

OUR FUTURE . . .



WHAT WILL IT BE . . .

A ZINE BY THE QUIRK-E ZINERS



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Editing: Val Innes, River Glen. Layout: Val Innes

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Photographs: credited throughout unless they are stock photos.

Our Future is self-published and printed by Qmunity in Summer/Fall 2026.

All rights remain with the authors. We are grateful to Britannia and to Qmunity for their support.

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 Zine Readers, once again the Ziners (editors) and the content creators (Quirk-es) have created a collection of pieces for your enjoyment. The title of this issue, “Our Future . . .” was suggested as a prompt to get Quirk-es to explore another “tense,” and there are a few offerings that took that direction. But Quirk-es do have minds of their own, and therefore you will find memoir, topics of concern, adventure or works of fiction on topics that the writers care about, be it past, present or future. There is also the addition of the question in the Zine’s title. We do live in stressful times: war, inflation, and the environmental consequences of more fossil fuel infrastructure being invested in, despite the planet getting hotter every year. There is the pushback against transgender people’s healthcare, and politicians using them as scapegoats to galvanize a base through fear and misinformation. The ugliest are slurs calling us groomers and pedophiles, which the haters are currently chanting outside schools in my area.

Over the twenty plus years Quirk-e has been writing, imaging, imagining, advocating and supporting each other, we have built a strong foundation, and our futures will be built on our enjoyment of creating, our deep bonds of friendship, and our determination to leave the world better than we found it. We Ziners and Quirk-es hope our art gives encouragement, information, escape and enjoyment to you, our readers. Let us look forward to better times with our sleeves rolled up and our elbows up, helping to make a healthy, safe, secure future full of hope and possibilities.



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.

DECOLONIZE SPACE

Don Orr Martin

I was six years old when the USSR launched Sputnik. It was the first artificial satellite sent by humans into the final frontier. A shiver of Cold War tension gripped the US when this Soviet satellite made its first orbit crossing North America. Was it a weapon? A spy camera? The trajectory took Sputnik east across the Pacific Ocean. Once it reached our continent, it passed directly over my hometown of Yakima, Washington. My parents had all us kids stay up late that October night in 1957. We lay on a blanket in our front yard staring at the clear starry sky. The night was darker then. And we saw Sputnik blink by. The space race was on.

Initially, the US and USSR sent other animals into space, then eventually (in 1961) fighter pilots--Gagarin, Grissom, and Shepard. We'd been prepared to expect space exploration for a while. There were a number of TV shows well before there was an actual space program. These shows were all pretty campy, with low budget special effects, but they all seemed to have military themes.

The first episode of Star Trek aired in 1966, promising something different, a "prime directive" intended to prevent interference with other cultures. We kids were rapt. We all wanted to be astronaut/explorers. It took a while to realize that real-life space programs were not so much about



exploration, or to seek out new life, or to befriend new civilizations. Their primary purpose was about military dominance. We've known this, of course, for decades now. Reagan had his Star Wars initiative. Trump has his Space Force. Netanyahu has his Iron Dome. Putin has his nukes in orbit, and Xi Jinping has his reusable rocket program.

Superpower cultures have been oozing colonial propaganda the whole time. Nearly all the space-based stories, TV shows, and movies were (and still are) about intergalactic colonialism. Even Star Trek morphed into mostly bellicose episodes about photon torpedoes and civilization-killing weaponry. Popular media has enlisted audiences to expect, or emulate, space conquistadors, cosmic capitalists, celestial missionaries, astro-supremacists, and planetary zionists. Content often involves interspecies slavery and genocide -- epic battles that aim to conquer, to possess, to transform a culture, a technology, a territory, or a whole planet. Even when there are no known extraterrestrial populations to oppress, the framing of space travel is about colonizing. NASA planners talk openly about the technological challenges of colonizing the Moon or Mars. They're seriously working out how to establish settlements that can survive without an available atmosphere or water.

In 2026, there are over 17,000 active satellites in orbit around the Earth. The US and China have the most. Over 10,000 of these satellites are owned by one company—Elon Musk's Space X. In addition, there is a vast amount of debris, the largest 9,000 or so chunks orbit at high speeds and are tracked by radar. China and India now have spacecraft on the Moon and plan manned missions and bases there by the 2030s. The US just sent astronauts out past lunar orbit. Colonial boundaries on the surface of the Moon are imminent.

It fascinates me that humans are dreaming of leaving the Earth for interstellar destinations, not just to explore, but to spread and colonize. Even with the impressive scientific advances in my lifetime, we don't yet understand what the universe is made of. Yet the ruling classes on Earth are ready to stake a claim of ownership, to plant a flag on a "Class M planet" in



case ours becomes uninhabitable. Is it a biological imperative or just an imperialist fantasy? Will humans go on to conquer and pollute the galaxy?

What would it look like to decolonize space? It's hard to imagine in an atmosphere of worldwide settler violence and invasive orbital technology. We say we want truth and reconciliation with Indigenous populations that were torn from their cultures, demeaned, imprisoned, and killed in North and South America. We decry settler violence in Palestine and genocide in Gaza, Sudan, Syria. Yet recent advances in women's rights and LGBTQ2S+ rights are being reversed in several places. Superpowers sell ballistic weapons to other authoritarian regimes to oppress their citizens and neighbours. And they are eager to spend trillions of dollars aimed at making the Moon and Mars livable. Why not focus first on making our own planet livable?

It seems obvious that to decolonize space we must first decolonize Earth.

Pictures provided by Don Orr Martin

EXTRACTION

Lorri Rudland

The caribou, wolf and bear roam freely on the land
The wolves crush bone with teeth and jaws,
The bears rip flesh with teeth and claws,
They share the land, and nature's laws.

The earth is home to deadlier beasts,
Some leave tailings ponds that leach,
Moved by greed, not Gaia's need,
They frack, clear cut and extract.

While wildlife and forests burn,
Around the world, the rivers churn,
Trees and animals have no voice,
And tomorrow's child has no choice.

Those who rule from concrete towers
Disdain the earth and its children,
They rush to extract gas and oil,
Their actions foretell mass extinction.



"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." John Lennon

MOTHER EARTH DAY

Cyndia Cole

Dear Mother Earth,
 Today is your special day.
 We want you to know you are the best mom in the world,
 Because you are the world.
 Without you, we would not be here,
 Because there would be no here.
 You keep trying to teach us to clean up after ourselves,
 To get along and to stop picking on each other.

Sorry for the mess we have made.

Sorry for all the squabbling.

Sorry for how we have treated you.

Going forward, we determine to do better.

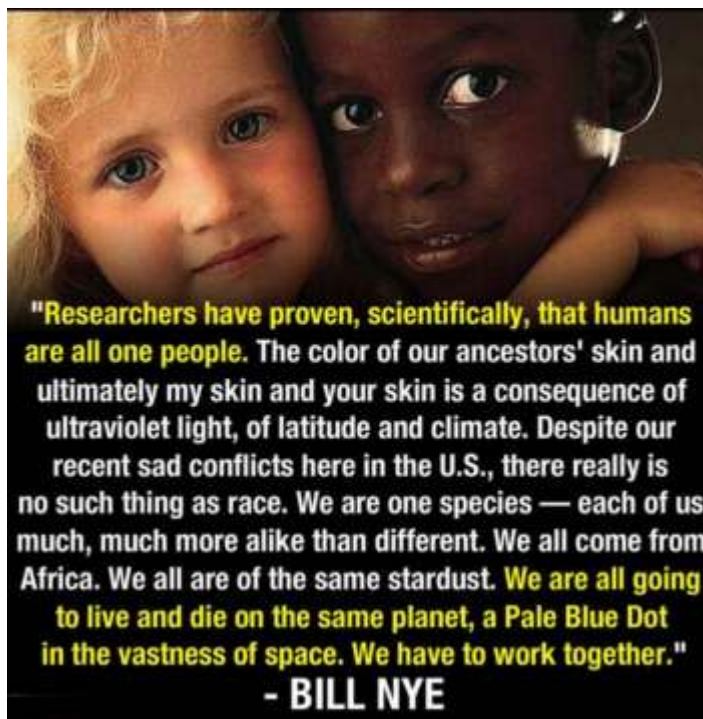
With love and gratitude for keeping us alive

Your children,

Cyndia and my eight billion siblings.



Pictures provided by Cyndia Cole



If you can be anything in the world, BE KIND.

BE PREPARED!

Val Innes

I have just celebrated my eightieth birthday this summer, and I also have just had a close friend for sixty-one years die, so on both counts I am aware of what seniors need to do both for our own sakes and for the sake of those we leave behind when we die, as we all will at some point. And we need to do it while we are thinking clearly. The first, and most obvious, thing that we need is a will. You do not want to have to figure that out, choose and get a lawyer, and write it while you are sick and dying. For one thing, for many of us, what's involved is assembling legal documents, listing assets and designating individuals you trust to carry out your wishes. You need to be physically able and thinking clearly when you do that. You'll also need to appoint an executor or executrix you trust and who has, verbally or in writing, agreed to fulfill that role. Getting that informed agreement ahead of time is really important because it's a fair amount of work, and executors can refuse to do it. You also need to name your beneficiaries with full names of people or organizations.



You should also think about setting up medical representation agreements to manage care if you can't manage it yourself, preferably with a trusted representative who will act on your behalf if you can't. As I write this, I'm aware that I haven't done that yet, and I need to; I'm including the links to My Voice¹, Nidus² and Prep School³ to help you with this; they will connect you to very useful information on expressing your wishes. And you also need to choose a lawyer or notary public you can trust – it's not strictly required, but it does ensure that your will is legally sound. I wrote my will using online resources, but I had a lawyer go over it, and she suggested some fairly significant changes.

And here are some things that seniors often don't think about even if they have a will. Have you appointed someone with enduring power of attorney to make financial and health decisions for you if you become incapacitated? Do you have a letter of instruction to whomever is your executor or executrix telling him or her where to find a list of your banking accounts, assets, investments and debts, your credit cards, mortgages or loans, and sets of your keys and a list of your passwords? If you put all of that into a



secure and accessible place, you can tell the two witnesses to your will and your executor or executrix where that secure place is. You should also include a written version of your personal information – your full legal name, date and place of birth, your citizenship and SIN. Another point to consider is whether you have listed your personal wishes. Also do you have pets, and if so, have you made arrangements for those pets if you are not there to look after them? And finally, if you care about this, have you

detailed your wishes for your burial, cremation or memorial? All that information needs to be accessible to people you trust.

All of this you should review regularly and update whenever a significant life change occurs. For example, for me, the friend who just died can no longer be in my will or be a witness to it, so writing this for all of you, is a reminder to me to update my will and my instructions. This may seem like a grim subject, but isn't really; it's sensible, realistic and necessary. It gives you some real control over the end of your life and what you will leave when you go.

1. [My Voice Advance Planning Guide English.](#)
2. info@nidus.ca
3. <https://deathsapprentice.ca/prep-school>

BUS INFORMATION

Janie Cawley



Janie at 16

For three years before graduating from high school, I worked part-time in the women's shoe department at Eaton's Department Store. In the spring of 1965, I realized that I needed a full-time job because I was going to university in the fall, so I started putting out job applications.

After two weeks of no responses, I was offered an interview by Mr. Kent, the personnel manager of the Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound Bus depot in downtown Vancouver. The interview was brief and focused on the fact that I already had some work experience at Eaton's. Mr. Kent told me he was particularly impressed with what he said must have been my extensive experience interacting with the public as a shoe salesperson. I nodded and smiled. Mr. Kent offered me the job. He told me that it involved shift work and that I was to meet with Miss Galt, the Bus Information Supervisor, in the main office the next day.

Although happy to have full-time employment, I accepted the job with some trepidation about interacting with the public. In truth, soon after I started working at Eaton's, my major objective became to find tasks that did not involve dealing with customers. For example, I was at a loss as to what to do when a woman insisted that her shoe size was 6, and her feet did not need to be measured. She had picked out two display shoes that she thought were rather nice and asked me to bring her these shoes or shoes like them in a size 6. For an hour I tried to fit size 6 shoes on what to me were clearly size 7 feet. She couldn't understand why no shoes fit and blamed me for not picking out the right ones.

Finally, I made one last trip into the stock room. I put a pair of size 7 shoes in a box clearly marked as size 6, then took the shoes to the customer. The size 7 shoes fit perfectly. "About time," the customer muttered, putting her own shoes back on. I put her new size 7 shoes in the size 6 box and took the box to the nearby cashier station. The cashier was supposed to check that the size of the shoe matched the size recorded on the box. She looked at the shoe size, then at the box, then at me. She had heard everything the customer had been saying and maybe was as fed up as I was with the woman's rudeness. The cashier sighed and gave her head a slight shake, but completed the transaction. Then she asked the customer if she would like to take the box home. I held my breath.



"Why would I ever want a box like that?" the customer asked and marched off.

After that, I welcomed with open arms tasks such as working in the stock room, carrying messages to and from different departments, and even delivering shoes to nearby shoe stores. When there were no other salespeople available and I had no choice but to wait on a customer, I usually managed to find the right size and style of shoe. I even managed to smile when a customer made comments such as: "You look too young to be a salesgirl." Or "I want to be served by someone more senior." Or "I prefer a salesman." Or "How old are you anyway?"

Now I just had to hope that people who used bus information weren't like some of the customers I had dealt with in the shoe department. Mom and Dad were pleased that I got the bus information job. When I told them shifts were involved, Dad quickly worked out a schedule. When I worked day shifts, he would drop me off on his way to work and I could take a bus home at 3.

"Ok," I said, "but when I work the 3 to 11 afternoon shift, I'll take the bus to and from work." Dad was having none of it. "It's fine and dandy taking the bus during the day, but no daughter of mine is coming

home on a bus at that hour.” Mom had crossed her arms over her chest. This was the “over my dead body” signal that I wouldn’t be taking the bus at night.

When I arrived at work for my first day, a woman greeted me at the door. “Are you Janie Cawley?” she demanded. I nodded. “I’ll be doing your training. Come to my office.” She didn’t introduce herself, but I knew she was Miss Galt because a badge on her blazer proclaimed in large bold print her name and position.

In the office Miss Galt pointed out that I had been hired to replace women on vacation. Each woman got one week of vacation time. I would replace each as her vacation time came up. Most were telephone information clerks. If I were required to replace someone with a different job description, Miss Galt assured me, I would get extra training.

I really didn’t have time to digest this information as Miss Galt quickly went on to outline how to interpret the bus schedules, arrival and departure times, and main routes of both the Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound buses. She emphasized the need for good manners and infinite patience, no matter what. She then handed me a bulging envelope of bus schedules and told me to become familiar with everything. I spent the rest of that day and the next two days studying schedules, times, and routes at a small desk in the corner of the reception area. Then I was set loose on the busing public.

The room for the bus information clerks was at the back of the second floor of the bus depot. There were six stations, three on each side of the very narrow room. Each station consisted of a table and chair, a headset, and a small board where a red light flashed when a call came in. I would flick the light switch to the right to answer a call and to the left to hang up. Fortunately for me, the full-time clerks were very helpful. Joan, who operated the station next to me, showed me how to plug the headset into my board at the start of every shift. She told me to be sure to unplug the headset at the end of my shift or whenever I left my station during my shift.

By the end of my first full day answering customers’ questions, I already had a fairly good idea what the job of a bus information clerk entailed.

“Hello, Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound bus information.”

“Are you bus information?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Could you tell me what time the next bus leaves for Abbotsford?”

“Where are you calling from?”

“Vancouver, of course!”

“The next bus leaves the Vancouver Depot at 9:40 a.m.”

“I can’t possibly make it by then.” The customer hung up without even a goodbye.

“Hello, Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound bus information.”

“Are you bus information?”

By the end of my first week I realized that I should limit myself to answering only the question asked and not add extra information, however helpful I thought it might be.

“Hello, Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound bus information.”

“What time does the bus leave to catch the ferry to Victoria?”

“There is a bus every hour at 10 past the hour starting at 7:10 in the morning until 8:10 in the evening.”

“Is there a bus around noon?”

“Yes, there is one at 12:10.”

“How about later in the afternoon?”

"There is a bus every hour at 10 past the hour starting at 7:10 in the morning until 8:10 in the evening."

"So, there is no bus after 8:10."

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, that doesn't help me at all!"

"You should know the 8:10 bus meets the last ferry going to Victoria." I added this merely to save the caller the time of finding some other way to get to the ferry that wasn't going to leave. The caller slammed down the phone. Another lesson learned.

Sometimes the query that followed my "Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound bus information" was not "Is this bus information?" but was "Are you the Greyhound?" By the end of a long day of customers asking if I was the Greyhound, I was, on occasion, tempted to bark. By taking a deep breath or two, I managed to suppress the urge. However, there were other kinds of questions that sorely tried my patience.

"Hello, Pacific Stage Lines and Greyhound bus information."

"Are you the Greyhound?"

"Yes, Greyhound information."

"If the bus leaves before I get there, will it wait for me?"

