getting out of bed, I slowly stagger, barefoot and so fragile, onto the deck with my milky tea, my coloured pencil crayons and colouring book. This summer each morning, I choose three or four colours and let them loose. It cheers me right up. No words for the first hour, just colours pulling me out of the darkness of my terror filled nightmares to the joy of mauve, pink, orange, golden, blue, purple, red, green. A multitude of variations, more than I can name, are shifting my mood from darkness to light in the comforting warmth of these summer mornings.

The intense sound of thousands of cicadas, clicking endlessly, remind me of a Japanese summer. The chatter of squirrels, the raucous honking of the Canadian geese, and the cry of the red-eyed Vireo call my attention. I am waking up, coming alive in this nature woodland, a shifting rainbow of sounds and light, where I first came at one month of age. Now I am 77.

Peace so profound births the grin spreading across my face. I am finding contentment, profound contentment. An osprey soars over in her handsome suit of white, brown and black. A yellow and black Monarch butterfly drifts over to land on my shoulder for a moment. The black squirrels race, soaring through the air from one limb to another, crossing the forest in minutes, without looking back to note my open-mouthed astonishment.



Life quietly opens a multilayered panorama of colours and sounds, revealing themselves deeper and deeper each day, as my worn-out city eyes gradually release the fog of grief, expanding my vision into another world, and slowly healing the ravages of the past year. My oldest dearest friend, my only niece and my cousin's only daughter have died.

There's the nightmare of Trump's election, the massive Liberal cuts to WAGE for women, and queer and indigenous rights while announcing \$15 billion for the Canadian military. The genocide of Gaza, starvation in Sudan, the elimination of USAID, DEI programs, and trans, immigrant and refugee rights as well as massive fires have collapsed my dreams of peace, climate change and a more just world. I am on my knees in political and personal exhaustion.

Nature asks me to sit quietly, watch and listen to a world full of colour, animals, music, children and friends. It calls on me to paint the vivid array of colours and life revealing themselves to me. Open your heart, open your eyes, open your mind. Rest, breathe and feel more and more deeply. Allow yourself to be healed by the richness of the universe in her full colourful splendour.

Tonight, I will dance naked in the moonlight. Tomorrow, I will paint and learn another way. Soon, too soon, I will return home and try to harmonize my work for peace with nature's lessons. Joy's kindness will help me balance the grief with the healing that I get from colour.



THE HOLIDAYS

River Glen

Whenever the cup of happiness has been passed to me, I have reached forward with waiting hands. I've raised the cup to my eager lips and once in a while I've been able to calmly sip and savour, but usually, I swill the contents with abandon. Thinking back on my Christmas experiences as a child, I searched my mind for the Hallmark card images. I can remember being very young and lying under a decorated tree in the warm glow of the coloured lights, seeing the bright ornament shine and the green smell richer under there. I retrieve another memory where I was watching the primary colours rotate by on the creaky, mechanical colour wheel, as it illuminated a cheap aluminum tree. Then back to another green tree with tinsel and clumps of icicles, the water filled tree stand that could not stop the needles from continuing to fall.

My mom told the story once of her single mom during the depression, which started earlier for her at the age of three in 1926 when her mom was widowed. I guess Grandma Bessie, who passed when I was 4, had procured a free tree on Christmas Eve, and she decorated it for my mother with saved foil from Hershey wrappers and fabric scraps and yarn. I guess years of poverty is one reason why my mom rather selfishly didn't let us help decorate the tree until years later when she'd had her fill.

I remember being both intrigued and put off by a few visit to Santa's knee at the local department store. He was, after all, a strange man. I remember meekly asking for this or that and Mom, afterwards, saying he might not be able to bring those things, but she was sure I'd like what he did bring. We never bought the photo offered by one of his elves because it was just very expensive. That was OK, I guess as I was an early skeptic of the old bugger, and I think I might have ruined the fantasy too soon for my younger brother at some point.

I remember school pageant shows every year, practicing carols, being a shepherd sheepishly in front of an audience of grown-ups. The winter breaks were always a relief, for I sort of liked, but often resented school days. The adults in my life and at school were always trying to control my spirit, which was as its best in my fantasy world or in the fiction books or the magic stories on TV. I was a kid marketed to by the newish medium of television. I heard the message of 'look at all the great things you can have'. I saw the perfect TV families. I couldn't articulate the feeling I had that, somehow, my circumstances were lacking. I also had to figure out how to deal with the season's religious component.

I remember we got dressed up and went to mass as a family on Christmas day. My mom was apathetic, raised with a simple view of Jesus and some Jewish traditions, and my father was Catholic only in front of his family and on Christmas and Easter. I was sent to Saturday catechism class and did my first holy communion, so I was into it, more or less. I do remember, I wasn't allowed to eat breakfast before mass so as to be able to take communion. I supposed that was so the Jesus Christ wafer didn't have to share my stomach with ordinary food plus a pinch of martyrdom tossed in for good measure. Somehow, with even my always ravenous appetite, I managed to live until post church breakfast and then, finally, we were allowed to open gifts. There was always underwear and socks or whatever other essentials we had been needing for a while. Mom bought herself a new bra and gift wrapped it, of course. My aunt, childless herself, always came through with a few books and a holy water font or prayer book, etc., taking her role of godmother seriously. In all the Christmases I can remember, I got total of four dolls, dollhouse furniture, but no dollhouse, so I used an empty drawer as the house, and a bike, once. My brother at some point got a small electric train and then an erector set, both of which I coveted.



