

Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Vol. 4 — January 2022



The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written.

~ Melody Beattie

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Publisher

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Front Cover Photograph by Margreet Kuypers

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Publisher's Ponderings



I have had a very quiet, reflective holiday season this year. I spent a lot of time alone ... reading, watching movies, taking long walks on the trail with my beloved dog, Mandy. However, I also made a point of inviting friends over for afternoon tea ... one at a time, sitting in my living room by my Christmas tree and having intentional, heart-felt conversations.

It has been a very difficult year. A very difficult couple of years, in fact. It's been a common theme, amongst everyone I've talked to ... but especially during the holiday season.

During my "alone" times of reflection, I've done a lot of thinking about the direction I want my life, and my business, to take in 2022. The theme of brokenness has always been prevalent.

I am regularly reminded of the line from Leonard Cohen: "There is a crack in everything. It's how the light gets in."

I have spent far too much time berating myself for "mistakes" ... for not being perfect (ahh, the lament of a perfectionist's daughter who adopted the same "values" from her father!). But I realized that I have never once berated (or even thought of berating) someone else for mistakes made .. some of which may have been far greater than my own (if there is in fact a scale for that).

My point is ... I believe we are all on a journey of our own choosing. We all have a "sacred contract" (in the words of Caroline Myss), and we all came to this planet, in this time, with lessons that we wanted to learn. Those lessons, in turn, become what we also came here to teach to others.

And so my brokenness has now become my strength. The cracks in my being have become my connection to possibility ... to finding the light in my own darkness, and shining that light where I can, so that I can help others to find their own way.

My vow, on this first day of a new year, is to embrace my own vulnerability, and to encourage others to do the same. It is when we are weak that we are strong. It is when we face our fears that we can see our bravery.

And, as telling stories and speaking truth is my passion and my mission in this life ... I invite anyone and everyone with a story to tell, to reach out to me. It will be my honour to assist you on the journey.

Lisa

Solstice, Endings and Beginnings ***Francine Houston***

As I write this, solstice has just passed, and the calendar is about to flip to a new year. As the time ticks down toward that flip, many of us are considering the year that is coming to a close, and the upcoming possibilities for the future. The last 23 months have many of us feeling very disconnected. World events, and the associated changes in how most of us move in our day to day lives, have given many of us insight into what was and was not working. It has not been without challenges, but those insights are a gift. The emotional, spiritual, and physical situations have been compounded by the normal inclination of most people to reflect and adjust their trajectory with resolutions for the new year.

While I have done that in the past, there has been an extended time of reflection, and I have taken a slightly different approach this year. So many people reflect, make a resolution or three, begin the calendar change with great gusto, and within a very short time, those resolutions fall by the wayside. I admit, I too have been guilty of perpetuating that cycle at times in my life. More recently, however, I have gone back to a way that seems more organic and grounded in natural cycles, and has worked well for me.

For me, Autumn Solstice in September, when the world begins to slow, the harvests are being brought in, and the world begins to head toward hibernation in the Northern Hemisphere, is the beginning of my time of recalibration. I typically look at the year that has been, and celebrate my wins. As autumn transitions toward winter, generally marked by Yule, the snow (at least in most parts of Canada) begins to blanket the world. Having assessed and recalibrated, I then look at where I want to be headed in the year to come, and recalibrate my trajectory. I pick three or four “power words” that I intend to call into my life for the upcoming year. It helps me to start to move into a place of being proactive in the calendar change. It also allows me to really celebrate the successes of

the outgoing year. My words allow me to choose circumstances and opportunities that advance my trajectory, and support my decisions to release opportunities that don’t quite align. This has been a truly pivotal strategy for moving forward in my life. In this, my year of “YES,” I look forward to seeing what the Universe has in store. Freedom? Creativity? Financial stability?

What would you call into your life?

* * *

Time’s True Worth ***Bill Brubacher***

One more day in our life
is one less day
in our lifetime,
and like any other
precious commodity
times true worth
can only be judged
by the degree to which
we value its scarcity.

Much can be said at this annual ‘solstice’ of the year, celebrating endings and beginnings: like starting over, setting new goals, opening a new life chapter. But what’s really at the core of all that?

Indeed, what’s at the core of life? Well, surely it’s time, isn’t it?

And for me, the most important message I wish to share with you today, is to remind you of what life would be without it.

Clearly, time IS life and without it; we have no life – are not alive.

So long as we have time, we are alive. And what could be more valuable? Because so long as we are

alive, there is hope. And so long as there is hope, there is possibility. And every moment of time offers each of us new possibility.

Time is like gold.

Just think, we are all given the same amount to start with each day, and the choice of how to invest or spend it is ours, for as long as we have it to spend. Time. Yes, time.

Time is also like a job. It's like working for ourselves. We are the boss of it.

We decide the work we do, and to use our time wastefully or wisely is up to us. And come the end of each day, we are paid on how we spent it.

Unlike currency or a job, time is not something we carry around with us in our wallet or pocket or purse. It is ubiquitous and has no special appearance to represent its significant worth – no particular weight to hold, either too heavy or too light, but just right, and is of inestimable value.