There was no point in asking which bus the caller wanted to get, nor did I feel I could say I would go down and chat up the bus driver about the possibility of waiting. I also felt a simple "No" would be too abrupt. I found refuge in the safe, but not necessarily accurate statement that all buses left as scheduled and that passengers must arrive on time.

"Oh," was that caller's only response, for which I was grateful.

My instructions to show good manners always were most tested by questions about times.

"Does the bus for Chilliwack this evening leave at 5:40 or twenty to six?"

"Does the bus for Chilliwack this evening leave at 5:40 or twenty to six?"

Now this was a question difficult to answer politely. I ruled out that 5:40 *is* twenty to six as I was afraid a note of incredulity might creep into my voice. As I saw it, I had only one option left.

"There is one at *both* times," I said.

"Wow!" replied the caller. "What good service!"

Some calls very nearly left me at a loss for words.

"Can I get my car on the bus to the ferry?"

Did someone actually think they could get a car on a bus? Well, the answer would be the same whether or not it was a crank call.

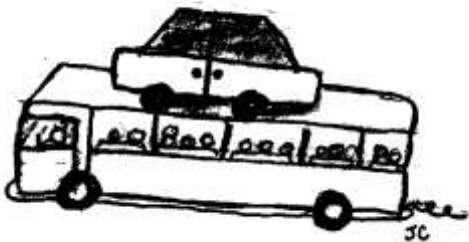
"No," I said. "The bus is for foot passengers only." Then I hung up quickly. Other calls I simply had no immediate answer for.

"Is the bus station still where it used to be?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Where did the bus station used to be?"

"Right near the Queen Elizabeth Theatre."

"Yes, it's still here. The exact address is 150 Dunsmuir Street."



"Oh, thank goodness," the caller said.

Shortly after that call, I realized that I had left my evening snack on the bus I'd taken to get to work. I was entitled to a 15-minute break at 10 p.m. Even though I was on my own in the late evening, calls were sparse, so I could unplug my phone. I rushed downstairs to get a snack from the bus depot restaurant. Downstairs was in total chaos. Police officers and sniffer dogs were everywhere.

"What are you doing here?" one of the officers shouted at me.

"I work upstairs giving out bus information," I said.

"Are there any more people upstairs?"

“No.”

“Why didn’t we know there were people up there?” he yelled. I had no answer for that, so I said nothing.

“Get out of the building,” he ordered. “There has been a bomb threat.”

I wondered to myself if the man on the phone who was so happy that the bus station was still where it used to be might have had something to do with this threat. I tried to tell the shouting officer about the call, but he wasn’t interested. I went outside. There were about a dozen people milling around and talking excitedly.

It was almost 11 p.m. when the police let us back into the depot. I was afraid that if my parents knew about the bomb threat, I wouldn’t be an information clerk for much longer. To my relief, the police and dogs left quickly. I had retrieved my coat from the office and was downstairs and out the front door just as Dad showed up to drive me home.

After I’d been giving out bus information for three weeks, Miss Galt called me into her office. As part of the training process, she had been listening in on some of my calls, she said. She advised me that I needed to moderate my answers and eliminate the note of sarcasm she had noted sometimes crept in. And here I had thought I was being the soul of discretion.

In spite of this criticism, Miss Galt felt I was sufficiently prepared to replace the woman staffing the information kiosk in the main terminal on the ground floor of the bus depot. I would be starting next week and would be dealing directly with members of the public. But that’s another story.

Pictures created or provided by Janie Cawley



THE BLISS OF SUMMER

Ellen Woodsworth

I remember the bliss of summer, scrambling up the sand dunes on hot sunny August days at the Sandbanks. We were at our Southern Ontario cottage co-op, a summer refuge, for a group of lefty Canadian and American families. Going to the Sandbanks with our good friends was the closest to heaven we got.

It would take my stressed-out mom awhile to make a picnic lunch, then load up towels, blankets and make my older brothers and I put on suntan lotion. Then we would drive up the rocky, dirt road to get Eddie Jr, Nancy and Phenola from their cottage at the top of the hill. Somehow, we all jammed into the old blue Studebaker and headed off to the Sandbanks, talking our heads off.

Us kids piled out of the car the minute it arrived, abandoning mom and Phenola. They would settle in and catch up on each other’s lives personal and political, one a black Methodist leader from Harlem, the other a local farm girl turned activist, living in Toronto. We knew they would take care of everything.

Nancy and I would take off after the older boys, running as fast as we could across the blistering hot sand heading straight for the metres high, pure golden dunes. The sand was as fine as pure salt. Shifting under our fingers and toes. The dust kicked up by the older kids filled our lungs; the bright sun seared my back; the younger kids below us would be coughing. Hot particles of fine almost white sand were in our eyes, bathing suits and gasping mouths. It kept shifting under us as we struggled to reach the top, parched, sticky, gasping but finally, euphoric. We paused for a few moments to look out over the rolling dunes to



endless Lake Ontario then across West Lake. I stared hard, hoping to see the old brick family farm on the other side. I would wonder what my cousins were up to, wishing they were with us.

Suddenly, one of the boys would whoop and make a huge leap out over the dunes. The rest of us followed, stumbling down one leap after the other, finally hitting the hard packed sand to race screaming, desperate to be the first to plunge our burning bodies into the cool waters of West Lake, then surface covered with weeds, gasping for breath and begin wildly splashing each other hysterical with summer's joy, safe with each other, best friends since our first days as babies at the co-op.



Then the older boys would take off, pushing us under as they raced ahead to our moms who were still talking about social issues in the shade of the poplars. They had spread out our picnic lunch on the green plaid blanket. We grabbed whichever egg salad or Black River cheese sandwich was left and some carrots and celery, happily munching away, slurping cold Freshie drinks, burping, laughing at our mom's annoyance and soon collapsing on the hot sand. We felt such a total sense of freedom and safety. Cooling down we would doze off daydreaming about the evening to come.



At night, all our families would gather at the beach, build a fire beside the water and cut sticks to roast marshmallows. We sang folk songs by the Weavers, Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson and other songs from the civil rights movement, like "Ain't gonna let nobody turn us around, turn us around, turn us around" or "Kumbaya". Before the night got too dark to see the path, we were told to go up to bed. Our parents would remain to talk about the state of the world. Proudly barefoot, we would stumble up the rocky path under the deep black night sky full of stars.

Opening the creaky screen door of our cottage, we would creep into the peaceful dark, splay out on our bunk beds no energy left to even shout good night, too hot even for sheets. Tomorrow was assured, another lazy day with our buddies. We would listen to our parents' voices softly murmuring, our dog, Masie, snoring on the floor beside us, all of us safe for the moment.

One summer, mom received a letter which she discovered had also been published in the local Toronto paper. It said that she had been removed from her position as President of the School Board by some of the members calling her a communist for signing the Stockholm Peace Petition urging world peace. She was livid; of course she had signed the petition, and it was illegal for them to remove an elected official from public office. She fought back, but there was nothing that could stop the viciousness of a large group of right-wing citizens who thought peace activism was a dangerous un-Canadian activity.



At the end of the summer, we had to go back to face the redneck part of Toronto where we lived. It was the early 50's, Senator McCarthy and his creation, the House of UnAmerican Activities, was in full attack mode, and red baiting was rampant. They were investigating people, summoning thousands to be interrogated, arresting many and blacklisting many more, such as Pete Seeger, Paul Robson and many others. McCarthyism was spreading across the US. In 1956, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed for espionage despite huge protests, though much later they were exonerated. The powerful right-wing surge was also spreading across Canada filling us all with fear. My mom advised me to be careful what I said as I was already a young radical.

These times are triggering old memories as the right wing is on the move again, this time targeting the Trans, queer, refugee and immigrant communities and so many others.

And now here is an article that should definitely disturb Canadians about our colonial history and our continuing racist prejudice. It is to be hoped that our future can be cured of such racial prejudice.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN STERILIZED IN CANADA: UPDATE

Lorri Rudland

Canadian Senator Yvonne Boyer estimates that more than 12,000 Indigenous women in Canada since the 1970s have been coerced or forced into a sterilization procedure that took away their ability to have children. (Mar.11, 2026, by Maddi Deliplain). And several thousand were sterilized in the period from about 1928 –1970s, the majority of them Indigenous, according to Karen Stote’s book *An Act of Genocide*. Stote’s meticulous book relied on the records from governments and hospitals to compile the statistics, but the problem was that many records were “not kept, lost or destroyed.” Stote wrote “the coerced sterilization of Indigenous women can be viewed as an act of genocide, or an attempt to undermine the ability of a group to exist.” Senator Boyer, a Metis lawyer and former nurse, reported that when she worked as a nurse in Saskatchewan and Alberta, she “heard other nursing staff talk about the *Indian problem* and the *Indian problem* would be fixed if all the women were sterilized.”



The practice of coerced sterilization begins with the contemptible but very popular pseudo-science called eugenics. The eugenics movement started in the UK in 1883 from Francis Galton’s idea of selective breeding to promote positive characteristics in the population, drawing on an incorrect understanding of the works of Darwin and Mendel. The language of eugenics is insulting and demeaning—it is the language of the period. (These offensive terms are in italics, unless they are directly quoted from an original source, such as the laws that were enacted in BC and Alberta, or from the Vancouver Sun editorial of 1927).

People mistakenly believed that positive characteristics could be promoted to benefit the race. If this was true, then the opposite was also true: people who were *feeble-minded* could pass this defect on to their children. (James H. Marsh). Protestant Anglo-Saxons were very afraid that they would be *outbred* by *degenerates*. This fear emerged from the white race’s privilege and entitlement and their wish to maintain their position of dominance. Another fear was that *unfit* people produced *unfit* people who became a financial burden on government institutions.

A Vancouver Sun newspaper editorial, in Nov. 1927, explained: “It is an admitted fact in every civilized country of the world today that the unfit are multiplying at the rate something like double [the rate] of the fit. Thus, for every child born with the mental, physical, and moral ability to maintain and promote civilization, two are born with the instincts to flout the essential discipline of civilization and tear civilization down.”

- To address their concerns, Alberta passed the Sexual Sterilization Act in 1928, which lasted until 1972. According to the law, a person diagnosed as a “mental defective” could be declared to be a candidate for sterilization by the Eugenics Board.
- In Alberta, one study concluded “Aboriginals were the most prominent victims of the [Eugenics] Board’s attention. They were overrepresented among presented cases and among those diagnosed as *mentally defective*.”
- In British Columbia, the sterilization laws were in effect from 1933 to 1973. The Eugenics Board of BC could order any inmate of a provincial institution sterilized who, upon discharge, was declared to be likely to “begat or bear children who by reason of inheritance” could tend to “serious mental disease of deficiency,” as it was defined in the Sterilization Act.



Whereas the number of sterilizations was more restrictive in BC, the laws in both Alberta and BC were broadly interpreted. From the late 1920s onwards, coerced sterilizations began on Indigenous women, Indigenous men, Metis, Inuit, children, immigrants (particularly from Central and Eastern Europe); it also was practiced on the disabled, alcoholics, people in institutions, criminals and the mentally ill, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, the urban poor, prostitutes, women still in child-bearing age with four to six children, women who didn't fit the mold of femininity at that time; and finally homosexuals, two-spirit Indigenous people, and trans people. This list was collected from numerous sources. (Stote, de Bruin & Robertson, National Human Genome Research Institute, *Eugenics: Its Origin and Development*, and may be incomplete).

The Supervisor of Social Services at Essondale (renamed Riverview), an institution for the mentally ill in the lower mainland of BC, proposed the sterilization of an Indigenous girl in this way: "Patient is a mentally defective Indian girl who has always been incorrigible, wild, undisciplined and promiscuous . . . Sterilization is, therefore, strongly recommended to prevent patient from having illegitimate children, which the community would have to care for and for whom it would be very difficult to find foster homes." (Stote).

In Alberta, Leilani Muir, an abused child, was admitted to the Provincial School for Defectives in 1955 at age of 10 by her abusive mother. Leilani performed well in the Provincial School, but was given an IQ test. The test was most probably based on Western Anglo-culture and linguistic assessments that would disadvantage Indigenous peoples. After the test, Leilani was declared to be a "mental defective moron" and sterilization was ordered. She was scheduled for a "routine appendectomy" and during this procedure had her fallopian tubes cut, rendering her forever unable to bear children. She had not given her consent and was not told of this until she discovered it later in life during her marriage, when she wished to have children. The surgery did not conform to regulations and Leilani wrote, "The Board . . . took the law into their own hands" (Kowalchuk). Further IQ tests showed her to be of normal intelligence. In 1996, Muir sued the Alberta government for wrongful sterilization, won, and was awarded \$740,000 in damages. This case resulted in more than 1,200 victims seeking compensation from the government.

Indigenous Women and Lawful Sterilization

These numbers are taken from official government and hospital records. Warning: their numbers may be underreported.

- In Alberta, from 1928 to 1972, 4,739 cases were recommended and 2,834 were performed. Although Indigenous women were only about 2% – 3% of the population, more than double that percentage were sterilized.
- During the final years of the Sexual Sterilization Act, from 1969 to 1972, Indigenous Women represented about 25% of those sterilized.
- In BC, records of sterilizations have been lost or destroyed, but estimates are between 200 and 400 people, some of whom were Indigenous.
- In total, the evidence showed that "74% of all Aborigines presented to the [Eugenics] Board[s] were eventually sterilized (compared to 60% of all patients presented)." (Stote).
- So popular was the eugenics theory that doctors performed sterilizations without a legal framework across Canada and the northern territories. Indigenous women (and men), Metis, and Inuit women were targeted.
- In federally-run "Indian hospitals" throughout Canada serving mainly Indigenous peoples, from 1971 to 1974, 551 sterilizations were recorded on Indigenous women. (The number is suspect). The prevailing view was that the sterilizations were *for their own good*.

Consent and Coercion



Consent was required to perform sterilizations. In 1970, M.P. David Lewis alleged that representatives from the Department of Health were *persuading* Indigenous women to be sterilized. He claimed that interpreters were not always used and that, therefore, women did not always understand the procedures they received. Finally, in 1976, a federal government internal inquiry showed that “health workers sometimes failed to follow guidelines on when sterilizations could be performed, that consent forms were difficult to understand, and that interpreters were not always used.” In a class action lawsuit, Indigenous women reported they were pressured to consent when under duress, and/or were told they would not be able to see their newborn child unless they agreed to sterilization. And sometimes the sterilization was performed

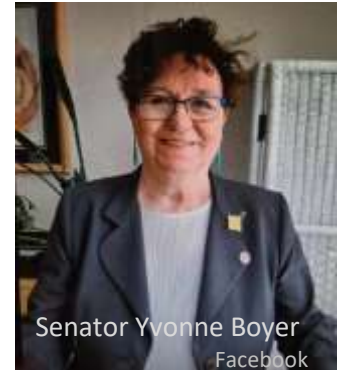
without consent at all. (Leilani Muir and many others).

The following numbers are shocking, and probably underrepresented, but show the horrific story of how sterilizations were carried out on children:

- In Ontario, a 1976 study reported that 686 sterilizations were carried out in one year, on persons who were unable to give consent, for example, developmentally delayed people and youth.
- 308 of these were on children, 50 boys, and 258 girls. And 109 of the operations were radical hysterectomies. (Stote).

Coerced Sterilization continues into the present:

- The evidence suggests that coerced sterilization continued into the 21st century. In Saskatoon, where there was no legislation to support sterilization, many Indigenous women alleged that they had been coerced to accept it during the period, 1970 – 2021. In 2021, Saskatchewan changed the law and required “documented consent prior to admission in labour (child-birthing).”
- Senator Boyer is contacted by Indigenous women from across Canada telling their story of forced or coerced sterilization. She said that this practice is still happening. Senator Boyer heard of a coerced sterilization in the Christmas of 2025. (CBC, May 20, 2025).
- Senator Boyer has introduced a Bill to criminalize forced sterilization. Her legislation, if passed, would impose a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison.
- However, during the debates in the House of Commons, while there was support for the view that “forced and coerced sterilization” should not occur, speakers were concerned “about whether criminalizing the medical procedure is the best tool to address the issue.” (Mar.11, 2026, by Maddi Deliplain). That means perpetrators will never face justice and can even continue with forced sterilization.



The statistics reveal that Indigenous women were targeted. The practice of eugenics was influenced by colonial policies of assimilation along with the prevailing racism and sexism of the times. Coerced sterilization was a grave injustice, an injustice that was never fully redressed, either in reparations for all survivors, or in penalties for the perpetrators. Morningstar Mercredi, an Indigenous author, was sterilized as a 14-year-old, but only found out decades later, when she wished to conceive; “Those who subject women to this must be held accountable. No amount of therapy or healing can reconcile the fact that my human right to have children was taken from me.” (AP, July 12, 2023).

Sources:

An Act of Genocide, Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women, by Dr. Karen Stote, Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario. And, an article online entitled "Sterilization of Indigenous Women in Canada."