1960s sad sack kind of tree

Our holiday meals always included our ancient Grandma, auntie and a not related “Uncle Al”, one of those fellows that little girls shouldn’t be left alone with. We all dressed up in uncomfortable clothes, ate stuffed celery and homemade party mix. The adults drank, smoked and made small talk. When she was still able, Grandma made the gravy. The rest was on Mom so, sure, the cranberries were from a can and the pies from the grocery store, but she made very good turkey and dressing, and we all pigged out until comatose. Having the company was good because, at least in front of them, my parents were on their best behaviour and not fighting. Yes, it was a brief recess from their hostility and my father’s emotional unavailability. However, we lived in the States, so the day after Christmas was no Boxing Day just back to the grind.



And next door neighbours dropped in before our dinner.
Photo probably taken by Uncle Al

When I saw the Christmas card words: merry, joy, comfort etc., they seemed rather over the top. I’d seen the movies, so I knew what we had was not what was advertised, and I guess my moody temperament was a factor. I always began December with some anxiety. The anticipation was uncomfortable. The fluster felt manic. The expectations we put on each other had a highly charged feeling. The best things, when they did occur, were over so quickly, leaving a hollowness that somehow also felt like relief.



Fast-forward to the home and the kids I made for myself in the 80s and 90s. I really tried to make things better. I think it was better. These days, we all surely enjoy our holiday get-togethers, especially with the grandkids added to the mix. Without a doubt, I grab the cup of happiness when it’s passed to me . . . those fleeting tastes of joy and comfort and making some merry, birthed from the love of years piled on years. Love is the most important ingredient, and no kid can be expected to feel safe and carefree if it’s in short supply at home, and no holiday is a simple fix for the lack of it.

Photos supplied by River Glen

Courage comes from
the wish to do what’s right,
to build a just society and
to be a good human being.

Daisaku Ikeda

From Cyndia Cole

And now for something completely different, this one definitely in the Or category . . .

BRIGHT BLUE EYES

Marsha Ablowitz



It was strange to be grocery shopping with Dad. It had always been Mom who picked Kitty up after school Thursdays and took her to the big new Safeway at 55th. After packing the groceries in the car, Mom would always take Kitty for a treat and 'girl time'. Would Daddy take her for a treat? Would he finally talk to her about what happened to mom? He looked sad and distracted as Kitty showed him how to find the soup section and the fresh meat section. Then, at the checkout, Kitty gasped as she saw that tall dark checkout clerk, Star, with the bright blue eyes. Kitty prayed Daddy would go to the self-checkout. She let out her breath in relief when she saw he was heading in that direction, but he paused, looking momentarily stunned. Kitty's heart clenched when Daddy turned and pushed their cart back, right into Star's row. It was too late for Kitty to pull him back. Star batted her blue eyes at Daddy as she began gracefully sliding the groceries through the checkout and bagging them.

"I'm so sorry about your wife, Joe."

Daddy jerked in surprise. "Sorry, do I know you? Did you know Nadia?"

"She was my beautiful friend. She sure loved her dark roast coffee."

"Yes, she drank a lot of coffee in her last weeks."

"I see you like lemon ginger tea, Joe." Star caressed the yellow tea box. She stared at Joe. He looked at her hesitantly and reading her name tag replied quietly: "Yes Star. I like that tea."

"Well, I will be seeing you again soon Joe . . . and dear little Kitty. Take care."

Leaving the grocery store Dad was confused. He asked Kitty if Star was friends with Mom. Kitty didn't think they were, at the end. Should she tell Dad about that scary time with the egg? Kitty and Mom were in the checkout, and Star had slipped Kitty a mini chocolate egg wrapped in gold foil while stroking mom's bag of dark roast? Mom had seen Star handing Kitty the chocolate egg and swore under her breath. Mom was so angry that she slammed the shopping cart out the exit and grabbed the golden egg from Kitty. She held it like something hot and hurled it into the garbage bin. "Stay away from that woman!" she shouted. "Don't take anything she gives you. Don't even look at her." Mommy's hands were shaking. Was Mommy scared? Kitty was shaking and about to cry. Then Mommy said "Sorry I shouted at you darling. Let's get home." That was their last shopping day together, and they didn't go for ice cream.

Kitty didn't know how to tell that story to dad, so she just said, "I don't know if Star was ever mom's best friend." Daddy didn't suggest going for ice cream. His hands were shaking when he started the car. As soon as they got home, Dad rushed to make himself a pot of lemon ginger tea. He fidgeted while it steeped and gulped it down, burning hot. Then he had another cup and slipped it slowly. An unpleasant scent of tea filled the kitchen. Kitty felt strange. Why did the tea smell rotten? Why was Daddy just sitting there staring intently at his tea cup?

It was weird to see him sitting still for so long. Usually he was rushing round the kitchen, slamming cupboards, making dinner for her. Now he was acting slowly, like Mommy when she started drinking pots of coffee and staring out the window. It was getting dark, way past dinner time. Kitty's stomach rumbled. Where was Mommy? Where was dinner? Oh, stupid Kitty, Mommy was lying still, all buried under the dirt in the cemetery. And Daddy did not want to talk about it. Tears began running down Kitty's cheeks. She wished Daddy would notice and hug her. She stood next to him. "Daddy I'm hungry . . . Daddy?" Finally he

looked up and reached to gently touch the tears on her cheek. He handed her the well-used box of Kleenex and shuffled slowly to the counter to air fry steaks and instant French-fries. Kitty didn't usually like steak, but it was late, and she was starving. They ate quickly without talking. Daddy had another cup of stinking tea.