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National Human Genome Research Institute, see *Eugenics: Its Origin and Development (1883 – Present)*.

The Vancouver Sun Editorial from November, 1927.

Photos provided from Indigenous websites and Facebook

MY THINKING -- IMPROVING MY FUTURE

Adriaan de Vries



I am troubled by my thinking, and the mood it brings in consequence. I have been locked in flat moods heavily sprinkled with negativity, with a focus on personal problems and seeing no way out. It's almost a doom mentality. I work to disengage myself from this. I do an hour of intense yoga or repetitious, vigorous, tai chi body moves like twists, squats, arm lifts, reaches, bends and more. A half an hour or an hour gets me into the positive zone. The neurotransmitters and hormones serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins flow again. I feel better, more positive. I go happily into my day.

I've been thinking about that thinking, and I want to work on that. I want to change my thinking through thinking. This is called metacognition; a new word for me. Metacognition is about cognitive processes, such as learning, attention, memory, and problem-solving. It's the awareness and regulation of one's cognitive processes involving monitoring, understanding, planning, [new] approaches to tasks and the evaluation of improved learning. Important functions of it, are self-regulation by adjusting thinking, habits and routines in achieving goals. It allows me to overcome my cognitive biases, especially those like: "I can't do that.", or "That is too much right now."

Oh, that's easy, you say, even after the explanation. Well, no, it's not. I easily set the intention and change the direction of my thoughts. And off I go. But 10 minutes later, I am back in the doldrums of my thinking, unless I maintain attention to my thinking. I have to engage the thinking about my thinking at all times, the monitor behind the screen. I ask self-reflective questions to take inventory. I find that I do much well. I do the various staples that raise the levels of the hormones to enhance mood. I am careful with diet with little sugar, fried fats and processed foods. I'm a yoga instructor and do intense yoga with my yogis three to four times a week. I also do resistance exercise for about an hour three times a week. I walk a couple of kilometres each day. I limit screen time as well.



And meditation, I've consistently meditated since February 1986 when I trained with the Transcendental Meditators. I evolved my practice and incorporated some (pranayama) breath work into it. What more can I do to help my thinking? I force a smile to start my day. "Fake it till you make it." Forcing a smile and holding it actually works in raising serotonin.

I think about my thinking and change my thinking. What more can I do? I practice, practice, practice!

Pictures provided by Adriaan de Vries

WRINKLED

Garth McIver

I'm 75, I'm old damn it!

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

Robert Herrick (1591-1674)
(Poem is in the public domain)

It is a lazy July afternoon and I am sitting on my balcony enjoying the sun. I glance at the back of my hand resting on my lap. For a moment I'm taken aback. I see the wrinkled skin, the speckled age spots and the prominent blue veins. I make a fist to smooth the wrinkles and the veins partially collapse. I open my hand and the hand of an old man reappears.



You would think by age 75, I'd be used to my visible ageing. I'm not. Some mornings I look at the face in the mirror, surprised at the image looking back. I turn sideways, tilt my head, ponder the jowls and creased forehead, the thinning hair, once blonde and now shades of beige and white. It doesn't fit the face still imagined in my mind.

I was recently at a large family wedding, with over 250 guests at the reception. The tables were numbered from one to twenty-five. My place name was on table number one. Yes, I am now one of the last in our clan and have the honour of occupying the centre front table. No need to mingle, the younger relatives and guests will make their way over to pay their respects. I am now the family's senior generation.

Dinner and speeches over and the DJ begins the music. I'll watch the bride and groom take the floor, and then invite their parents to join them, but that will be enough for the night. The music makes conversation a struggle. I begin to strategize how I can discreetly make my departure. It was not always so. There was a time when I wondered if I'd ever make it to old age. Well, wonder no more. I've checked that box. By most determinations, I am old, and if I'm honest I wonder if my best years have passed with only a few more memories to be made. I am grateful for the past but sometimes fearful of the future.

Many years ago, I read a chapter on the religions of India and the four life stages of transition as taught in Hinduism. They went something like this -the first stage is Dharma (education and learning ending in early adulthood), the second, Artha (career and family ending in mid-life), then Kama (teaching and retirement as an older adult) and then finally, Moksha (liberation and freedom to be one's true self). For those fortunate to have a long life, Moksha apparently starts around age 75. What a coincidence, I'm 75.

Moksha: a time of freedom and release from imposed duty, and the striving for worldly goods, physical desires and the responsibility for others. Moksha: a time of psychological liberation and a time for

self-knowledge and self-realization. The opportunity to be true to one's self. To finally be the person you were always meant to be.

It's true. I am finding self-acceptance and inner peace. Many of the mysteries of my life have begun to unravel. I am unhampered by many of life's demands with the freedom to be me. I will include ageing on my gratitude list, thankful for the blessings of Moksha. Maybe, just maybe, I'm at the beginning of one of my life's most comfortable and best stages.

Picture provided by Garth McIver

MY BIG EVENT

River Glen

From September 2025 until the break December 12, 2025 I lived with increasing pain. My doctor held onto the idea it was my fibromyalgia. As someone with decades of experience I knew it wasn't. I asked repeatedly for a referral to a pain clinic. The waitlists if you could get on in any of the Lower Mainland cities was three to four months. I went three times for X-rays: hips, knees and lower leg. In hindsight, the doctor said she never saw the X-rays only the summation from the technician. My surgeon said he saw those X-rays and could identify a problem, and he told me the pain down my leg and in my back was referral pain from the hip, that the nerves up and down were linked.

My life shrunk during those few months from 10,000 steps a day, the ability to ride transit for a couple of hours to get from Surrey into Vancouver, and being a caregiver to people in my life. Enjoyment of all the little things was eaten away. And then on the morning of December 12, 2025, stepping into the shower, the top of my femur, riddled with a sarcoma, disintegrated. I lay in the small confines of my shower with water pouring down on me and despite excruciating pain, I knew no one could hear me scream, and that, unusually, I'd left both phone and smart watch in the living room. I have been through a lot of pain in my 72 years and have had the need to rally over many odds before in my life, so I attribute my sheer willfulness to that. I managed to get over the 4 inches of the shower pan though I pulled the door near off. Scooting backwards on butt and the heel of my good leg I moved out of the bathroom, down the hall and across a wide expanse of the living room floor. This took a while and probably is one of the hardest, scariest, most painful and most desperate feats of my life.

I finally arrived at the phone and I called 911. The dispatcher talked encouragement, over no idea how long it took, for paramedics and fire to arrive. Unusually, good this time, I had left my suite's door unlocked the night before, thankfully, so no need to break it down. I had covered my nakedness with a pillow I pulled from the sofa. I was pretty much in shock but was also soon shocked at the minuscule amount of pain management available in the ambulance. A whiff of nitrous oxide did nothing, nor did a shot they gave me. Once in the Surrey Memorial ER, I had a trainee botch starting an IV, but finally there was a bed in the hall and hydro morphine. Over the next two days, I had kind nurses except for one. I was vomiting frequently from the hydro morphine, and my nurse daughter suggested morphine instead which wound up with my getting a dose not nearly enough to help the pain just as dayshift was replaced by nightshift. The night nurse refused to contact the attending doctor to change the meds, and not wanting to hear my protests, shut the door and left me for hours.

Thankfully after that night, I was as loaded into an ambulance and banged and bumped to Vancouver General. My operating room nurse daughter knows the surgeon, one of two of the best in BC. He scheduled the first operating room he could get, 9 days hence. I meanwhile had a biopsy confirming the Dedifferentiated Chondrosarcoma. On December 23, I went to the operating room to get a new steel partial femur and the socket for it. Unfortunately, I woke to bad pain as the socket was too big, and the leg slipped out of position. December 24, I was again wheeled into the operating room to have it replaced. Next day was Christmas, and my beautiful family turned up with food, gifts and love. I have to give thanks

and praise also to being in a room with a million dollar view. I called it my window TV as the sunrises or sunsets splashed colours on cityscape and the North Shore mountains. At night the city lights were



beautiful, and on occasion fog banks rendered all opaque. The helicopter landing pad was right outside; in daylight I could see the pilots inside, and at night the lit chopper looked like it was coming right at me. Let me say that throughout my days in VGH, my family, friends, even neighbours from Surrey and especially Quirk-es and others in our queer community kept showing up and bringing an embarrassment of food and gifts. The over the top generosity makes me cry writing this.

I'm human; I was in pain; I was scared; I was exhausted though I pulled out cheer and lots of patience. But I did have serious grievances. I

need to express the hard parts about our medical system. The first grievance is that I had to keep my Vancouver GP because I couldn't find a Surrey one taking new patients. I also heard so many woeful tales about Surrey Memorial's Emergency that I was determined not to go. The months of only communicating with my doctor through phone calls contributed to my feeling very misunderstood and alone with the pain I was going through. In late November, I was visiting my friend in long term care in Vancouver, across the street from Vancouver General. My friend demanded I go across the street to Emergency to check out the pain. I was seen within a couple of hours, but I made the mistake of mentioning the dismissed X-rays and fibromyalgia diagnosis to the doctor there, and with no further ado she sent me on my way.

Back to deficiencies once in hospital that negatively affect recovery -- those who have been there will get it. There is constant noise: call bells, yelling, loud laughing and chit chat even at 11pm., and so much snoring. Oh, and the food, half of which over weeks I simply didn't want to even peek under the cover to see what was there. But the most difficult was sharing a room with only a curtain separating your own pain, personal care and visitors from the roommate's. My first roommate was a sports enthusiast. Yes, his name was Jock, and he had never heard of ear buds when watching TV so hour after hour I listened to the hysterical announcers of football or hockey, the bang and scratch of sticks on the ice . . . on and on. There was the drama of his catheter and his genitals or mine being poked at, or one or the other of having bowels wreaking havoc or me barfing a lot.

Let me interject here how on day one, post-surgery, Christmas Day, Physio started trying to get me to sit on side of bed and then stand. I would spend a few weeks vomiting and passing out with each attempt as my blood pressure tanked with any vertical. So, I was then trussed in compression stockings and an abdominal binder every day. Eventually, I got good at sitting on the side of the bed, and on Jan 12 sat in a wheelchair, and on 15th I walked some steps. I also developed Deep Vein Thrombosis in the leg, so I remain on a high dose of blood thinners and will have another ultrasound in April.

Back to the institutional challenges. The night I arrived at Surrey memorial, I found myself in an even smaller room, and they had no TV service and lousy Wi-Fi. The yelling behind the curtain was well underway. I was stuck with a woman roommate that night who was suffering from dementia and kept me up all night chanting gibberish or wailing. Sleepless the next morning, I begged for a new roommate. A man was having a similar experience in another room, so the switch took place.

I had four other male roommates after Jock. I never knew how great I'd had it with him. Back at VGH, one roommate was a man whom they deposited into the bed and then left alone, and he soon fell out of the bed onto his head. The curtain bottom was a couple feet or so shorter than the floor, so I actually saw him fall. I started yelling for help and frantically pressing the call bell. He was rescued with no apparent harm, but he wound up in restraints for the rest of the night. He had this behaviour of audibly rubbing his feet incessantly against the sheets that would make him migrate down to the end of the bed, amazing the nurses over and over at the crumpled heap he was at the bottom of his bed. The next roommate was a fellow off the streets with addictions who had wandered in front of a car. He didn't understand the call bell and would yell help over and over for the nurses. Then I had a truly delightful

roommate for a few days, a 23 year old from Guadalajara, hurt in a snowboarding fall. His mother and girlfriend traveled to be with him. They all spoke Spanish in soft voices. Soon the family introduced themselves to me, and they spoke great English and were full of sincere concern for my recovery. I had one final, far too intimate, room share at Surrey Memorial for a couple of weeks. I mean the room was so small, it was not much more than if I was sharing a king size bed with him. He had had cancer that took his colon, bladder and probably more. So he had a colostomy bag and renal bags and a few more weeks of hospital logged than me. There were the smells, the loud TV, football on his tablet, snoring, and the heartbreak of his anger and terror at no more quality of life or much life ahead.

At Surrey Memorial, I had a talk with the doctor assigned us that week. She encouraged me to write the BC government about the conditions. Vancouver gets lots of funding, but the Fraser Health authority and the other smaller regional hospitals around the province don't. The old Surrey building has single glazed windows, no TVs, people in the halls, and not enough personnel. I barely saw Occupational Therapy or Physio, but when I did, I wound up without a wheelchair and was expected to use a commode to move around the halls between walking exercises.

In order to get out of Surrey memorial to a rehab facility, I had to get off 39 days of catheter (I had two painful failed tries, but once I finally got gravity on my side, my body functioned), and I had to cut way back on the morphine. Check and check, and I was moved January 22, to just a couple of blocks from home to a private room with TV. There was more time with physio, a decent wheelchair, and I was able to take meals in dining room and chat with a few people. My friends from my building came to visit. I was able to take a shower, and soon I had bowel control. My family visited, including all five of my young grandkids. Of course, there were still noises, and I was woken daily at 5am so that someone could read the chart and give me pills at 6am, but breakfast was not until 8:45am.

I pushed hard, and after 50 days was released a week earlier than they suggested. I have been home a week now. I am taking care of everything for myself. After so long completely incapacitated, this feels like freedom. I had ten X-rays last week, and I will sit in limbo, wondering if the cancer is going to appear, as every few months into the future, there are more diagnostics. I now have an electric wheelchair, and therefore more freedom. Such is this thing I call life. This thing I am so grateful for and will fight for as I can.



Pictures provided by River Glen

GLIMMERS OF HOPE BUT MORE OF THE SAME ***A WRITING PROMPT ABOUT OUR FUTURE***

Don Orr Martin

It's 2031. I'm 80 this year, a remarkable milestone given my gay life of sex, drugs, and loud music, all of which I still enjoy. Of course, the sex is mostly solo now, the drugs are for blood pressure and arthritis, and the loud music is mainly cranked-up volume for my hearing aids of Broadway musicals. I have to admit, as a dual US citizen, I have also attended the raucous outdoor rap concerts promoting Bad Bunny's bid for re-election as US Vice President alongside President Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She's an inspiration.



The unhoused 2031

The world somehow managed to weather the Trump administration's corruption and downfall after the disastrous war with Iran that marked the first use of nuclear weapons on civilians since WW2. The Iranian people remain strong and will rebuild Tehran. Israel's fate is still unclear as war crime trials are once again delayed by Zionist lobbying pressure. Trump, of course, finally resigned in 2027 because of ever-mounting scandals, war, mental breakdowns, rising gas prices, and his third impeachment. Most people are still angry that a convicted rapist, child molester, warmonger, would-be dictator and his corrupt family were pardoned by JD Vance in Vance's only act as a hapless stand-in president. Glad he's disappeared, too.

Mark Carney's re-election in '29 kept the conservatives and failed Albertan separatists at bay. An international coalition of middle powers that Carney helped build seems to have isolated a few of the worst outrages of superpower foreign policies, and for now, despite his massive military spending, has stabilized the Canadian economy. A movement is building to convert weapons spending to housing needs and better public services.



Soup kitchens 1931

Sadly, in 2031 the world feels much the same as I imagine it did in 1931. As perhaps it did in 1831 comparatively. The same dynamics are still in play. Pandemics, colonial slaughters, corporate corruption, religious, racial and sexual persecution. Humans are despicable. Will we ever evolve?

New technological disruptions, climate change, demands for fairness, social change, and political freedom—these things may someday be resolved. But I've been resigned for a long time to

the slowness of change, and the confounding influence of violent human impulses. Progress against racism is slow. Humanitarian progress is slow. I do remain hopeful that capitalism will begin ebbing by the end of this century—jeez—it emerged around 1531! 500 years is long enough. Come on you youngsters. Get us past this mess!

I think we are finally coming to an end of the maddening fad of AI totalitarianism. That bubble has burst. The oligarchs pushed us too far with their lies and manipulations and wars. We'll see what entanglements emerge with quantum computing.

In my ever-declining (yet privileged) condition I'm still capable of leisure travel. My husband continues to plan trips for us to warmer climes during Canadian winters, but they now involve shorter travel times, easier accommodations, and less demanding levels of physical exertion. My driver's license expires this year and I have to decide if I trust our self-steering EV from China enough to venture out on my own through the city streets. I mostly use public transit and manage fine with a cane. My hubby has a few good years left at the wheel and there are still many cross-country destinations we want to experience (such as the Maritimes). We'll just take our time getting there. I refuse to go on those disease-spreading cruise ship tours even if they are more accessible. We dream of certain tropical island destinations before they are completely underwater from rising sea levels.



Child labour 1831

Travel this winter, though, will have to wait for my recovery from hip surgery. I'm determined to continue feasting my diminishing eyes and ears and palate on diverse cultures of the world as long as I possibly can before my well-worn organs give out. John and I have had discussions about what to do if one of us has a stroke or some dire health event, but I'm not sure it's really figured out or if I'm prepared emotionally. Thanks to the advice of friends who have been through this, most of our paperwork is in order at least.