By the time dinner was over, and she had helped Daddy load the dishwasher it was time to get ready for bed.

"Go upstairs Kitty and brush your teeth. I'll clean up here and come up soon to tuck you in."

"Yes daddy."

Kitty didn't want to leave Daddy but she followed the rules. While she was changing into her starry fleece pjs she heard the doorbell ring. A woman was at the door talking slowly to Dad.

"Hi Joe. I was just walking down the street and noticed you in the kitchen. Come out to the yard for a minute Joe. The moon is so full and bright."

"Oh Star, what a surprise. Yes, I'll grab my jacket."

"Tell Kitty you'll be up soon to tuck her in."

"Tuck her in? Sure . . . Hey Kitty sweetie, I'm just going out to the garden for a minute. I'll be up soon to tuck you in."



Kitty thought Daddy's voice sounded strange. She felt an urge to run downstairs and pull him back from the front door. She needed to say "Don't go outside daddy. Please, please, stay with me." But her legs were frozen. She stood there next to her bed stumbling to pull on her pj bottoms. "Daddy, I need you Daddy." Shaking she crept to the window and peered outside through the curtains. Why was she so frightened to look down in her own backyard? Her heart was pounding. She was terrified to see Dad with that Star woman. The moon was so bright that the trees were sparkling silver. There stood Dad speaking to a dark lady. He was looking at Star, not at the moon. He put his arms around her. She seemed to melt as he pulled her close to him and kissed her deeply. Kitty had never seen Daddy kiss Mommy like that. She wondered why she couldn't stop her legs from shaking. She felt a stab of pain as she saw Star look up at the window. Star's eyes stared right at her and flashed blue. Then Star's whole body turned smoky and faded away. Daddy turned walking slowly back to the house.

Kitty stumbled away from the window gasping. It was coming for her next. She needed to hide. Where to run? She couldn't escape outside to the yard. She couldn't run to the neighbours. The thing was out there. If she crawled under the bed it would find her. Where could she go?

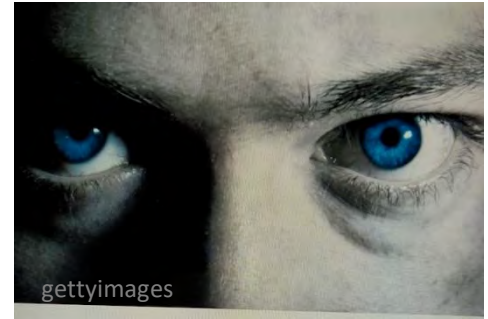
Kitty's eyes darted all over her room. It was a trap. She was caught. Then she stared at her closet door. Suddenly Kitty remembered that last day shopping with Mommy when Star gave Kitty the dangerous chocolate egg. As soon as they got home that day Mommy rushed her upstairs saying, "If ever danger comes you must quickly hide in your bedroom closet and not say a word." Then Kitty watched Mommy take a small, maroon, velvet bag from inside her shirt. Mommy sprinkled dust from the bag all around the closet door. Was the dust still there? Would the door shut tight?

Kitty heard the front house door open. Heavy footsteps crossed the living room and started up the stairs. Maybe it was Daddy coming to tuck her in like he said he would. But why did it feel dangerous like something was coming to kill her? And Kitty knew this time she would not go to heaven. She crept into the closet and pulled the door as tight as she could. She squatted down making herself small. Her head was pounding and she bit back a sob. Mommy said to stay quiet in the closet.

Footsteps were coming down the hall. Her bedroom door squeaked open. The daddy person was looking for her. Did he growl or just sigh? "Kitty sweetie, it's me, why are you hiding?" It sounded just like Daddy, and Kitty felt relieved. She was about to fling open the closet door and rush to hug him. But

something stopped her. He was right there, but he didn't smell sweet with daddy smell. He smelled like knife-sharp smoke. Her throat hurt. She was gasping.

"Come out darling. It's time for bed." He stood at the closet and reached for the door knob but jerked back as if something stopped him. This time she thought he growled. "O.K. sweetie. We'll play it your way." He squatted down close to the closet door and peered through the keyhole. He spoke in his gentle, loving voice. "It's safe to come out now, Kitty. Come to bed. I'll tuck you in, and we'll talk." Through the keyhole, Kitty could see Daddy's kind face and his bright blue eyes. Tears poured down Kitty's cheeks. She knew her real Daddy had green eyes.



OUR BATTLE FOR WORDS

Cyndia Cole

Our battle for words
 Has defined us for decades
 They call us perverts and deviants
 We call us lovers
 They call us criminals
 We call out 'Free at last!'
 They call us sinners
 We call Hate as the sin
 We call our Love heavenly
 They call it gender ideology
 We call it living in our truth
 They call it biological sex
 We call it sex assigned at birth
 After a brief external glance
 By someone who presumes
 They can tell us who we are and who we will become
 They call it men in dresses
 We call it Drag Royalty
 They call it pornographic
 We call it artistry, entertainment and satire
 They call it sexual and not age appropriate
 We call it rainbow families
 They call it indoctrination
 We call it positive queer role models
 They call us pedophiles and predators
 We call them out for preying on us
 They call us woke
 We call out 'wake up to injustice'
 They call us radical leftists

We call for radical empathy
 They call us libs and dems
 We call us humans who care
 They call us dangerous in sports
 We call us determined to play and to play fair
 They call it mutilation
 We call it health care that is gender affirming
 They call out 'What are you?'
 We call out 'I know who I am'
 They say you must be either or
 We say we are everything and more
 They call us not related
 We call us chosen family
 They say use your name at birth
 We say I am my chosen name
 They call for parents' rights to control us
 We call for parents' responsibility to affirm us
 They call it reverse racism
 We call it white supremacy
 They call it barbaric
 We call it sacred indigenous ceremony
 They call it religious freedom
 We call it bigotry
 They say 'be who you are told to be'
 We say 'be who you know you are'
 They say submit
 We say discover
 The battle to define us defines us
 Are we who they say we are?
 Or do we have the power to define ourselves
 And win our battle for words?
 This much I do know
 When we reveal our true selves
 Love
 Always
 Always
 Always
 Always
 Wins!



Photo by Nancy Strider

And following this we have a sombre piece which is definitely not a celebration, quite the contrary in fact, and one whose topic we should pay far greater attention to, as some other countries have.

OUR CLIMATE IS GETTING HOTTER AND MORE EXTREME

Lorri Rudland

Industrial countries had a chance to maintain our perfectly balanced, habitable world, if we had worked together and converted our economies, but we did not. The increase in heat on planet Earth is caused by “human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs)” [*Climate change: global temperature*, Lindsey and Dahlman]. In other words, through the burning of coal, oil and gas. But most countries, including ours, have not reduced our GHGs enough, if at all. Heat waves, droughts, forest fires, floods, and other extreme weather events like tornados, hurricanes, and other violent storms—all of these are happening quite regularly on Earth right now because of climate change.

Some scientists deny that climate change is caused by human activities, including the Canadian economics professor Ross McKittrick, who is advising President Trump. McKittrick also writes for the Vancouver-based Fraser Institute and the *National Post*. He and others pull together an “embarrassing collection of cherry-picked statements” that downplay the perils of human-caused climate change [“A Critical Review of Impacts of GHG on the US Climate” from *The Tyee*, 2025/09/02].

The Paris Accord of 2015 is a treaty adopted by 195 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference which took effect in December 2015. Its goal was to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels. Although 2024 exceeded the 1.5 C target, breaching that temperature for one year does not mean the Paris Accord is broken [World Meteorological Organization (WMO), State of the Global Climate]. Temperatures will be measured over the next decades to see if the temperature will stay at 1.5 C or increase. An increase is a serious concern. If countries of the world continue reporting as they have been, that would result in “emissions of 51.5 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2030, a level only 2.6% lower than in 2019” [UN Climate Change Report, 28 October 2024]. The UN states that “Greenhouse gas pollution at these levels will guarantee a human and economic train wreck for every country, without exception.”

In 2025, on August 26, 2025, Lytton, BC recorded the highest temperature for that day in Canada at 41.3 C (106.3 Fahrenheit) [Canadian Press]. And during a severe heat dome in 2021 that extended through the Pacific Northwest both in BC and the US, Lytton recorded the highest temperature again at 49.6 C (121.3 F). The Village of Lytton burned to the ground shortly after. The global temperature is rising steadily and heat waves are increasing in frequency and intensity [Climate Injustice, Otto].



According to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, “2024 was the warmest year since global records began in 1850. The global average surface temperature was 2.32 F (1.29 C) above the 20th century average (57.0 F or 13.9 C)”. Although there is a huge variance in temperatures on our planet, the concept of a global average temperature helps to track changes in Earth’s temperature. This temperature is created by taking measurements around the globe and then converting them for anomalies, such as the difference between the observed temperature and the long-term average temperature for each location and date.

The WMO Report, 28 May 2025, forecasts that “the annually averaged global mean near surface temperature, for each year between 2025 and 2029, is predicted to be between 1.2 degrees C and 1.9 degrees higher than the average over the years 1850 – 1900.” They also stress that “every additional fraction of a degree of warming” drives more harmful extreme weather, ice melt, ocean warming, and rising sea levels. And if GHGs are not reduced, the “global temperature is on track to rise by 2.5 degrees C to 4.5 degrees by 2100” [NASA Science, Is It Too Late to prevent climate change?]. “The rise in global

temperatures would begin to flatten within a few years, “if we stopped emitting greenhouse gases today” [NASA Science]. “Temperatures would plateau but remain elevated for many, many centuries.” Temperatures are irreversible for humans alive today, but “every little bit of avoided future temperature increases results in less warming that would otherwise persist for essentially forever.”

Some impacts of ice sheet melt:

- The massive polar ice sheets of Greenland, the Arctic, and Antarctica are melting, as are mountain glaciers. As they melt, we lose a cooling effect — these white surfaces reflect back solar energy away from the Earth. But as the ice disappears it creates larger, darker land masses that absorb heat which further accelerates warming [National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) at University of Colorado, Boulder].
- Oceans are “the key to regulating climate”. Oceans continue to warm, and sea levels continue to rise [WMO].
- As the Arctic permafrost thaws, trapped greenhouse gases are released that further accelerate the problem. The WMO states that Arctic warming over the next five extended winters is predicted to be more than three and a half times the global average.

“The entire Greenland ice sheet could melt by the year 3000 causing a rise in sea level by 23 feet (7.4 meters),” if GHG’s continue at their current level, [NSIDC’s *Why Ice Sheets Matter*]. “For most of the twentieth century, the ice sheets made very little contribution to sea level, and were nearly in balance in annual snowfall gain and ice or meltwater loss”. That stability changed in the twenty-first century.