So many of the original gang in my writers' group have passed on. Yet our weekly meetings and public readings keep going. New recruits energize us and have taken over most administrative chores. The support and social connections we gain from this group have sustained us elders for 25 years.

I'm working on my second cookbook after the success of *The Vagabond Gourmet: Great Meals You Can Make with One Old Pot and a Dull Knife*. My new book will be some favourite, super-tasty, nutritionally-balanced, 20-minute meals specially designed for the elderly home cook who faces a host of domestic challenges. Like difficulty grocery shopping, remembering to turn off the stovetop burners, inability to stand for long periods in the kitchen or read instructions in small print. You get the idea.

Photos provided by Don Orr Martin

WARNING FOOD SHOPPERS: PRICE FIXING IN THE WORKS

Lorri Rudland

A ban on surveillance pricing was voted down by the Liberals and the Conservatives in the House of Commons on Wed, April 15. The NDP motion opposed the use of algorithmic pricing because it means that personal data collected in store, on social media and search engines, for EACH consumer could be used to fix prices. Surveillance pricing works by setting the maximum price the consumer will pay based on that consumer data. It's a shakedown of each shopper – and everyone in line will pay a different price.

As if the corporate grocery giants didn't already control the market and make enough money in 2025:

Loblaws – \$61 billion in revenue, controls about 32% of the market share.

Sobeys (Empire Co.) – \$30 billion in revenue, controls about 25% of market share.

Metro Inc. (Ontario/Quebec) – \$21 billion in revenue, controls about 15% of market share

Moreover, in July, 2025, Loblaws agreed to pay \$500 million in a class action lawsuit linked to a bread price-fixing scheme. And all three companies have used property law restrictions to control competition in the business by preventing competitors from operating adjacent to them. In April of this year, CBC found that Loblaws and Sobeys sold underweight packages of meat AGAIN.



So if you trust the grocery giants to use surveillance pricing fairly, think again. They will use it to gouge the maximum out of every shopper – in this day and age when many people struggle to pay for the basic necessities. The Liberals and Conservatives talk big but aren't doing enough to protect consumers.

SIX BOOKS WORTH READING

Val Innes

The Future Belongs To Those Who Fight Climate Revolution For Beginners. Todd Dufresne.

Through Grief We Grow. Brian Vachon

The Reason You Walk. Wab Kinew

When The Forest Breathes. Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World. Suzanne Simard

Being Mortal. Atul Gawande

Who We Are Four Questions For A Life And A Nation. Murray Sinclair

LIFE POINTS

Val Innes



Scotland

Cycling off for the day on a Sunday by myself
green and treed, Old Aberdeen High Street left behind,
past the cathedral,
the country spread before me to the sea, purple with heather,
yellow with gorse, spreading over the hills

or

the library at the head of the High Street,
old, oak tables and books upon books,
a treasure trove of different lives, different worlds
in which I could live for awhile

or

in my kilt and twinset, tie correctly knotted,
curtseying with the others as the teacher came into the room,
a roomful of girls in an orderly world,
one that expected them to learn, to succeed
not just as mothers, but doctors, lawyers, scientists, poets, writers too.

Then

Winnipeg: strange, flat, cold, harsh climate, but warm people
welcoming the newcomers with their strange accents,
a Scottish burr laced through all their words, familiar or new.
School, no uniforms here, and boys, too –
a Scottish girl in kilt and tie curtseying to an astounded teacher,
amid laughter and ridicule ringing in the room
of boys and girls not necessarily expected to amount to anything,
thousands of miles from Albyn School for Girls.

Eventually,

acclimatized,

post university and boyfriends,

a lingering kiss from a woman friend, and the sudden urgent desire
followed up, so life changed on a heartbeat --

and mine was pounding –

another leap into another life:

as profound a change

as immigration

and as permanent.



Pictures provided by Val Innes

You don't get to choose how you're going to die. Or when. You can only decide how you're going to live. Now.

Joan Baez

THE GOLDEN YEARS

Farren Gillaspie

Stuart's son Gerry was already twenty minutes late. Stuart had exhausted himself playing that mental tennis game in his mind about how he would say this and Gerry would say that. Finally, Gerry showed up, knocking lightly on the front door, and Stuart ushered him into the living room. "Sit down Gerry. I have been rehearsing in my mind what I would say to you. The main thing I want to say is, my heart is broken, and I am so angry with you, and you know what? I am ashamed of you. While your mother may not be here now, I assure you, she, would be just as ashamed and as angry as I am with you. How many times did you show up in ICU while your mother was fighting for her life! That's a rhetorical question by the way."

Gerry glared at his father. "I was trying to get ahead and get my promotion at work!"

"And your wife, Carol, what was she doing while I was trying to hold things together. Never mind, I know, trying to upscale her social circles. Your mother died without seeing your face. She might have forgiven you, but I never can, even though I have kept silent all of this time! Don't get me started about my own son trying to have me declared mentally incompetent!"

Gerry's face was flushed. Stuart wasn't sure if he was angry, ashamed or fearful. "I was trying to protect you! You were giving your money away, my inheritance, without even talking to me. You started changing when you went to that perverted fag church. You aren't even gay for Christ's sake!"

Stuart bristled. "Gay or not, that's none of your business and I don't need to explain. I'm just reminding you that the money and investments are still mine. I paid your entire university costs. You graduated debt free. I helped you buy your first house, and I have started education investments for your children. They will be okay while you and Carol are chasing your promotions and social circles. I also need to let you know how much you hurt me. You never even talked to me about how you felt and what you were planning. You burned that bridge, Gerry. I am selling the house. You and Carol may get a token from the proceeds, but my lawyer will have everything ironclad. After I have put the sentimental things I want in storage, my realtor will let you know, and you can come in and take whatever you want. The rest will go to one of the shelters downtown. Now I want you to leave my home. I'm not sure when I will be able to look you in the face again."

His own son, Gerry, had been the last loose end that Stuart had to tie up. When he had come home, after having been declared competent to manage his affairs independently against Gerry's wishes, he set about to make some changes. He had listed his house with a realtor and changed documents around his living will and power of attorney. He had felt totally betrayed, vulnerable and even fearful. Gerry was the same boy Stuart had walked to school on his first day, and promised to wait outside the classroom door until Gerry had given him a discreet nod through the door window when Stuart peeked in. How could the little boy he and Jennifer had loved and nurtured turn on him? With the traumatic passing of Jennifer, his thoughts had started shifting. He had been focused on security for his family and himself. Now he realized he had enough; his family was secure, and it was time to use some of his money to support others who were less fortunate.

A seed had been planted in his mind when he and Jennifer had supported their friends after their son had committed suicide. This was some time before Jennifer's diagnosis. The boy had been bullied for being gay and at sixteen had given in to hate. There was a service and a celebration of life at a "gay church." The family had started attending services there after their own congregation had turned their backs during the son's coming out time.

Stuart and Jennifer were overwhelmed by the love and compassion that had been generated by the pastor and his congregation. There had been such a range of people there from all walks of life. Tears had



flowed freely during the service. There had been tears of sadness and understanding, but also of a determination to support each other through the loss of their gay friend. Stuart had seen a courage there of people who had endured hate and judgment and still found comfort and love from their shared experiences.

After that, Stuart had attended a couple of services there with Jennifer. They had agreed that they would provide some financial support for the church. After she passed, Stuart took comfort in attending services on his own. He got to see how they struggled financially, having to raise money through fund raising, often contributing themselves. They had an outreach for unhoused teens, helping them to not only secure housing, but to assist them in working their way back into society and productive lives.

Moving On:

Stuart liked his new accommodations. His realtor had gotten a few brochures for seniors' residences. This one was just finishing the building phase when he found out about it. The brochure

advertised twenty-four units for independent senior living. It had a huge common room with a small kitchen for communal meals that could be booked and planned, a small gym and a large roof top garden with sunning areas, BBQ's and quiet corners. There was a designated suite by the front entrance for a live-in caretaker. Above the entrance was a plaque with a diagram of an androgynous figure on it, their arms held open. The words below said, "everyone welcome."

Stuart was able to get a top floor unit. It was just over six hundred square feet. It was everything he needed even though his former house was three thousand square feet.

Stuart brought the few items that had sentimental memories, then told the realtor to tell Gerry that he could go through what was left.

It was so invigorating to just have a new start. The bedroom was quite small, barely accommodating a double bed, a double dresser, and a night stand. Stuart had a very basic understanding of Feng Shui, and positioning his bed was problematic. It shouldn't be under a window and neither should it back onto a bathroom wall. Stuart opted to put it along the bathroom wall since that was the only practical place. He lessened the negative Feng Shui influence by covering most of the wall with muted mosaic mirror tiles. They reflected the outdoors and he could see the view outside no matter which side of the bed he slept on.

The care taker, Parvinder, came by for what would be a monthly check in. Parvinder was in his forties and had most of the residents drooling over him and sighing as he walked away. When he saw the mirror mosaic he smiled and winked at Stuart.

"Get your mind out of the gutter Parvinder!"

"Is it my mind that is in the gutter, sir? Mirrors have many purposes!"

"Okay let's cut with the sir, Parvinder, you can call me Stu."

"Okay, well my friends call me Parv."

Stuart smiled, "so we are friends then?"

"We all need friends Stu." He winked again and sashayed away.

There was also a private nurse who was hired to check in monthly to answer any questions residents might have about their health. Her name was Ingrid Anderson.

"Hello Mr. McPherson. How are you settling in?"

"Never better, but you can call me Stuart, or Stu if you prefer."

"I think I prefer Mr. McPherson, and you can call me Ms. Anderson."

Stuart was a bit taken aback.

"Guess you wouldn't want us getting too friendly, would you Ms. Anderson."

"Well, no need to get any ideas." Ms. Anderson raised her eyebrow.



"My dear, regarding women, that ship sailed quite a long time ago. There is no need to fret about me. Nowadays, let's just say my attractions are more cerebral."

"I can live with that, Mr. McPherson. If you have any concerns you can call me. My number is in the directory."

Meeting People:

It was May and Stuart had talked Parvinder into letting him help with the flowers and shrubs on the roof top. It felt good to get his hands into the dirt. Already the dahlias were popping out of the soil. The hydrangea leaf buds were fat and ready to burst. Stuart had brought over a potted lodge pole pine he had stored at his neighbour's home. It was only three feet tall when he had gotten it from a friend's ranch at 100 Mile House. Now it was over seven feet tall and was an impressive sight in the reading corner. There were several lilac bushes as well, and one of them was also in the reading corner. They had been his grandmother's favourite flower on their dairy farm. When Stuart sat there in a bright red Adirondack chair, he felt connected and at peace.

Marion, who lived on the east side of the building, had commandeered the vegetable boxes. She and Stuart had bonded over their mutual love of gardening. Marion seemed like a strong confident woman. She was tall and slender and didn't wear any makeup. Her longish white hair was always pulled back into a



pony tail. She reminded Stuart of Jane Goodall. When the sun got a bit too warm mid-afternoon, they would sit in the reading area sharing ice tea from a thermos. Stuart was partial to tea cups but Marion preferred mugs. The reading area was under a pergola. Frank, who lived on the west side of the complex near Stuart, had offered to buy plants that would grow over the pergola, but he didn't know what would be best. Stuart felt that wisteria would be nice; Marion thought a rich purple clematis would be a good accent

at one end. Frank made good on his word and bought the plants. Marion contributed some scarlet runner seeds that would give some gratification until the wisteria established itself, which would only be next year. They ended up with three Adirondack chairs in that corner, and Marion, Frank and Stuart bonded sitting there through the summer.

Frank at six feet tall was about the same height as Stuart. However, where Stuart was slim and wiry, Frank had a stockier body with a bit of a pot belly. His hair was still fairly dark contrasting with Stuart's thick silver white crowning glory. Frank had moved here after his same sex partner of twenty-six years had passed away. Frank and Stuart would go for mild hikes at Lynn Canyon, or the Seymour and Cypress watersheds. Marion had some hip issues which made hiking difficult for her, but she would often accompany them to the Lonsdale Quay to buy veggies and hang out at the water front watching the sea buses come and go. Stuart knew the two guys that owned the hamburger concession inside the quay and would often buy lunch from them.

Summer went on into fall, and the three of them decided to book the BBQ for a mid-week dinner and invite everyone in the building. Stuart was to bring cocktails, in homage to his youth when he was a bartender and some tandoori chicken. Marion offered to bring a pasta salad with veggies grown on the roof top. Frank was bringing some wine and a carrot cake. It seemed like a good time for them to deepen their bonds even more, while meeting some of the other residents.

Stuart had loved his wife. The last few years were really difficult. The pain had weighed heavy on his heart. Wandering around the large house without her had been just adding to his pain. He had been becoming more and more reclusive. Now, in this new residence, he was once again starting to feel a sense of purpose. The people around him were starting to feel like part of an extended family. His heart was slowly becoming lighter, and the pain from the hospital experience and palliative care for his wife were very slowly being replaced by the happier memories they had experienced. He was even thinking about starting a writing group. This was a whole new beginning for him. He thought about a discussion he had with Frank. There was an old saying that this is so good, it can only end or fall apart. Frank said that a better

phrase should be, this is so good it can only get better. That sounded good to Stuart. The creases on his forehead softened, and a slight contented smile began to form at the corners of his mouth. He was looking forward to each day. He was looking forward to meeting other tenants in his building. Marion and Frank were his new core family. Life was good.

HARD THINGS

Cyndia Cole

After giving birth to two girls, my parents desperately
Expect me to be
The boy that I am not.
Living as a disappointment to them becomes
A hard thing.
Then everyone
Expects me to love playing with baby dolls.
I don't.
I run around outside in the ravine
With the little boys
Until they hit me. Hard.
When my dad leaves to be stationed in Korea for a year
We stay stateside, away from the war zone.
This is hardest on my mom
When he returns and feels like a stranger at first.
It is hard on me too.
The car accident is scary hard
The drunk driver hits us on a dark country road.
I wake up to Mom pulling glass shards from her cheek.
Dad's broken ribs hurt when he laughs
But he laughs anyway.
The only thing hard in Puerto Rico
Is being terrorized on our first day
By the girl next door.
Her tales of dangerous tropical creatures
Are shocking lies. It's hard being fooled by them.
Moving yet again from this lush Caribbean paradise
To the windswept plains of Kansas
With its Bible Belters
Is a crash course in hard weather and rigid rules.
Being scorned for my intelligence is weirdly hard
Because earlier it had won me praise.
The effort of not knowing that some of my intense female friendships
Are attraction and infatuation
Ties hard knots inside me.
Internalizing the screwed-up thinking
That I am a failure because I scare off the boys is hard to swallow.



Moving again and again makes it hard to learn sustaining relationships.

When I do find a BFF

Others demean her for being sexually abused and poor,

I choke on such hard-hearted meanness.

I am in Washington DC on a class trip

The day that Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated.

Watching hope die, the city in flames and the troops roll in

Is hard in a never-ending way.

To see my homeland at war over injustice

Forges my life long commitment to peace.

Fleeing two years later because of the war in Viet Nam

Makes me a stranger in a strange land.

It's hard to start over, yet again.

To improve our safety and chance to stay in this place of peace

I need to marry this man who I like and admire but do not love.

How hard it is to lose my identity and autonomous personhood

To this sexist heteronormativity.

Eleven dollars a week buying food for two

Hitchhiking up the mountain to SFU to save on bus fare

And I'm not even a student yet, but he is.

Scarce resources make it hard to imagine a future.

Other feminists save me and channel the hard truths for women

Into sisterhood and powerful action.

We unearth and create knowledge by and for women.

We even make a place for others to do the same.

Laying the groundwork demands hard collective effort

But the rock-solid foundation we build supports others for 50 years.

Teaching in a field that does not exist is a hard career path to pursue.

Discovering that knowledge alone cannot transform me is a hard lesson.

When my health and joints blow up before I turn 30, I can hardly walk.

Coming out as a lesbian in 1976 means taking a hard look at my life and asking,

"How did I not know this sooner?"

Being an outcast is hard to survive.

Who will hire me?

How can I thrive in a world that rejects me?

A tiny community of outcasts sustains me.

But support blows up under the pressure of our differences.

Social isolation is hard and lonely.

A new practice appears, offering Pride Inside

And a mission to sharpen hard things into tools.

Courage to take a leap of faith is hard to muster, but I do.

This earthquake shatters hard rocks inside

My heart and mind have another complete reboot.

Working at a front line, minimum wage job

Where no one cares what I think is a hard shock

For a person who once gave lectures.

The hard physical labour is so strange for this one

Who relied on the life of the mind.



Simon Fraser University

Five and a half years is a long hard wait to advance
 While humbly hiding my master's degree from the old folk.
 The boss who interviews me lists all the hard things
 About becoming a supervisor.
 I laugh inside and say carefully,
 "I can do that."

Knowing full well that I am already doing
 Much harder things.