An example of environmental trouble in BC is the new LNG export facility in Kitimat, BC. In June, on the day that it opened, the LNG plant became BC’s largest point-source emitter of GHGs. Furthermore, emission totals increased due to gas production across the entire supply chain — fracking, processing and pipeline transport [The Tyee, 20 May, 2025]. As a result, BC will probably fail to meet its emission targets. Moreover, the flare from the LNG plant frequently engulfs Kitimat’s 8,000 residents in black, hydrocarbon-filled smoke



which irritates lung tissue and airways especially in those who are vulnerable. The smoke contains nitrogen dioxide and exceeds Canada’s guidelines. But Tim Takaro, physician scientist at SFU, said there is no “safe” level of nitrogen dioxide. Plus, nitrogen dioxide accumulates in waterways and takes nutrients from soils, which adds up to a biodiversity loss, further adding to climate change. In addition to nitrogen dioxide, volatile organic compounds are produced. They combine with the nitrogen dioxide to create ground-level ozone “which can cause serious health problems and environmental damage” [The Tyee, 24 Sept., 2025]. Add to that the sulphur dioxide from Kitimat’s aluminum smelter which is far in excess of health guidelines. Kitimat has major health concerns, and doctors and First Nations leaders have called for a study into the health impacts of LNG production before the plan to double its capacity is executed.

Environmentalist David Suzuki explains how the world got to this sorry state:

“I think the critical problem is the underlying way that we see our place in the world. Everything was ‘what can we take from the land?’ The economic system is inevitably destructive because nature isn’t in it. Nature is only there as a resource or as a sewer to dump our waste. But Nature has no place in the economic construct because the economy is based on human creativeness and human productivity . . . And we based this economic system on the belief that the economy can — which it cannot — and must, grow, forever. That’s nuts. Nothing can grow forever in a finite world . . . that belief is the destructive agent.

Our political system is developed to deal with these big crises . . . But those most affected by the decisions . . . are the children, our future generations, the oceans, the trees or the air . . . But they don’t vote and so the whole political system is tilted. So the problem, I believe, is that we

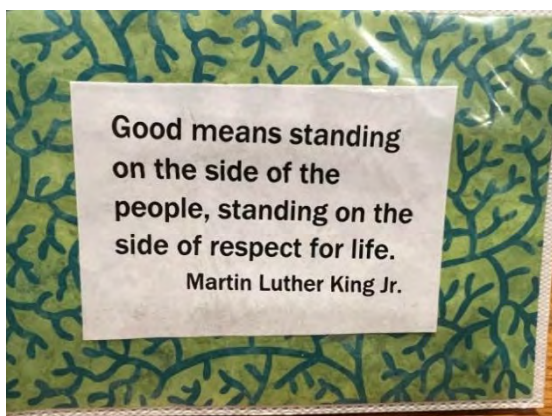
think we're the center of everything, and the systems we've designed to govern ourselves, and to power ourselves, and to grow our economy, they're all basically destructive."

[*BC Legends*, TV show, YouTube].

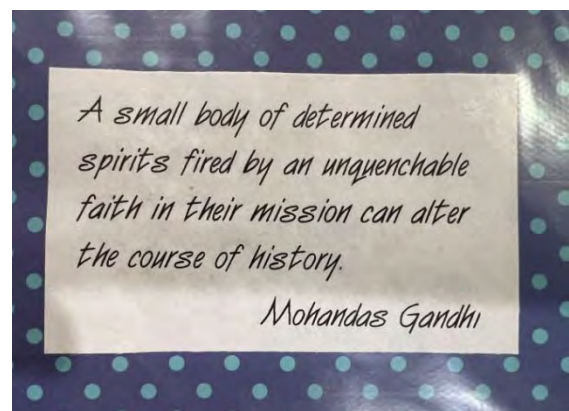
The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, at a Special UN Climate Conference, September 24, 2025, spoke of good news: "In the last ten years, projected global temperature rise has dropped from 4 degrees Centigrade to less than 3 — if current NDCs (country commitments to reduce emissions) are fully implemented." That's the question: "If?" Will enough countries comply? There have been exciting green initiatives worldwide, but the extraction and burning of fossil fuels still proceeds. Prime Minister Carney of Canada has introduced five major projects to start right away, which include doubling LNG production in Kitimat. US President Trump, a climate change denier, advocates "Drill, drill, drill." No one can accurately predict the future, but it is clear that humanity and all living species are facing rough seas ahead.

Sources available throughout the article

And now that you have read that, also know that we can change this, and some countries have done so already: here is what could be world-wide . . . just think what a difference that would make here in Vancouver!



From
Cyndia
Cole



IN COUNTER BALANCE TO DECEMBER'S OVERLOAD OF RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

River Glen



Disorder and change, bubbling and boiling all around an island of incessant wash and repeat. Homo sapiens now walk on this land where once dinosaurs walked. We breathe the same recycled air they did and are nurtured by the same sun and earth's greens. We here, in this era, see ourselves as the more evolved human species and spend effort to look for a meaning of life that confirms our importance in the scheme of things. We expect our lives to reap the eons of created investment humans have put into building civilizations, and throughout history, most have thought there is some infinite disembodied or bodied divine reasoning attached to the

foundation of creation. These gods, or, for many, the god entity, demand that in return, people show devotion and gratitude, and the various religions tell people how to go about doing that. So holiday celebrations developed.

In our time or dinosaur time all the materials in existence are elements from the stars, recycled bits and pieces left over from other experiments in existence. Our lungs draw in the element of oxygen, and we enjoy the effect of it circulating into our iron rich blood, one breath then the next. Since this is a science gifted moment in time, in the immense time of the cosmos, we can begin to understand that human life is tied to everything else, and that neither our bliss nor our torture stands frozen in place. We, too, are but a flash in the pan of the cosmos which continues to expand, and we can't stop eventually being recycled again, not to mention possible happenings in other uncharted dimensions.

Pandemics, climate crisis, political chaos with ideological confrontations and ruthless wars bubble and boil, cool and bubble and boil some more. The apparent constant is the inherent movement from one state of being to another. The resilience is built with the crumbs of the past, one breath followed by another. That is the real promise of the future, infusing meaning into these days. It can seem so exhausting when witnessed by an old human, who has been around the sun and the block quite a few times. Especially when some of the battles won don't stay won. But it's that promise of the new assembling of ideas and things we need to appreciate and keep in mind; the elements that were around before us are still full of the potential to go on and on, but with humans now a part of the cause and effect process and product, at least during this currently playing song and dance.

Humans being Stardust turned into consciousness can't help but think that the consciousness that humans offer is just what the cosmos needs, and that human minds and feelings are meant to witness and be witnessed, and then, many think, judged and go on for an eternity. What a concept that is, so alien to the life and death of stars, that there is a human reality fixed somehow in perpetuity.

Certainty of that, or in any other concept, eludes this writer's mind, which was recycled from dinosaurs, but I'm always ready to celebrate my take on it or yours with feasting and fun, and then get up the next day and fight for the stuff everyone needs.



Screenshot of costume available online-Temu



MAYA ANGELOU

Sheila Gilhooley



I am a big fan of Maya Angelou. Her poetry speaks of kindness, not as a trait, but as an active choice requiring courage, compassion and a generous spirit instead of apathy or anger. She writes “people may not remember what you said or what you did but they will always remember how you made them feel.” For me, that is especially true of kindness. I remember the feelings of both kindness and hurt, but tend to remember only the details of the kindness.

Angelou talks of strength and resilience and how it fits with kindness. She suffered a huge trauma when she was eight years old. Raped by her mother’s boyfriend, she told her brother, and he told her uncles. The man was arrested and found guilty, but only sentenced to one day in jail. He was beaten

to death. Her family chose to never speak of it again, so she had no counseling or support. She thought her voice had killed him and didn’t speak for nearly five years, a trauma reaction called selective mutism. She became an avid reader and listener, eventually developing a profound command of the English language and also learning other languages like French Spanish Italian and Arabic. She never went to university, but she received forty honorary PhD degrees.

The kindness and inspiration of a teacher in high school changed her life. The teacher praised her reading skills but challenged her love of poetry, telling her “you do not love poetry until you speak it; they are only words until spoken aloud, and they mean more than is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning.”

Her first book *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* established her voice, the one she had silenced as a child. Maya Angelou’s voice is magnificent, deep and powerful, giving her poems a whole special quality of inspiration. It has warmth and humor and strength. She read her poetry to her special teacher and began to speak again. Her poetry describes kindness as a powerful choice requiring courage consistently practice virtues like truth, mercy, and generosity.



In her poem *Continue*, she tells us to be who and how we are, and to astonish a mean world with our acts of kindness. She elaborates on this theme through much of her poetry. Empathy and resilience are brought together in one of her most well-known poems *And still I Rise*. “You may kill me with your hatefulness, but still like air, I rise.” Kindness does not mean you are weak; kindness is a bold act, and it takes courage to be vulnerable, to risk judgment and yet maintain your boundaries. Maya Angelou is clear that being kind does not mean never saying ‘no’, and she cautions that if you always try to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be.

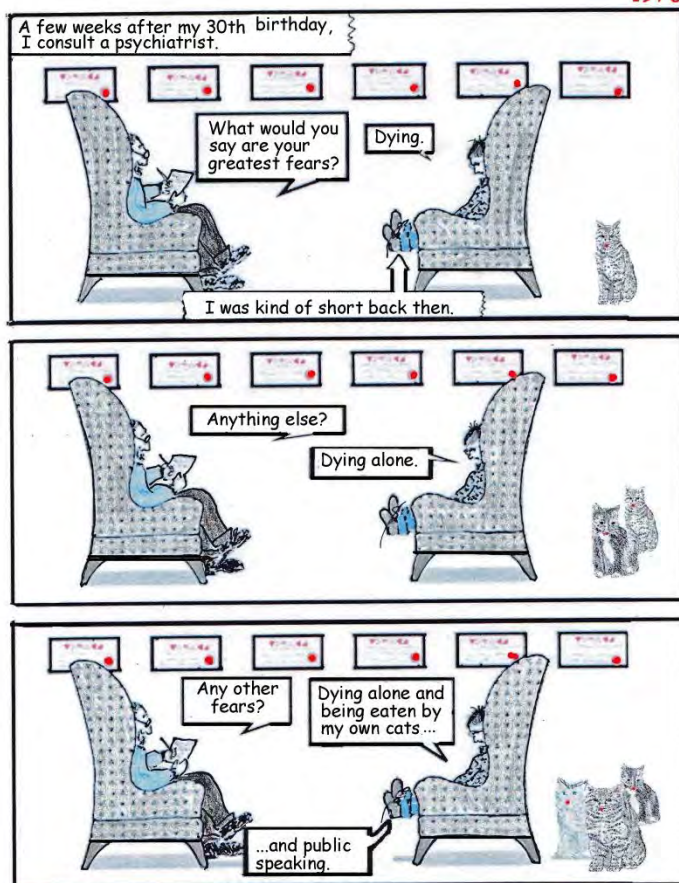
She was part of the civil rights movement and was in a writers group with James Baldwin. She worked with Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. When MLK died on her fortieth birthday, she never celebrated her birthday again. In her poetry on kindness, she says: “You are enough and have nothing to prove to anybody and try to be a rainbow in someone else’s cloud”.