But I'm not prepared for the screaming worker who hates me for years
 Because I accidentally misplace her timesheets which delays her paycheck.
 Nothing is harder than talking with 300 gay men younger than myself
 Who know they are going to die of AIDS next month or next week.

Seeing them feared and abandoned is heart-breakingly hard
 When at least they could leave their shortened lives surrounded by love.
 Falling in love at work is so wonderful

But how hard it is to hide it from the homophobic co-workers and clients.

Hard to move to a new job after 21 years and to find

That my expertise does not extend to a million new things to learn

As a fish in a much, much bigger pond.

Despite the status and fat salary, responsibility is a hard row to hoe

It means reading my blackberry emails on evenings, weekends and vacations.

I am never really off duty or at rest.

Now my love is working 12-hour shifts, some days, some nights

And sleeping every hour not there.

How hard she works with outcasts everyone else avoids.

How hard to see it destroy her health.

How hard seeing her off not knowing

If she'll catch COVID and die.

Being escorted out like a criminal

When my job is eliminated by right wing politics

Is a hard break from what I have given my life to.

Being paid to do Whatever

With no boss at all calls for a

Hard adjustment from being crucial

To being utterly unimportant.

The unstructured freedom of retirement

Is only hard if I overcommit myself

To five or six volunteer positions.

After decades of good health

Following my earlier disability

It's a hard shock to develop

An enervating disease with a persistently mysterious cause.

I need energy to do all that I desire

But I can't count on having enough.

Losing lifelong friends is hard enough but

Seeing those living lose hope in their grief,

Hope in the world we have busted our butts to make better,

Losing joy in life is too hard to bear.



Hard things pile upon hard things
 One wave after another
 And yet
 Those hard things
 Pressure this Cole into a precious diamond.
 They make life shine bright.
 Hard things forge me
 Like hammering a samurai sword
 Makes a blade so sharp it cuts through the bull.
 Hard things make me fearless and unbreakable.
 Thank you, hard things
 For teaching me
 I can gain from every loss
 I can transform
 Anything into happiness.
 This little pussy cat
 Is also a tiger.



Photos provided by Cyndia Cole and Val Innes

Recently at the Surrey Museum and at Gibson's Library, the Quirkies put on a skit set up by Don Orr Martin to the music of "I'm a lumberjack" if you remember that tune. The skit is called "I'm a Hockey fan and I'm OK". It turns the homophobic lumberjack skit into a pro-lesbian message! Here are the lyrics and a picture. If you remember the tune, sing along as you read . . .

I'M A HOCKEY FAN AND I'M OKAY

MARSHA: I'm a hockey fan and I'm okay, I watch all night and I sleep all day

SINGERS: I'm a hockey fan and I'm okay, I watch all night and I sleep all day

MARSHA: I go to games, I jump and curse, I taunt the referee, I get a jumbo hot dog and cans of Kokanee

SINGERS: I go to games, I jump and curse, I taunt the referee, I get a jumbo hot dog and cans of Kokanee

I'm a hockey fan and I'm okay I watch all night and I sleep all day

MARSHA: I cut my hair, I wear plaid shirts, I scream at my TV. I want a women's version of Heated Rivalry

SINGERS: I cut my hair, I wear plaid shirts, I scream at my TV. I want a women's version of . . . Heated . . . Rivalry (slower, tiny pause)

I'm a hockey fan and I'm okay I watch all night and I sleep all day

MARSHA: I wear big boots, I smoke cigars, I ride a motor bike, I keep my elbows up and I call myself a dyke

SINGERS: I wear big boots, I smoke cigars, I ride a motor bike...

(music ends -- singers jump up smiling and throw arms into the air triumphantly)

MARSHA: I keep my elbows up and I call myself a dyke.

(Singers raise arms and cheer YAY. River rolls toward Marsha with arms outstretched; they kiss and all exit together).



Upper three: River, Marsha and Bev
Lower: Pat, Janie, Lorri and Adriaan

Picture taken by Angie Joyce

FUN AT GIBSONS LIBRARY



QUIRK-E

CHRONICLES Check this out at www.quirk-e.ca

QUIRK-E scored with the skit, *I'm a Hockey Fan and I'm OK*, at our public reading at the Gibsons' Library on Saturday June 13, 2026. Marsha Ablowitz led the skit in a glamorous silver-toned, long-haired wig. In the course of the skit, her character shed the wig as she made the switch from a closeted woman to a proud dyke. Additional players, Adriaan de Vries and Lorri Rudland, wore hockey jerseys and provided support for Marsha in the Skit. The

entire audience participated by reading the words as we sang. Their cheers and applause resounded as we finished. Ellen Woodsworth, Marsha Ablowitz, Adriaan de Vries, and Lorri Rudland read works. All received very positive feedback along with lots of interaction via questions and comments from the audience.

Photo of Marsha Ablowitz as a Hockey Fan together with Linda Zysblat in Gibsons Library, taken by Paula Stromberg

LONELY

Garth McIver



"Only the lonely know the way I feel" Roy Orbison song 1961.

It is the mid-1960s in rural Manitoba. I have driven to a secluded spot along the Pipestone Creek, a pretty pastoral spot to be enjoyed if one is in the mood. It is midsummer and the trees are in their green splendour and the nearby wheat fields are turning golden. There is an opening in the tree lined creek and the farmer has fashioned a sloping approach so his cattle can drink from the creek's edge. I am 16 years old. I sit behind the wheel of the family car, and Roy Orbison's song "only the lonely" comes on the radio. And like the lyrics, I'm so lonely I could cry.

I have friends, and I think most would say I am even popular, a good student from a good family. But no one knows my secret, and I don't know anyone I can confide in. No one knows that when I double date, I am more interested in the other boy than either of the girls. I do have a girlfriend, but we have never gone past holding hands and a goodnight kiss. I'm thankful that she has never indicated she wants more. I know of only one other couple we hang with that has gone any further . . . we're a pretty uptight bunch.

My mind wanders to a boy who hung himself a year ago. He was 15. I think of him a lot. They found him in the family barn, and they say he was wearing his sister's clothes. I wonder if he really was wearing a dress, and if so, what did that mean. Maybe it is just a rumour. No one really talks about it. He was a nice quiet kid, and he has a brother and sister still at my school. I really liked him. Maybe I could have talked to him. Maybe he was lonely like me.

There's a boy in the class ahead of me who is effeminate, a "nancy boy" as we used to say. He's nice too, and no one seems to tease or bully him, but maybe that's because he has a big brother that no one would mess with. But I could never talk to him. I didn't know the reason back then. I do now. It's called being homophobic.

Today, I am an out gay elder, and I want, and feel a responsibility, to be an ally and role model for gay youth. I want them to know that they deserve and can have a rich and full life. A life with purpose,

opportunities, community, friends, being loved and with the person they love. I want them to cherish and accept their identity, be proud, stand tall and never have to cry alone.

But, there are still many confused and lonely boys and girls. For some, it may not be much different from the 60s. Young boys and girls still choose desperate measures and even death. There is still so much more work to be done.

They still play Roy Orbison's song on the radio, because there's still an audience.

*The 2024 National Survey (USA) on LGBT+ Youth Mental Health – the Trevor Project reports: 39% of LGBT+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year. More than 1 in 10 (12%) attempted suicide in the previous year.

Picture provided by Garth McIver

DINNER 1963: VIEW FROM TODAY

Adriaan de Vries

It is 6:30 PM on Sunday, December 23, 1962. The de Vries family is sitting down to dinner, later than usual on a Sunday evening. As always, the meal has been prepped on Saturday as much as possible, so that all that is needed on Sunday is to turn on the gas. The fare is overcooked Dutch stodge. The aroma of boiled Brussel sprouts and soggy potatoes permeates the kitchen. The meat dish is fried, un-spiced meatballs smelling a bit greasy. and the gravy is skimmed from its fat.

All sit down, including the patriarch at the head of the table in his designated spot. Ian, age 18, is not present. He just arrived home yesterday from college for the holidays. On Sunday morning, we all go to church as always by patriarchal fiat. Ian takes the recently acquired compact car with rare permission from Dad, to pick up his girlfriend, Thea, with our younger brother, Ben who is along for the ride, and then to join the family at church. They don't make it.

Midway through the service, in a blatant hush, hushed interruption, an elder comes, whispers surreptitiously to Dad. Dad gets up and leaves without any expression, wearing only his usual poker face. Dad seems fully in control of the situation, taking charge as he always does. What's going on? Then, Mom is also called out at Dad's behest. This must be calamitous as nothing is allowed to interfere with Sunday worship.

After the service, a church elder robotically tells the brothers that my parents have gone to the hospital. We brothers will be looked after by some church members. Ian has had an accident on the four lane Highway 2. Details are scarce. Without comment, basic facts are shared. The car was hit head on by a Greyhound bus, with both vehicles spinning out of control on black ice and smashing into each other at speeds, likely, 50 to 60 mph. The bus hit the passenger side. Ben has a broken ankle. Thea was killed instantly. Ian has a severe concussion. He is hanging on to life. Doctors stabilize him as best they can, but his prognosis is gloomy.

After hours at the hospital, Dad and Mom come home. There is nothing more they can do there. Ian is unconscious and will need months to recover. Dad directs us to dinner with no feeling being shown. They are in shock, as are all of us. No emotion is shown, in the best of northern European, Calvinist stoic tradition. A gloomy silence prevails. Emotion is weakness, after all, not expressed in a family of 9 men along with Mom, the only woman.

We sit down to dinner in utter silence. Dad starts to say the immutable blessing. The very idea of saying a blessing seems crazy, an anathema to my 16-year-old logic. I am flummoxed by emotion. Dad continues the praying until he breaks into a heart wrenching paroxysm of pain and grief. My mind catapults past his noise. "He cares. He really cares."



For the first time in my 16 years, I hear an unequivocal expression of care ripped from his heart out of his programmed Calvinist, chauvinist, inculcated repression.

63 years later, embracing my ever-evolving emotional freedom, I remember my dad as clearly as on December 23, 1962.

Picture supplied by Adriaan de Vries

TOURISM IS CHANGING BAJA: MY JANUARY 2026 TRAVELOG

Don Orr Martin



Yellow-crowned night heron
at the end of the malecon

My husband John and I have been driving down to Baja California Sur (BCS) almost every year for over 30 years. Its scenery and the warmth of its people have captured our hearts. This past winter we flew down for just 2 weeks. We usually stay longer. Here are some of my travel notes and John's photos.



Blue-footed boobies on Isla Carmen



A blue whale photographed last year between Isla Danzante and Isla Monserrat south of Loreto

This week we have strolled along the malecon in Loreto watching for whales, driven up to the mountains around San Javier for an elegant lunch at a new restaurant, and hiked the sheer cliffs near the casita in Mulege that is our base of operations.

Loreto has long been our favourite town, but it's changed. Formerly a fishing village and regional capital, it's now primarily a tourist destination. A surprising number of Canadians winter here. I will always regard Loreto's stunning landscapes as among the most beautiful I've ever seen. Vast forests of cardons, theatrical mountain ranges that change colour throughout the day, and a sea of cobalt blue. Dolphins and whales, finfish, manta rays, turtles, and shellfish galore. Unrivalled kayaking opportunities.

We love to bird watch and identify plants, which are so different and interesting in the Sonoran Desert. We hike the shoreline, being very careful along steep hills and cliffs because I'm not as surefooted as I used to be, the trails are crumbly, and if I stumble or fall, every plant has nasty spikes. Still, the views are spectacular.



A palo blanco at sunrise on the way to San Javier. This peak is visible from downtown Loreto

The Sierra de la Giganta bordering Loreto and the Sierra de San Francisco abutting Mulege are jagged peaks with deep canyons and zigzag roads. At a viewpoint on the road to San Javier high above Loreto, you can see the distant Sea of Cortez. San Javier is a tiny, spring-fed mountain village with a 17th century stone mission; there is also an excellent new restaurant, plus farm-fresh produce and jars of guayaba paste from little stalls in the town square.



The Giganta mountain chain stretches for miles as a dramatic backdrop, upstage from Loreto and the sea

Mulege is a much smaller, less prettified village than Loreto. It's about an hour and a half north. Tourists (including Canadians) are here in Mulege, too, but not in the same numbers. Mulege (MOO-leh-HAY) is built in the cleft of a palm-lined estuary.

The Mulege lighthouse looks out on the Sea of Cortez just north of Bahia Concepcion, a big beautiful bay teeming with sea life. We have kayaked here in the past, but not this trip. Tomorrow we are hiring a boat to take us across the wide opening of the bahia to the outside shoreline of the peninsula (unpopulated, no roads) which we have never seen close up.

Mornings have been chilly, but the daytime temperatures are perfect. No confirmed whale sightings yet. There are many pelicans, terns, boobies, and ospreys as well as a few magnificent frigate birds, cardinals, elusive canyon wrens, and of course the yellow-crowned night heron. We are eating lots of fresh fish and local produce from farmers markets—doing what we can to promote local economies and allyship between Canada and Mexico.



A steep trail hugs the precipice above the mouth of the bahia. Far below us, out of sight, birds congregate and in the distance you can see the point that we will boat to tomorrow.

Change has been slow coming to this area but is nonetheless relentless. Lack of water has doomed some development projects, but has not stopped tourist housing, golf courses, or cruise ships in Loreto. One noticeable change from last year is some new construction and more street paving. When we first started coming to BCS, except for Highway 1, many roads were unpaved, even within city limits.

On the hilltop near where we are staying in Mulege, we can see our favourite fish taco stand and the estuary that stretches into the centre of town. Its full name is Heroica Mulege commemorating the victory by townsfolk and local soldiers over American would-be occupiers in the 1840s. The quaint old village has narrow, one-way streets and many colourful murals.



Murals in Mulege also feature local flora and fauna, hometown heroes, cultural activities, and popular spots in town, or you can get your photo taken with angel wings.

We are kind of liking Mulege better than Loreto these days. We've found a great casita we can rent for a month or more. It has a walled courtyard, a dunking pool, and a bougainvillea arbour that attracts hummingbirds, other local avians, and butterflies. It's a short walk to the seashore where lots of sea birds hang out. The shore faces away from downtown and is also accessible by hiking along a high cliff with a switchback trail. We've gotten to know the owners of the casita, and I make dinner for them one evening during our visits each winter. John and I tend to prefer the culture and ethos of rural Mexican villages to the privileged amenities of US-dominated resort places like Cabo or Nopolo.

It's hard for me to get a sense of what the future holds for this part of the Baja peninsula. I feel lucky to have experienced many aspects of its traditional culture, including life on mountain ranchos where little has changed for decades. John and I try hard as tourists to respect local customs and to leave a minimal footprint. But we have witnessed many changes wrought by tourism, corporate interests, and US trade policies. Canada and Mexico both have our problems, but we are natural partners, with enduring democracies and resilient economies. My hope is that together we can resist our bully next door neighbour.

Pictures provided by Don Orr Martin

CLOISTERED AND CONTEMPLATING

River Glen

I am cloistered these days. If you have a cloistered way of life, you live quietly and are not involved in the normal busy life of the world around you. Synonyms for cloistered are sheltered, protected, restricted, shielded¹. Or, one might say, definitely out to pasture.

It happens, and it is a space, a thin slice of where the imagination can roam with others' stories or forgotten memories that are easily willed into enough . . . entertainment. It would be nice to hold a chisel and pound out meaning and beauty, but it is not so necessary when the quiet feels precious, essential, and even relevant to this circumstance. My pen does word search or puzzle books, and I have learned to

dissolve into the scanning and small frustrations or victories of words not found or found. That releases the same brain chemicals as other more demanding tasks used to.

I may reside mostly in a room, but the door is open to visitors breezing through like wind gusts. How appreciated those connections are that continue despite weakening reciprocity. Even when I venture into the neighbourhood, I am cloistered in my wheelchair, at once sheltered, secluded, protected, isolated, restricted and shielded from “normal” expectations. And I am tethered by fatigue or discomfort, with time or distance from home the driver; the sanctuary of my safe but often claustrophobic retreat beckoning me back -- to my hermitage where time whispers like a slow moving river meandering towards no place in particular.



1. Google

Photo taken by Val Innes

LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Cyndia Cole

Dear Younger Self

I know that it's 1962 in your young life, and I'm writing to you from the perspective of 2026 at the age of 75. You have just turned twelve, and you are facing upheaval in your sense of self. To know who you are and to live true to yourself has always been your source of power. For the first time, you are troubled with doubts. Before puberty, you thought the gender rules simply did not apply to you. If anyone said, “girls can't” or “young ladies must”, you just ignored them. You strive to understand the glories of the universe through astronomy and the mysteries of the microcosm through nuclear physics. For you, mathematics is not hard, it's beautiful. You think that being popular is stupid and being cute is not worth the obsession. Now you are discovering that most people don't love what or who you love. You used to be admired for your confidence and outspoken eloquence. Now mean girls are calling you names, attacking your appearance and treating your strengths as if they are flaws. The boys hold you in contempt. You don't think of yourself as different. You are just you. Others disapprove. You are in the process of deciding that the price of being true to who you are is being alone, isolated, never understood.



From my perspective now, having lived another six decades, I need to tell you: you're right that you are unique and special. You're right that you can't dumb yourself down, or gussy yourself up, live with injustice or hypocrisy, or silence yourself and be happy. The thing is, that doesn't mean that you will be all alone and on the outside forever, as though you live on a different planet from everyone else. You don't need to be a famous first or the most awarded person ever in order to be loved or to enjoy the spotlight. You have your own spotlight. Shine it on yourself and on the ones you love. Find them. Let them be your mirror. Trust me, all in good time, you will. You do. And you are never lonely again.



Photos provided by Cyndia Cole

FAILURE SEEING THE FUTURE: GOVERNANCE AND SOCIETAL SYSTEMS

Adriaan de Vries

Universal interconnectedness is seen everywhere in nature by wildlife photographer, Hamza Yassin. He highlights that all living things are connected, focusing on how ecosystems work, that nature is a complex, interconnected web rather than a collection of individual species. He sees what happens when one group takes too much, too fast, without responding to the system around it: for example the impacts of reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone ecosystems.

We see the world largely from the perspective of board rooms and commerce. Yassin sees it through people/communities and environments under pressure; lives shaped by decisions made far away. Those who watch closely notice the warning signs of damage long before it becomes irreversible. *

Problems related to ignoring issues' interconnectedness and intersectionality coalesced after reading the report titled: "Beyond Checkboxes: Why reconciliation requires systems thinking", released by the BC Assembly of Nations on December 18, 2025.

To me, the major contribution of this report is the urgency expressed by the authors of the need to approach the multiple, diverse problems of First Nations and to achieve holistic solutions by integration of the interconnected issues, while understanding complex solutions.

This intersection** and interconnection focussed thinking, and analysis must be brought to national issues which are currently reduced to stand-alone items. Thus, they cannot be addressed holistically. The many strands or individual issues must be analyzed as part of complex interconnections with other issues, problems, and solutions. All need to be recognized, identifying where and how they intersect, like an intricate tapestry. Then it becomes possible to address the issues in a complex, cooperative approach for managing our country, bringing together all specialists with unique perspectives on the intersecting, connected issues. The world is now so complex that a problem cannot be reduced to a single issue. It will not be seen holistically so it is inevitable that it cannot be resolved. We have a history of evidence supporting that. The examples that the BC Assembly of Nations report offers, are just confirmations of that.

This kind of thing:

- Poverty in the context of our nation's wealth
- Homelessness, endemic in a rich, prosperous country, begun and maintained by closing psychiatric hospitals in the 1970s and '80s***
- Economic disparity, as it has led to ever widening gaps between the billionaires and the "poor" (the top 1% own more than 25% of total wealth and the top 20% own 70% of the total), largely caused by preferential laws, and "inequitable" taxation reflecting the lobbyists and power mongers.

Update:

"Oxfam reports that the richest 1 per cent in Canada hold nearly \$1.25 trillion in wealth, almost as much as the bottom 80 per cent of Canadians. As the report puts it, "That isn't a narrow wealth gap but a wide, expansive, echoing wealth chasm.'" The Maple, March 16, 2026

- Housing- adequate housing is hamstrung by multilevel governance, conflicting policies and bureaucracy, crony capitalism. It is not seen as an inalienable right.
- Medical care — staff shortages, a medieval guild mentality and protection of coveted professions for white cis, hetero men (e.g. the Canadian Medical Association). Medical care is plagued by reduced funding and efforts to privatize it in some provinces, ignoring projected demographics in long-term



planning of medical education, hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities [all requiring ~ 20+ year horizons from planning to execution],

- The hierarchical approach to people which is controlled by known parameters [all these factors exacerbate finding solutions]. Some of these are income, mental health, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, education, education quality and cost, cis-white-old-hetero-men, religion, capitalist ideology as the only game in town, stagnant dated bureaucracy created in a past reality, short term political thinking entrenched largely in profits and gaining votes,
- Rigid, moribund democratic government that no longer works well,
- Ruthless, and unregulated hyper capitalism, Libertarianism,
- Power inequality and dominance created through “legal lobbying”,
- Education, currently plagued by reduced investment, poor long-term planning, and rising costs for post-secondary, forcing many to carry student loans for decades.



The sad truth is that the system is working as designed. Most players do not (want to) see that, so they do not look and they continue operating without cognizance of political ethics. How did we get here after the “golden” post-World War II era and what was golden about it in the first place? That golden era is characterized by recovery from the global devastation caused by World War II. Canada’s infrastructure had not been destroyed, so supplying Europe with needed goods gave us an advantage. The golden era had full medical care for all, subsidized education, little poverty or homelessness, no huge military complex, low pollution, a more effective justice system, and greater social equity with no billionaire class that sought to control nearly everything related to money.

This near utopia came about following the crash of 1929 which brought rampant unemployment, loss of housing and savings, soup lines in every community, men riding the rails looking for work, and no more than basic education or health care for most. It was tough and people survived by looking after each other, often by something as small as sharing a meal. After a zeitgeist of four harsh decades starting with WWI, Canadians wanted a life of peace, with decent housing, better education, safety and wellness, reasonable work and food.

J.S. Woodsworth, a Winnipeg minister, tapped into that zeitgeist and organized a movement to protest poverty and hardship. He was cofounder of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation [forerunner of the New Democratic Party], its first leader, Member of Parliament from 1921 until 1942. His work led the country to monumental innovations that we assume are permanent and unchangeable.

Some of these innovations included:

- Unemployment Insurance started in 1940
- The Family Allowance Act passed in 1944
- The Saskatchewan Hospital Plan, originated in 1947 by Tommy Douglas, the blueprint for the national Canadian Healthcare Plan introduced in 1957
- Canadian Old Age Security instituted in 1951
- The Canadian Pension Plan begun in 1966
- Provincial and well-financed education—graduate school from 1969 to 1971 and from 1975 to 1977 cost me less than \$500 per year in tuition,
- Canada Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was set up in 1946 to meet housing needs for veterans of World War II—later expanded with major investments in affordable housing through financing, funding emergency shelters, and building general housing
- The growth of union membership to about 40% of the workforce by 1983.

These national programs were for the betterment of all Canadians with the support of the majority based on their lived experience, education, and sense of citizenship. It was a new zeitgeist of care, responsibility for each other, and equality. Politicians worked for the people, not for billionaires.

Interconnectedness

So, what happened in the last few years to degrade so much of what Canada had achieved and become? Observing through the lens of interconnectedness and intersectionality, I note the following:

- After the flower power era of the 1960s and the antiwar era of the '70s, trust in government and the establishment eroded.
- As people grew satisfied in a prosperous, peaceful community, an independence emerged, and people relied less on each other.
- The New Age movement of the '80s fostered and sold individual growth.
- Monopoly capitalism strengthened. There was only one billionaire before World War II, about 10 in the 1990s, and about 70 in 2025. Accompanying this uber capitalism was the lobbying of politicians to pass favourable laws and gain subsidies. The privileged class greased political palms and turned politicians away from the community—their influence directed government funds away from social benefits such as medicine, healthcare, education, welfare, housing, etc.
- Urgent housing needs were mostly fulfilled by the '70s and government programs ran out. Housing became the money engine for developers, catering to high-end sales aimed at offshore investors seeking safe haven in Canada. Their condos in the big cities now sit empty as the need for new affordable and social housing is effectively ignored.
- The economy shifted dramatically from resource exploitation and a unionized workforce to high tech and service industries. Unionization fell to 28% in 2022.
- Continuing global conflicts divided the populace into doves and hawks, reflected in the seesaw politics of Canada between the Liberals and Conservatives mitigated from time to time by the NDP.
- In the late 1990s and 2000s social media grew ubiquitous and separated people, changing community life of previous decades to disconnected individuals.
- Awareness of climate change and pollution separated fossil fuel exploiters, and developers from concerns that climate change affects all [intersectionality]. Big oil keeps lobbying select politicians and exploitation proceeds apace.
- The predominant unity of the golden age was further sundered by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the '80s and '90s. Existing discrimination exploded into fear and hatred, shunning and vitriol, each highlighting intersectionality. 2SLGBTQIA+ people united and provided initial care to persons with AIDS as even hospitals were initially inadequate. Along with queer care came education by queers.
- Protesting in the streets and badgering politicians were screams for help. Ultimately the world woke up and started to care because everyone knew someone who had HIV or died with it. They were all interconnected: sons, brothers, uncles, teachers, lawyers, stars, friends, professionals, caregivers, leaders of the arts and more. The virus was non-discriminatory. It emphasized that everyone is vulnerable.
- The pandemic influenced gaining legal partner rights, same-sex marriage, gender affirmation in Canada today.

I don't suggest that no new government initiatives were made during the last few years. Community awareness and education still had some influence with politicians, although endeavours with no or little cost attached seem to gain preference – for example, women's property/financial rights, protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ and Same Sex Marriage. Social media helps educate about minorities where Canadian, largely USA owned, media does not.



Some positive initiatives are:

- Women's rights. Full voting rights for women was achieved by 1940. Finally, in 1964, women got the right to own property and credit cards in 1974.
- 2SLGBTQIA+. Decriminalization of queerness happened in 1969 without legal protections. That came in 1996. Same-sex marriage arrived in 2003. Gender identity as a right was recognized in 2017. HIV/AIDS educated everyone through its danger to everyone. Education in this area is critical, as there are still significant, vocal parts of the populace seeking to erase same-sex marriage and adoption rights, and to restrict SOGI in education and books available to minors. Many Conservative leaders are anti-Trans and anti-SOGI. Social media helps spread awareness.
- The last of the Residential Schools oppressing First Nations closed in 1995.



Political action enabling change is avoided due to a fear of losing votes from vocal partisan groups, for example the religious right. Homelessness, rooted in poverty and lack of privilege, is a major complex issue in all cities. No holistic action has addressed this. Homelessness lacks for-profit potential. It is not seen as connected to the well-being of society. Its perception is often as a single issue of lack of initiative rather than systemic failure.

Poverty isn't a mistake.

It is the engine.

The rich stand on your neck and tell you to be grateful for the view.

It survives because it is useful to them.

Arundati Roy

We continue to fail at holistic solutions because we tackle every problem in isolation from all factors that impact it, naïvely thinking that that might work if we fund more. The interconnectedness of everything demands multidisciplinary, intersectional thinking and approaches. We must include all three levels of government, and all Canadian society. We must think in terms of social democracy.

I do not suggest that my thinking and writing begins to describe these issues completely. I am trying to look more at the interconnectedness, intersectionality and complexity of everything. It's time to speak out, and the BC Assembly of Nations and others say it clearly. By talking about it, by writing about it, we can start to revitalize that thinking. Let's be open to innovative thinking in 2026.

Notes:

<https://www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wildlife/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem/>

*Google: Hamsa Yassin on interconnectedness.

** intersectionality: "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of dis/advantage." Oxford Language

***Dates and facts from Wikipedia and Internet search engines, vetted in Hansard Canada

Further Reading:

Blakely, Grace. Vulture Capitalism: Corporate Crimes, Backdoor Bailouts, and the Death of Freedom. New York, NY, Atria Books, 2024

MY BROTHERS FROM OTHER MOTHERS

River Glen

Grade 10 had just ended and my 4 years of Catholic school with it. I had been sent across town to



Notre Dame Academy where my second cousins attended because my parents thought that would spare me the coming integration of public schools. Kids would be bussed in from Compton to the lily white neighbourhood of Westchester in Los Angeles. Ha ha! The last laugh was on them; though the grades 7 and 8 had had no Black kids, by the time I went to the Notre Dame Girl's High School for grade 9 and 10, it was very integrated. There were girls of all sorts: Hispanic, Asian and Black girls. The combined factors of my announcement of self excommunicating the day after the confirmation ceremony at the end of grade 8, plus the financial slide of my parents, and the fact that the original

reason, escape from Black people, didn't hold water anymore since I was already in a racially diverse school, helped me convince my parents to let me go to the local public school in my neighbourhood.

This was very important as I only had one real friend, Arley, since 7th grade, and I had to take the city bus to school or visit her from my neighbourhood 8 miles away. She was Armenian, grew up to be Bi, and, because she had an older sister, she was sophisticated in the cultures of Rock n Roll and the frontline of late 60's social revolutions. She was comfortably middle class and lived in a nice house in Westwood Village. She introduced me to the local Free Press bookstore. I can imagine what the older patrons thought when they saw us standing there reading *Horseshit Magazine* in our Catholic school uniforms. Happily, her parents drove us to all kinds of concerts and filming of TV shows. The most mind-blowing was the filming of Elvis's 1968 comeback where we three girls sat on the steps surrounding a small square stage when he sang "Love Me Tender". I still have my pink handkerchief with which he wiped sweat off his brow. It has the face makeup he wore on it.

But there were lots of other times I remember being very alienated from the negative environment at home and being lonely and wishing that the change of schools would help me make friends. Looking out my bedroom window at the house next door, just rented out, I saw a teen boy helping move stuff in. A few days later, I heard him and friends playing electric guitar etc. in the garage. I hung out my window and shouted something down the driveway about my approval of their music. Memory fails on details, but soon I was hanging with them, and they used my window to enter my room and hang out with me. Ross was the neighbour, and Ben was his best friend from a better neighbourhood from which Ross's own family's economics had necessitated their move. We were all just trying to figure out our place in the world. Ross was 16, and I was 15, soon to be 16 and going into 11th grade. Ben was soon to be 15 going into 10th grade. I was so happy to experience their male confidence, worldliness and their freedom compared to mine, plus I would soon learn they were special and unique individuals.

I will reminisce a bit about Ross first. His parents were first generation Sicilians. His father was an engineer; his mom was the homemaker and soon to be cooking mentor to my mom. We had a Beagle named Tammy, and he had a Basset Hound named Tony. They were pretty cute walking the down the street together. I am not sure which of us was more "worldly" about drugs, but I am fairly sure I became the most preoccupied with the subject. When the doors opened at school in September, I was to find a cornucopia of anything one could possibly want to try. One day, a girl came, and she had a large brown grocery bag with about 2 inches of deep Red Devils (barbiturates) in the bottom. She gaily passed out as many as anyone wanted to accept. I mentioned this because Ross, Ben and I soon went to a Jimi Hendrix concert at the Forum where I spent the whole time babysitting Ben, who was significantly over medicated. I

won't spend time on all the stuff we consumed over the next few years except to say these fellows, myself and several others that were my friends, had complicated realities at home and feelings like we certainly didn't fit with the jocks, cheerleaders or compliant types. We just had to push boundaries to get to somewhere else.

But we were all good students, and though Ben got sent home for too long hair and I got sent home for a top I made that exposed a bit of midriff, none of us were troublemakers. I had to work, so I went on the school program where I was expected to take 5 classes and only work 10 hours a week at the fast food restaurant. Of course, I worked as many hours as I could get. In 12th grade I took 4 classes and was only supposed to work 4 hours a day. Again I worked as many hours as I could get. I wound up



Arley and me in high school 1970

graduating with just enough credits and no plans for the future, while the fellows made their way to universities. I also had no developed talents in the arts or sports, never had travelled, and academics, as I mentioned, had not been the emphasis in our home. I could babysit all ages, sew, cook and clean and show up to a lousy job on time and reliably. In contrast, Ross built a harpsichord from a kit, taught himself to play Bach as well as the guitar, and started purchasing Baccarat glassware in 11th grade. Okay, yes, soon my queerness recognized his queerness. Ben was comfortably middle class; his father and step mother were in education. He and his brother had been abandoned by his birth mother when he was a toddler. She remarried, started another family, and never contacted the boys thereafter. The stepmom and dad were the most rigid, cold and conservative people I had ever encountered. But Ben had a pool, a pool table, all kinds of toys, played clarinet and classical piano.

He was tall, blond, golden skinned and surfed, loved hiking, got a car first and when he got to grade 10, the choir/drama teacher fell in love with him. Yes, it was inappropriate; everyone knew yet no one raised an eyebrow in the school. By the time Ben was 16, Mr. Robert Wood had taken him on a trip to Europe with his parent's permission. I remember eating lunch on the Junior lawn talking about Stonewall in '69, and how homosexuality was still in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 1974, not fully removed until 1987. It was the free love era, after all, so we were figuring out our identities against that macro backdrop. I had been sexualized by a friend of my father in childhood and date raped at 16, very loaded on drugs and alcohol. After that, I put on my butched up outfits and held tighter to my gay boys. But wouldn't you know: they both took cheerleader types to the proms. I was probably working at my stupid job and not able to afford a dress anyway.

I'll go back to Ross here briefly. His straight, homo-hating, engineer father wanted him in science and math classes. Ross, as I said, was musical and able to make a beautiful instrument that was also elegant furniture as an adolescent. Ross wanted to major in art which, of course, he was also great at. The father and son lived with real acrimony with dad threatening to not pay for university if Ross stuck with the art major. Well, his Dad had a massive hemorrhage and died one night from a life with maybe too much wine in it. Ross was 18 and went on to study art, eventually having a career in San Francisco as a mural painter in fine homes.