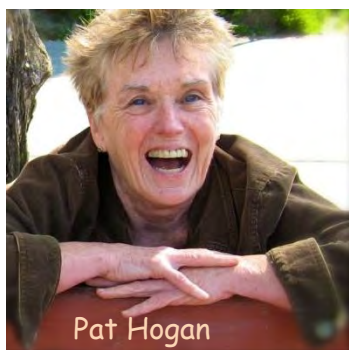
In 2010, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the U.S., by President Barack Obama.

Black History Today

1976



JUDY FLETCHER'S ART



1963-69 SAN FRANCISCO

Pat Hogan

The following is one leg of my life's journey to Canada, home to me since 1969. (More stories to follow.) Synanon: Chuck Dederich, the founder of Synanon held group meetings in a warehouse in downtown San Francisco. He founded this offbeat group in Bodega Bay on Northern California's craggy coast, creating a communal village of addicted users of drugs and alcohol, giving them home, hearth and meaning to their wasted lives. Chuck had come from a background of alcoholism and abuse. In exchange for his total support – housing, food, and community – the members of his group had to do what he told them to do, including playing the games he created – confrontational group encounters which permitted group members to call others in the group on their own "games" – the stuff they tried to hide, deny and avoid. Harsh verbal confrontations were followed by gentleness and support. The rest of us non-residential, 'ordinary' people, seeking something in those turbulent days of the 60s were called 'squares.' We played the 'games for squares', aka non-users. We were all equals at the games, equally responsible, and equally called on.



The Synanon facility during the 1960s

WHAT DO I CELEBRATE?

Val Innes

Actually there's rather a lot that I celebrate at this point in my life. Oh, don't get me wrong; I'm very aware of the state of the world right now as well. There's Russia attacking Ukraine and threatening others; there's the unhinged madman ruling the USA, kowtowing to the billionaires and threatening our sovereignty; there's Israel practicing genocide in Gaza with we Canadians complicit in that. There are sixty-four countries in the world where it is illegal to be who I am, a lesbian. And no doubt about it, the world is probably more troubled than it has been since World War II, always including the possibility of nuclear war, not to mention the very real threat of climate change. I don't, of course, celebrate any of that.

However, I live in Canada, and I celebrate the fact that my family emigrated from Scotland to Canada instead of the USA where Dad, an Aberdeen University medical professor, had been doing a sabbatical in Boston for six months a few months prior to our move in 1958. I celebrate the fact that I live in a democratic country that has universal health care, a decent education system and supports the poor. Oh, it's not perfect, by any means, but it's there, and if I wind up in hospital someday, that's not going to bankrupt me. I celebrate the fact that Winnipeg offered me the opportunity to get four degrees and build a career I loved teaching English and Art in high school and then English in college and university.

And I celebrate the fact that, when I came out, after a failed lesbian relationship in which I had been closeted, I was accepted by my parents and found a community under the wing of Heather Bishop and her lesbian guitar group who introduced me to the whole Winnipeg Lesbian community. And I further celebrate the fact that with my new community over the next twenty years, we helped move Canada to change the law and give LGBTQ people the same rights as the straights. We marched, wrote, protested and challenged the law, and we won!

In 1986, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, there were a number of lesbian, gay and Trans hangouts where we would gather, but there had never been a gay conference. A group of us lesbians decided to do that and chose to approach the downtown University of Winnipeg. We were successful and held the first Lesbian Issues Conference at the University of Winnipeg attracting a large number of lesbians to attend. It was a huge success, and that's something to celebrate. And there were the Pride marches: the early Pride marches were not as peaceful and joyful as they are now,



CBC documentary "one gay city: a history of LGBTQ life in Winnipeg"



but, boy, did they make a difference! And they are as joyful and as much fun as they are now because of us, all of us who worked to make that happen. That's so worth celebrating. I am more moved to that Canadian celebration in today's world as I watch LGBTQ rights next door, in the USA, fall in so many places under the Republicans, although I am worried about Alberta's attack on Trans rights. One more battle we hope to win.

I also gratefully celebrate my health. I have Multiple Sclerosis, but it never got beyond Relapse-Remission, so here I am in 2025, seventy-nine years old, part of Quirk-e, part of Mill Creek Village where I live, with good friends and still a little family left, still writing, still painting and drawing, still creating and building, still walking every day, still canoeing and swimming at the lake. It's a good, useful life, and I enjoy and celebrate that.

Photo supplied by Val Innes



Qmunity is a non-profit LGBT2S+ organization based in Vancouver that works to improve queer, trans and 2-Spirit people's lives, providing a safe space for them and their allies to fully self-express while feeling welcome and included. The new building under construction will be an even greater catalyst for community initiatives and collective strength.

Quirk-e has been in a mutually beneficial relationship with Qmunity for many years. Qmunity provides us with events that we can participate in throughout the year. In addition, Quirk-e's zine publications have been graciously printed and distributed by Qmunity.