Back to Ben. When he turned 18, he aged out of the "special" place in Robert's heart. Of course, this left Ben painfully wounded especially when the fresh-faced boy ingénue, Roger, entered the picture. Throughout, the parties were going strong at Robert's, when I was finally included at age 18. This reality of a gorgeous home on Manhattan beach with fine food and free flowing beverages, where I'd hear lots of Barbara and musicals and about the head spinning queer culture flowering out in West Hollywood. It was also where I met my future husband when I was 19, and several years later in the end of 1980, Robert was a witness at our city hall marriage, and then threw us a party.

I'm not going to go into my many adventures in the in-between years, but among other things, I travelled, supported myself, and took lots of classes at City College at night. After our marriage, we moved to Canada, owned an orchard and really took going back to basics to heart. Goats, chickens, bunnies, dog, ducks and a cat plus a huge garden kept me busy. We eventually had 4 children, and as the economic conditions continued to stress agriculture in BC, Canada, we sold and tried agro-tourism. We saved a 1910 house from demolition, thoroughly renovated it, and moving it onto my sister-in-law's sheep farm with the intention of running a bed and breakfast.



Professional pic of Ben in '70's

Enough about me. While I was safely stowed away in my pioneer woman fantasy, Ben was living through the last of the free love era and then found himself in the unfolding horror of the AIDS crisis. I gave up the stoner ways January '81, moving to Canada, but he didn't. He never finished university, being financially cut off from family because of his gayness. He was a polished waiter in fancy places like Neiman Marcus always hoping for a career as an actor. He moved to San Francisco's Castro after a beating in West Hollywood by homophobes. Pieces of that talented confident boy I had loved were lost along the way. In the eighties, I would hear of his many dying and dead lovers and friends. My family took a road trip down to California in, I think, 1990. I had a short but loving visit with him. I heard he was positive, and a few years later Ross let me know of a later visit with Ben, an invalid by then. Ross had taken him out of the hospital for a drive and a few joints. Ben died in '94 at the age of 40. Several years ago I exchanged letters with Ross. He had retired from his art gig, and he and his husband bought a vineyard in Napa.

By the mid '90's I had been living a parallel life with my husband and was frustrated to be sure. I started taking correspondent courses, and in '97 left the marriage and went to university and reengaged with a passion with the queer community. I graduated in '99 with a BSW, and I stayed near my ex's home for the 9 years it took until the youngest went off to college. Then I moved to Vancouver where, gratefully, the kids all moved close to me.

I need to say a few more things. I really think the boys and I did what we could with what we knew and what was happening around us. We all would have benefited from better home lives. For me, being female, working class, not able to identify something I was good at and have that as part of my identity plus over exposure to an unhealthy lifestyle from childhood led to some of my poorer opportunities and choices. I could never paint Robert as bad because in the gay world at the time, since everything was considered wrong, having good boundaries wasn't part of the consciousness. Now-a-days, post AIDS, with rights and Average Joe role models creating wholesome families I don't think Robert would have acted the same as he did, and Ben might have had different expectations for himself if he's been young in the 2020's. I don't know what a different era growing up would have made me. I don't have regrets for my twists and turns, fluidity or trying to meet my needs at different stages of my life. I have now lived outside the closet for the second time for 29 years. I love my queer life. I treasure my friends and the organizations to which I belong. A couple of years ago, my ex told me Robert had died and left him \$20,000. I said what am I chopped liver? Hadn't I helped keep the party going for years? The fact was Robert and what was left of the LA relationships blamed me for ending the marriage and never contacted me again. Oh well, no one walks in another person's shoes. Right?

FROM QUEER TO QUEER, FROM RAW TO RICH

Adriaan de Vries



It's 1960. I am 14.

"You queer!"

It was spat at me. Venomous. Striking me with the precision hit of a cobra. Hitting me at my most vulnerable place – my low self-esteem. I was blindsided in naïve oblivion, not expecting anything from anyone, minding my business. I was the way I am every day, guarding myself from appearing, looking, or seeming different, from appearing 'queer', as if I knew what that was.

Then I thought I was the only queer in the world. The only one who knew that under the layers covering that I was queer. They were 'only' words, but I was viciously stricken. There was no surface wound, nothing showing anything was wrong. "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me." Never? Inside I bled, my heart lacerated. I wondered about the worth of life. It ulcerated for decades.

It was the times – the 1960's and 70's. This vitriolic hate, directed at about 10% of humanity, was accepted as the norm, propped up by sanctimoniousness and aspirations of godliness. It was supported by malignant hyper-masculinity that was the required standard for anyone male. The oppressed had not yet said: "Enough. I've had enough. I had no choice in this matter. Stop the hate and discrimination. I am worthy of everything you demand for yourself. Every right. Every privilege. Everything." Wounded and supporting each other in spite of self-hate, depression, addiction and mental illness. Then standing to be recognized like any other being, fully alive. To be proud and joyous; healthy, in mind and spirit. We struggled. We still struggle.



It's 1964. I am 18.

I go to college. A Christian college but with more freedom, nevertheless. Away from the ever-



present weight of parental control and religious oppression, I get to explore who I am. It started me on the path to freedom. It allowed a queer essence to grow inside, with tiny roots of self-acceptance. For a decade plus I lived in a binary world: queer and non-queer: functioning professionally as "straight" and personally as queer. My self-effacement was to keep my divisions, one part clearly separate from the other.

It's 1982. I am 36.

HIV exploded into the world and my self-acceptance thrusts me into beginning freedom. My allegiance to my community was stronger than my fear of being queer. I marched as "Silence = Death". I volunteered at the AIDS Committee of Toronto. Family Rights were won to allow spouses to visit their same sex partners dying in hospitals. I sunbathed on Fire Island oblivious to the HIV status of friends beside me. After more decades of protest and lobbying, we got Same Sex Marriage. Slowly, pride creeps in. My queerness becomes a strength. My queerness is my essence. I experience life as never before.

It's 2026. I am 79

My Queerness is whole. I luxuriate in its gifts, as an individual, as a friend, as a partner, as part of a community. I revel in all the experiences that I



have had as queer that I never have had and will not have as straight.

I am queer. Can you hear? I am queer. I am proud. I am accomplished. I am wise, advanced beyond my advanced years. My life led me to my queer fullness! In crossing the river Styx, I emerge from the hell of self-hatred into self-acceptance and joy, community and fulfilment, pride and love.

Pictures provided by Adriaan de Vries

QUIRK-E AND HEALTH QUEER IMAGING & RITING KOLLECTIVE – for ELDERS

Adriaan de Vries

An interesting idea has arisen that Quirk-e might have a connection to health. That immediately raises the question of whose health? Is it the health of the Quirk-e member, the person they are interacting with, Quirk-e's community or the community at large? I posit that it is all of those and I will try to show that.

But before we can move to that discussion, we need to ask what is health, and how do we determine what it is? There are several accepted classifications of health, with greater complexity as one dives deeper. The first is broken down into four parts: physical, mental/cognitive, emotional, and metaphysical/spiritual. The second classification is more formal and has four components, helpfully broken down into subcomponents. This classification is the Determinants of Health: personal (healthcare 25%, genetics 15%), social and economic (50%), and environmental (10%).

As a Quirk-e member who is approaching octogenarian status within a few months, I will add some other components that relate to queerness and our community with great impact, such as politics, gender, culture, race, homophobia (both sub-surface and open), loneliness, and isolation to name a few. It is also important to note that some benefits overlap the categories of health as laid out.

I will identify the major activities that Quirk-e carries out and relate them to health benefits. First, we have weekly meetings, fluctuating between in-person meetings and digital meetings. In these meetings, we greet each other, and bring each other up to date on how we are -- and this often moves the group or individuals to support and/or offer direct assistance to members who are experiencing health or other difficulties. We deal with the business that comes up from all members. We talk about political issues, including possible advocacy action, as they relate to us, about community engagement and invitations to perform or other. We talk about our direct engagement with community and how our writing/imaging can be shared or performed in community at large, as well as to queer, intergenerational, multiethnic/cultural and multiracial audiences.

Our meetings build and foster deep friendships. Our meetings directly combat loneliness and isolation. These impacts are recorded in expert gerontological literature as critical health promoters. People stay healthy longer when engaged with others. These benefits are enlarged by our frequent performances at community events, workshops, pride events, and diverse public gatherings. They add to the health of the community by educating and raising awareness of queer seniors, queers in general, by sharing our collective and individual wisdom as well as our unique history through our writing, images and performances.



River visiting Maggie

Our friendships are important to us and deeply meaningful. During our “normal” lives, we visit, go to meetings, protests, rallies, dinner, public entertainment, and much more together. When we are ill, we visit, we give rides, we call regularly, and we help the immobilized to be mobile. We continue all these activities when members are no longer able to be part of our Kollektive activities and may be in long-term care whether in their own homes or in a facility.

This has indirect impact on physical well-being, great direct impact on mental well-being and acuity, immeasurable impact on emotional well-being as well as on metaphysical/spiritual Zeitgeist and belonging. Directly supporting members living in care facilities to attend our virtual events helps to bolster them with sense of belonging, as well as helping to educate care staff in those facilities, most of whom have no idea of the unique physical, mental, emotional needs of queer seniors above the “regular” attention afforded white cisgender residents. We offer all with love: caring without expectation or judgement.

Quirk-e provides health benefits at all levels: to the individual, the Quirk-e community, the larger



queer community and the greater community at large. Through our mere existence, we combat isolation and loneliness. We stimulate mental activity and resolve challenges. We help to integrate the larger queer community by sharing the wisdom nascent in our personal and collective histories, creating an inspired sense of continuity, connectedness and purpose. We impact, educate and change all communities especially in unconscious and open homophobia through advocacy in our writing and actions. We stimulate shared activity, deep thought, and considered education about our struggles and our legacy, and we impact everyone we reach. We change our

world and culture for the better in all criteria considered for health individually and collectively: physical, mental, emotional, social and metaphysical.

. And we started with the aim of writing our personal stories.

Photos provided by Val Innes

REAL RECONCILIATION

"Reconciliation is more than just an opportunity for us to forgive others and each other. It is a chance to give the world something it has been lacking for more than seven generations: the full contributions of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and knowledge."

. . . from The Reason You Walk, Wab Kinew

BIG TALL WOMAN

Farren Gillaspie



This is a story, not only about a very special person, but of how one person can enrich and change our lives. In the early eighties, I was a coordinator for a home with four disabled adults. This is when I met Marilyn. She hadn't been fitting in with the three women in another care home. To give her and her roommates a bit of a respite it was suggested that she could join one of the residents and staff from our home for a short holiday to the interior of British Columbia. On that holiday, she bonded so intensely with the other resident and staff that when she came back from the holiday we mutually agreed this home was a perfect fit for her. She was ecstatic. She completed our model of four residents, two women and two men.

Marilyn was very mischievous and had a great sense of humour. She brought a spark to the group dynamic that made it amazing. She was barely five feet tall, weighing in at just under ninety pounds. Her striking features included her large, smiling brown eyes, with a mysterious twinkle and a thick mop of black hair. When rough housing with her 180 pound male roommate, we would often need to come to his rescue after his plaintive cries for help. She proved that a small body doesn't have to be limiting and it doesn't mean a small spirit. I have a place January 19- Feb 2nd so am trying to find gigs before and/ or after.

We wanted to celebrate her indigeneity with her. It was a difficult concept for her to understand since she had been segregated in a basically white institution for disabled people her entire life. We introduced her to some indigenous music and visited some indigenous people we knew but since we did not know which tribe or nation that she belonged to it was difficult to be authentic. She kind of understood and went along with it, sometimes, I think, just to please us. I had some familiarity with some west coast tribes and shared the little I knew. We talked about the four directions, our connection with Mother Earth, smudging and chanting. We talked about the possibility of an indigenous name. She was game. After much time smudging, chanting, drumming and seeking clarity from the Creator, the name that kept coming up was Big Tall Woman. It fit; she loved it!

The ensuing years brought much adventure and laughter, along with grass stains and muddy shoes as she pursued trails with her male roommate. Through the laughter, there were a few cruel twists of fate. The main one was that her body seemed to be slowly deteriorating. She began falling more often and went from using a cane to a walker and eventually a wheel chair. The only diagnosis we could come up with is this was the result of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, plus the fact that she only had one kidney since birth. She began having bouts of depression. I constantly felt I had to make her laugh and keep her from feeling her sadness. Maybe it was the fact that she seemed small and vulnerable and the fact that at that point she had no family. I would do almost anything to achieve my goal of keeping her happy. It really brought me out of myself, and allowed the performer, clown, boy in me to come out and play. Even as thirty year old man I learned that in friendship there is safety, and when there is no judgement, true friends can be real in each other's presence.

One day, Marilyn would not allow me to cajole her out of her sadness. She actually said, "no", and slapped me on the chest, put her head against me and sobbed. I got it. Sometimes we just need to acknowledge the pain, and it is okay to cry. It is an honour to be the recipient of that trust and be able to simply honour that process.

During this time we consulted with each other and some professionals to address the decline but also how to support Marilyn emotionally. Marilyn had been abandoned at birth and left in the hospital, so she didn't have the built in supports most of us have. She lived in a hospital-like setting until she aged out

and came to our organization. We totally got how special and important she was to us, but as a group it seemed like few of us had voiced that to her. We felt she wasn't aware of how beautiful she was inside and out or what a joy it was to be in her presence. As someone with such an independent nature, she was now reliant on everyone for all of her physical needs. We wondered if she felt she was a taker with nothing to give in return, and by extension no reason to live. She seemed to feel that she wasn't smart enough, not pretty enough and just a burden.

All of her staff came together to form a plan. Every day staff worked with her, we would individually let her know how important she was to us and the impact she had on people around her. The easy part was letting her know how beautiful she was. The gift of insight for me was that if I observe or think something good about a person, tell them, let them know. Until that point I felt that if I showed up and did a good job, that demonstrated that I cared. I realize now that there is no measure of the value of positive, genuine praise from people we trust and care about. I always thought Marilyn was fabulous, but I had never clearly told her that.

We got her a volunteer job that was just once a month, arranging small vases of flowers for a seniors' social. The seniors fussed over her and exclaimed how grateful they were for her contribution. She had purpose, and it was validated by people outside her circle. A reminder to all of us is that everyone needs to feel worthy, and that we contribute. We all need to feel that we are givers as well as receivers. A mentor of mine once suggested that if we never allow ourselves to receive from the people we give to, we in fact turn them into beggars.

Marilyn had been getting mediocre haircuts from people that didn't really know how to cut her thick wiry hair. Sometimes we would tear up on the ride home after a tragic haircut. I found a young man who had a wall of trophies from competition stage cuttings around North America. We offered him the challenge. The transformation was amazing! Her hair was a bit spikey on top, with longer hair fashioned into sideburns on each side. On the ride home, I lowered the visor mirror, so she could see herself. Her range of motion was not very good, but with some difficulty she managed to rub her hand and wrist over her hair. "Wow", she said almost in a whisper. She was smiling, ear to ear. My heart melted.



Marilyn rallied a bit, at least in attitude. Then in the mid-nineties, after almost a decade with us something miraculous happened. We discovered some of her family in the form of two uncles in Williams Lake. They came complete with aunts, nieces and nephews. I had always supported Marilyn to accept her indigenous heritage, but I was never totally convinced that she understood it.

We went on a road trip to meet her family and attend a powwow at the same time. Her tribe was a rather poor one, but there was a continual line of people to meet her in her wheel chair at the powwow. I kept encouraging her to cheer for the tall muscular dancers, but she just shook her head. Then a short stocky man came into the circle with bells around his ankles, and she went wild, cheering and rocking her body. During that visit, she got it! She understood where she came from.

She visited her family in Williams Lake and hosted them when they visited her. She ruled her rowdy nieces and nephews with the firm hand of a family matriarch. Another awareness reached was that we all need to belong; we all need family, chosen or otherwise, and we need to know where we came from. It gives us direction; it gives us purpose.

Marilyn had only one kidney since birth and to our dismay we discovered it was in rapid decline. Because of her deteriorating physical condition, she was not eligible for a transplant. The doctors at UBC hospital felt that she would only survive another year at the most. On the journey back from UBC, we cried and then we did what all sensible people do, when they get bad news. We went shopping!

We went to an exclusive hat shop in Vancouver. She tried on many. We couldn't decide so we bought eight new hats. Over the next five years as the doctors kept revising their time line for Marilyn, she became known around the North Shore as the "Hat Lady".

With about ten percent kidney function she kept going. She became easily fatigued and had to nap often. Finally in August of 2002, the doctors said this had to be it. She should have been in a coma. Enjoy Thanksgiving because she wouldn't be around for Christmas, and if she was, she wouldn't be aware of it due to the toxicity in her system.

For Thanksgiving, we celebrated our gratitude like never before. When December rolled around we decorated and prepared like never before. Marilyn was not only coherent; she was the hostess of the season. Every night we would talk about the next day. After Christmas it was New Years, followed by Valentine's day. Then from a selfish point of view, I suggested she could hang in for my April birthday, and she would be the best birthday present ever. Of course, that led to Easter. Then we had a conversation about how incomplete it would be to end an earth tour without reaching one's fortieth birthday, hers. She was in total agreement. It was a smaller celebration than other years, but it was intimate and, of course, far



more poignant. The lesson here was to celebrate every day we have and use holidays and birthdays to cement these days as even more memorable milestones.

The first week in June a support person took Marilyn to the Museum of Anthropology where she got to spend time exploring more facets of her culture. She was tired but keen to go through the exhibits. Two of Marilyn's day support workers had gone back to the Philippines to attend a wedding in May. The first one returned to work June the 9th and worked with Marilyn for the first part of the week. Marilyn was thrilled to reconnect. The second woman worked with her

for the remainder of the week. They went up to the village in her wheelchair for a coffee at Delaney's on Thursday. Marilyn was too tired to venture out on Friday. Saturday, she slipped into a coma, and Sunday she made her transition while in the company of two very caring support people and her roommates. It was peaceful and dignified as befitted a person of her stature. She called her own time as she had lived a good part of her life, on her own terms.

In my life, this became a twenty year season of gifts. It was profound to me, and in my observation, had a similar effect on all the many people who had come into her life. I know that most of us felt we had received more from her than we gave, and I am grateful that we had the opportunity to let Marilyn know that.

The legacy continues even after Marilyn's transition. Marilyn's aunts and uncles had been part of the residential school system. They came together to celebrate their niece's life and left with a renewed determination to get together more often and strengthen their ties. They knew that Marilyn's mother had passed away but that is all. We managed to find the burial site in a Vancouver grave yard. We were allowed to insert the urn with her ashes in a small hole on the top of her mother's grave. She was reunited with the mother she had never known, except perhaps in her dreams. The aunts and uncles had a chance to say goodbye to their sister and their niece and support each other in their loss and their pain.

I felt very privileged to be able to watch part of this process. I gave thanks to Big Tall Woman.

SEX AND SELF DEFENSE

Marsha Ablowitz

It was the early 1970s. I had got my Masters of Social Work at UBC and found a good job, but I missed campus life. I was anxious as I went to meet the UBC Women's Office coordinator. Sue was a lovely grad student from England with a short haircut and a formal British accent. In a consciousness raising group she had told us about going to her first women's bar in London. Her partner and she had to decide who would dress butch in a men's suit and who would be fem in a fancy party dress. I was fascinated by her story and relieved that I didn't need to decide if I were Butch or Fem. In my women's groups this wasn't an issue. We all wore work clothes or worn jeans and tie dyed T-shirts. Now as I ran up the stairs of the Student Union building I wondered if Sue would support my request. I was feeling uneasy and unsure of myself. I was splitting up with my husband because of my attraction to women.

The coordinator smiled at me. "Hi Marsha."

"Hi Sue, I'm a social worker. I have been talking to some women who were assaulted."

"Yes, it's a serious problem at UBC."

"I would like to volunteer to teach Women's Karate and self defense here."

"Oh, that would be good for our Women's program."

"Can I store the punching targets and gear in your office?"

"Sure, how about in the closet."

"Can you book a room?"

Sue readily agreed to book the ballroom, make posters and to approve everything. She even handed me a key to get into her office in the evening. It was so easy, no forms to fill out. Little did I know that teaching this class would lead to so many opportunities for sex. I didn't know that many lesbians were attracted to powerful women and that when they looked at me punching, yelling and kicking they would get turned on.



A large group showed up right on time. I showed them how to make a fist and we were soon all jumping, kicking, punching and shouting. I noticed that one bright eyed blonde woman was looking at me intently. She was totally coordinated. She followed each move instantly, throwing lightning fast punches. When it was her turn to practice with me she punched hard, directly to the moving target that I held in front of her. I was impressed.

"Have you studied Karate?" I asked.

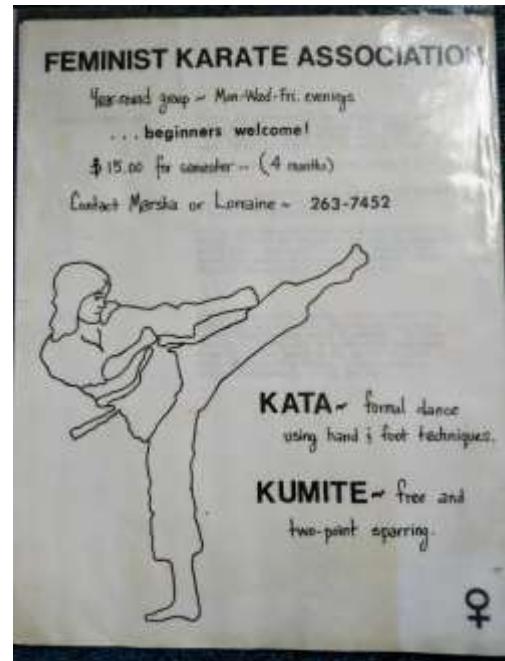
"No. It's my first time." She smiled. "I love the class."

"Wow, you are a natural."

After the class this blond woman, Nan, approached me grinning and asked: "Marsha, do you have a car? Could you give me a drive home? I live close to UBC."

"Sure, I just have to store the gear in the office."

As we walked to the parking lot, Nan told me where she lived. I wondered why she had wanted a ride since it took almost as long for us to walk to my car as it would take to walk to her apartment. She told me she



was studying teaching and loved skiing. When I parked at her apartment she leaned over and kissed me on my lips. I gasped, shocked. She was gone in a flash, leaving me and my pounding heart.

The next week Nan invited me for dinner and I met her tall, jock partner. Claire looked me over and winked at Nan. She told me she had returned from studying volleyball in Japan but then got kicked off our Canadian team. They joked about how Claire had easily lured Nan away from her husband. I told them about how hard it was for me splitting up with my husband Randy and wanting to live with the woman I loved, Jane. But she wouldn't commit to me. They smiled and nodded to each other.

Nan suggested we go snow camping in my VW van. I blushed when they called my van a fuckmobile. Only Nan showed up for the snow camping trip. She said Claire was busy. We hiked up a steep snow slope. The snow was soft and we often found ourselves sliding back down. At the top we stopped to look around. There was no one in sight. The mountains were shining, heavily covered with fresh snow. We felt very happy but couldn't stop long as storm clouds were blowing in.

On the way down the mountain we were plunge stepping in the snow, sliding and yelling. Suddenly Nan laughed and jumped on me, knocking me down in the snow. She rolled over on top of me and began kissing my wet snowy face. We made love right there in the snow bank. We couldn't take off many of our clothes since snow was getting into interesting places. Despite being bundled up, the snow sex felt great. Back in the van, I zipped our sleeping bags together, so we could take off more of our clothes. I gasped at the feeling of cold fingers on my warm clit. Afterwards, I stared at frost crystals forming around the metal screws on the roof of my van. Nan kissed me, saying she really liked making love in the snow.

Nan and Claire began inviting me for dinner every week. We talked about women's Lib and watched women's volleyball competitions. They were very sympathetic listening to my lonely laments. I had split up with my husband Randy to be with Jane. But now Jane was not sure if she ever wanted to live with me. She said she wanted to be friends with me, she made love with me sometimes. But then she went home to her place. I missed her so much and kept hoping she would come and live with me. I had convinced myself that one day she'd move in with me. In the meantime I was soaking up the attention from Nan and Claire.

One evening after dinner Claire invited me to go for a walk. It was a frosty winter night. "Your hand must be cold," she said as she took my hand into her warm pocket. I told her more about how sad I was to split up with my husband Randy. He was committed to me, but I was totally in love with Jane. Now Jane was firmly settled into her own apartment far from me. She seemed to be pushing me away. She was spending time with other women.

Claire squeezed my hand and said she couldn't understand Jane because Claire found me so attractive. I was surprised. I wondered if Nan had told her about our snow sex. I replied, "I think you are also attractive." In fact in those days I found every lesbian attractive. But I didn't say that. Claire hugged me briefly and breathed deeply. She towered over me. As we walked along she said, "We don't get these opportunities to be together often in our lives, we mustn't let them slip away." Then she stopped in front of me, put her arms around me and kissed me on my lips. My heart was racing but I was also confused.



What about Nan? What about Jane? Claire walked me back to my car and climbed into the back seat with me. We started making out but didn't get too far since it was cramped and icy cold in the car.

The next time I went for dinner with Nan and Claire they had candles on the table and wine. I couldn't drink much because it made me sleepy. After dinner they suggested that since I had been drinking I shouldn't drive home. I could sleep over at their place. They had a futon in their bedroom at the foot of their double bed. Just as I was falling asleep I heard them whispering and giggling in their bed. Claire said, "We think you must be lonely Marsha. Why don't you come join us?"

I jumped up. Instead of moving over, they invited me to crawl over top of Nan and cuddle between them. Just as I was sliding over Nan there was a sudden menacing loud crack. I froze, and they gasped. The mattress tipped; we all slipped. We landed on the floor. The bed frame had broken. We were lying on the floor in a tangle of wood frame, sheets and blankets. I was embarrassed that I had broken their bed. Claire was giggling as she assured me it wasn't my fault. "Not your weight Marsha. That bed frame was already cracked." I crawled back to the futon as they laughed and pulled at the bedclothes to make their bed. That was my last attempt at a threesome.

Photos provided by Marsha Ablowitz

OUR COMMUNITY – IN QUIRK-E AND BEYOND – HAS SUFFERED TWO SEVERE LOSSES RECENTLY.

Two women dear to many of us in Quirk-e have died in the past few days: barbara findlay and Greta Hurst.

barbara findlay

With Shantel's permission, I am including his notification of barbara's death here. Our queer community will mourn her and miss her, and we send our sincere condolences to Sheila, her partner who is a member of Quirk-e. As a lawyer, barbara fought for us with skill and determination, and all Canadian 2SLGBTQ+ owe her a debt of gratitude for her work and the ground-breaking cases she won for us.



barbara findlay

Dear friends of barbara,

It is with sadness that I am writing to let you know that barbara died yesterday. After a long disabling illness, barbara chose MAiD. Her beloved Sheila was with her when she passed.

barbara wasn't afraid of dying. She often said that she was "a momentary articulation of matter in the universe."

She said our culture gets death wrong. Death is not always an on-off switch. Rather, sometimes it is like a leaf slowly letting go of the branch, curling softly away from the tree before falling to its next role in the mulch.

barbara has returned to the energy of the stars.

There will be no funeral, but we will keep you posted about a memorial.

barbara asked me to send her love and best wishes to all of you.

She urges us to keep heart for the struggle for justice and equality.

Yours in grief,

Shantel Ivits

Greta Hurst

As is posted on our Quirk-e *About Us/In Memoriam* at www.quirke.ca, Greta was proud to say she was the oldest member of Quirk-e until she passed away at the age of ninety. She said she was delighted to be part of such a clever and unique group of writers. Greta's stories appear in all eight of Quirk-e's anthologies, in three of Quirk-e's zines, and in *Sharing Our Journeys (Queer Elders Tell Their Stories)* from Filidh Publishing.



Greta Hurst

Born in Montréal, Quebec, in 1936, Greta lived a remarkably rich, full, and independent life. She was a deeply adventurous spirit who loved exploring the world, living and travelling in different countries and constantly defying expectations. Never afraid to go against the grain, Greta carved out her own path and sought out communities of like-minded individuals wherever she went. Greta travelled well into her 80's these last trips included Europe, Haida Gwaii, a cruise to Alaska. But her favorite was the Galapagos.

Greta was a woman of many talents and passions. She was an avid reader, an enthusiastic gardener, and a dedicated creative who loved writing and performing her short stories. She also had a lifelong passion for photography, finding equal joy whether she was capturing the world from behind the lens or posing in front of it. For many years her photo was used to promote QMUNITY Seniors programs. Above all, she loved socializing, sharing stories, and connecting deeply with others. We remember Greta for her smile and infectious laughter.

[Greta Hurst 1936 – 2026 – Quirk-e](#)

TWO EVENTS COMING UP THAT YOU MAY NOT WANT TO MISS



42nd Annual Vancouver Fringe Festival

Thursday, September 10, 2026 to Sunday, September 20, 2026

Labour Day Weekend Preview: September 5–7, 2026

Full Festival Dates: September 10–20, 2026

Locations: Granville Island and satellite spaces across Vancouver

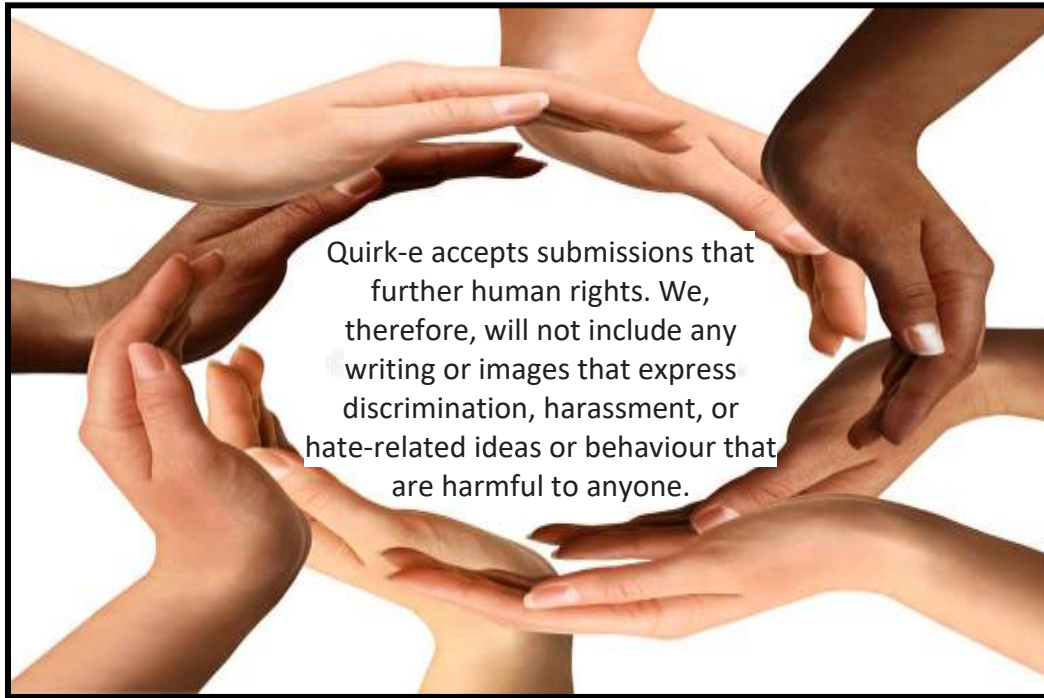
Tickets and Information: Show details, passes, and schedule information are available on the [Vancouver Fringe Festival Website](#).

Vancouver Queer Film Festival 2026 Sets "A Seat at the Table"

The **38th annual Vancouver Queer Film Festival (VQFF)** returns this fall, running in-person from September 10 to 20 across local theatres, followed by an online streaming programme from September 21 to 27.

Presented by Out On Screen, this year's festival features 87 films from around the globe centered on the overarching theme, "A Seat at the Table". Inspired by visual artwork from local Black queer artists Odera Igboke and Tolu Ayoka, the 2026 programming focuses on belonging, shared community space, and collective liberation.





Editor's note: While the following is not from a Quirk-e writer, in the uneasy world we live in today, with its wars, tariffs, rising costs, climate change and other threats, the reminder is timely and worth reading. Keep in mind also that being kind to others can and often will change their world and yours.

**Reminder that we live in a world
where humpback whales lift other
animals out of the water to protect
them from predators, where crows
hold funerals, where trees in
drought send water through their
roots to other struggling trees,
where dolphins have names
for each other, where sea otters hold
hands when they sleep to stay
connected, and where a group of
people sitting silently together in a
state of love can measurably reduce
violence in the city around them**

Gorgeiecollinson



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, 604-5307 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/>
- Queer Aging BC (formerly known as Dignity Seniors Society) [https://queeraginginbc:](https://queeraginginbc.info@queeragingbc.ca)
info@queeragingbc.ca
- 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>

A site River Glen thought you might also 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. You can sign up for updates or manage your subscription through the [LGBTQ Nation Newsletter Signup](#) page. [1]

WHATEVER OUR FUTURE HOLDS FOR YOU, HERE'S
A WISH FOR YOU FROM THE QUIRK-E ZINERS . . .

may the sun
bring you new energy by day,
may the moon
restore you by night,
may the rain
wash away your worries,
may the breeze
blow new strength into your being
may you walk
gently through the world and know
its beauty all the days of your life.

Elliott Arnold, *Blood Brother*

Photo of Fox Lake, Ontario by Val Innes