Quirk-e looks forward to many more years of collaboration with Qmunity.

Qmunity- <https://qmunity.ca>, reception@qmunity.ca, 604-684-5307 ext. 100
1-800-566-1170

QUEER ORGANIZATIONS

If you're looking for connections within the queer community in the Lower Mainland or on Vancouver Island, the following contacts should be useful.

- Rocketman website with a list of queer organizations: <https://rocketmanapp.com/blog/13-organizations-supporting-lgbtq-communities-in-british-columbia/>
- Qmunity- <https://qmunity.ca>, reception@qmunity.ca, 604-5307 ext. 100 , 1-800-566-1170
- Vancouver Island Queer Resource Collective (Vancouver and Victoria)
<https://viqueercollective.com/>
- Dignity Seniors Society <https://www.dignityseniors.org/>, dignityseniorssociety@gmail.com
- Vancouver Pride Society <https://vancouverpride.ca/>
- Surrey Pride surreypride.ca
- Alex House alexhouse.net,
- New West Pride <https://newwestpride.ca>
- Youth 4 A Change <https://www.youth4achange.net>

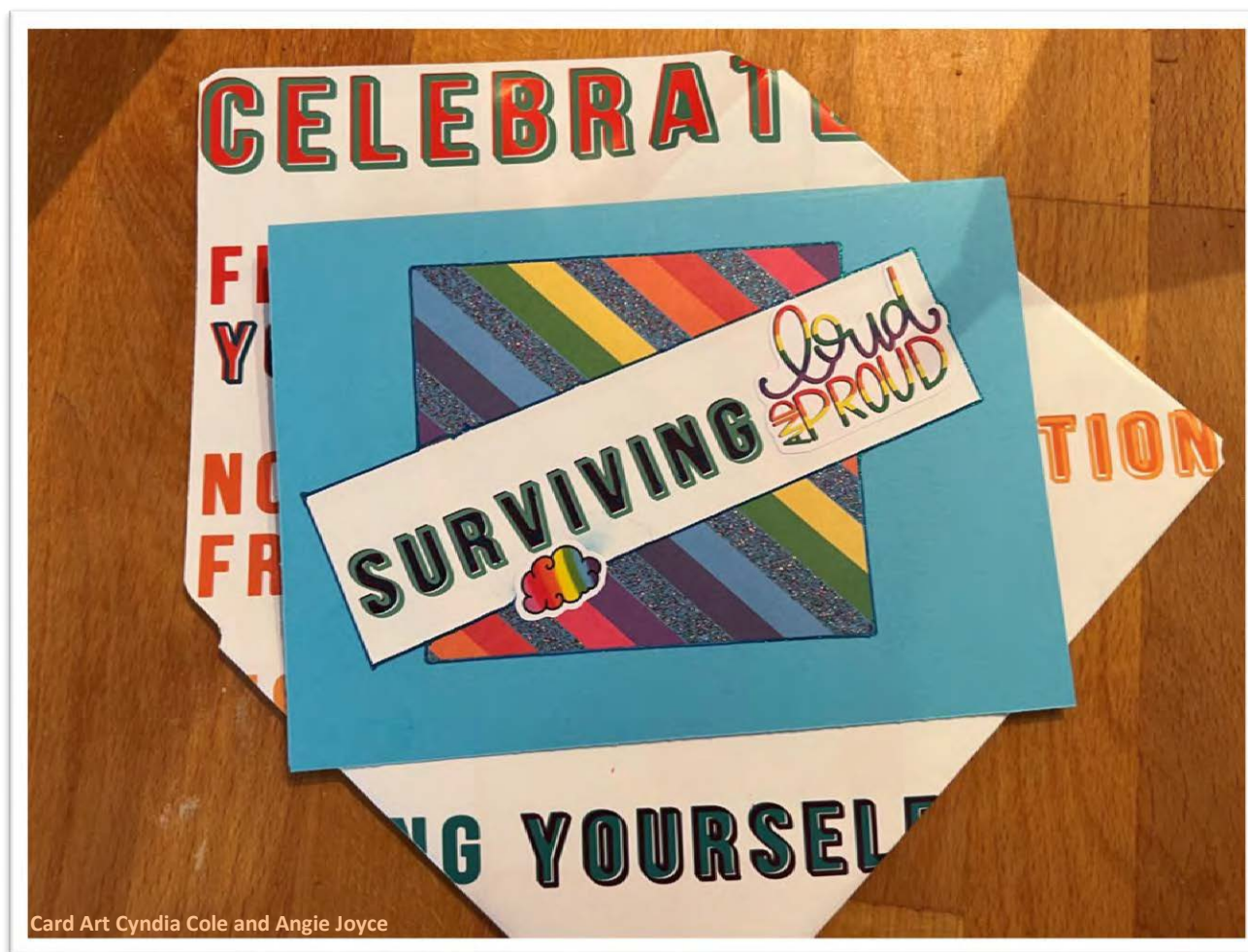
Collected by River Glen

A site River Glen thought you might be interested in is **Good News from LGBTQ Nation**
<newsletter@lgbtqnation.com> As the site says:

Good things are happening to LGBTQ people. It's easy to overlook the positive stories in the daily mix of news, so every other week we highlight moments you may have missed.

Like it? [Share it with a friend](#). Everyone could use a little good news.

CELEBRATE WHAT'S GOOD!



AND WORK TO CHANGE THE REST.