Moreover, time is invisible, other than when we're using it to guide our actions like arriving early or late – or right on time.

Everything and everyone depends on it; the world revolves around it. And if you listen carefully, it is the drum beat of our life.

As I said, it is nothing physical. And the closest it comes to anything like that, is when we look at a clock to see what time it is, or watch the second hand tick away the seconds of our life, or hear the haunting chimes of a grandfather clock or the regular dripping of seconds like small droplets of water from a slowly leaking tap.

Yes, this miraculous thing called time that we so often simply take for granted is also like breathing. It is an omnipresent reminder of life that is constantly dwindling down what we have left of it, along with the

ever present possibilities of using it, or losing it to the stretching shadows of darkness.

So what do I have for you today?

Well, it's a very special and personal gift with your name on it. Time.

It's a surprise post-season gift, redeemable year round to be used at any time to create a new future for yourself or to simply stash away for a rainy day.

However you decide to spend it, I hope you will discover the gift of giving yourself and of finding the true worth of the value of time.



Wishing you a very happy, fulfilling and purposeful gift of your time throughout all of 2022.

* * *

Jump for Joy Brenda Cassidy

“I don't care if the whole world thinks I'm crazy!” Candace crossed her arms defiantly over her chest.

“Hey, don't let me bother you,” replied Candace's best friend, Lucy. “It's just that if it were my sixteenth birthday, I would have asked for something else besides permission to jump into thin air. You're always complaining about that strawberry hair of yours. Why

didn't you ask to have it lightened for your birthday? Or have your freckles faded? Heck, that would be nothing compared to this!"

"It's too late. I've already completed my training," said Candace, sticking her bottom lip out. "This is just something I have to do... for myself," she added.

"For yourself, huh?" chuckled Lucy. "You haven't taken your eyes off tall, dark, and questionable over there since we got here."

Candace managed a smile, but it quickly faded. She was remembering how impressed Cameron seemed to be with an older girl named Denise. Denise was new to the Sunvalley Skydiving Club, but she had at least a hundred jumps under her belt.

"Okay, okay," Candace said, rolling her eyes. "He's cute, he's nice, and I like him. But he doesn't really notice me, at least not in the way I would like him to." Candace noticed the "I told you so" look in Lucy's eyes, and quickly added, "But that's not the reason I'm doing this. I'm tired of being sweet little Candace, boring little Candace. If I don't do something soon, I'm going to end up living boringly ever after."

"You shouldn't be so hard on yourself," said Lucy.

"That's easy for you to say, Lucy. You're popular, and you have all the self-confidence anyone could ever want. And you're growing in all the right places."

"Perk up, Candace old girl. You're not over the hill yet. I'm sure you'll grow some more. If not, heck, being small isn't so bad. I'll probably envy you someday."

All thoughts of future developments came to an abrupt halt as Candace heard her name being announced. "You will meet me at the landing target, won't you Lucy?" Candace asked.

"I'll be there with the net!" Lucy jokingly said.

"Cute, Lucy," said Candace, giving her friend a good natured punch in the arm.

As Candace walked over to the clubhouse, there were ocean waves in her stomach. Her throat felt as though it were closing up as she gathered the necessary gear assigned to her from within the clubhouse. Trembling, she pulled a pair of well-worn, dull green coveralls up over her clothes, and then donned a pair of heavy, rubber-soled boots.

With a little effort, Candace managed to hoist a parachute onto her back. She forced a frozen smile as a more experienced jumper helped her adjust the main parachute harness, and connect the reserve parachute to the front straps. Candace then put on a helmet. As she turned to leave the clubhouse, she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror: drab, baggy coveralls, a helmet with six inches of chin strap left over, and a reserve chute that hung down a foot too low. Candace rolled her eyes. And Lucy thought I was trying to impress someone, she thought to herself.

Candace's balance was off as she concentrated on each step she had to take to get to the runway and the waiting airplane. She was thankful that it was still early June and not too hot yet. A gentle breeze had started to blow, and it felt refreshing against her perspiring face.

Candace waited beside the small Cessna aircraft. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other. A fellow beginner was already waiting inside the aircraft, but Candace knew that they still had to wait for the instructor and one experienced jumper. The instructor soon appeared, followed by a girl in a neon-pink, made-to-order jumpsuit. Her parachute was compact, and she walked with ease and grace. It was Denise.

As naturally as she could, Candace hoisted her reserve chute up to her waist and held it there. She watched as Denise breezed into the airplane. She was all smiles and reminded Candace of those toothpaste commercials. Candace took her cue and clambered clumsily onto the port wing, falling headfirst into the

aircraft. She giggled nervously as her face grew red and hot, and hoped the others would think it was merely the reflection from Denise's jumpsuit.

Moments later, the airplane taxied out and lined up on the runway for takeoff. The roar of the engine increased steadily as the aircraft gained speed. Within seconds, Candace could feel the aircraft lift gently off the tarmac. She gulped and was in a dreamlike state of fear. This can't be real, she thought to herself. I'll wake up soon. I'll go with Lucy to get my hair done and my freckles faded.

There were no seats in the small craft, and Candace's knees were grinding into the floor from the extra weight she carried. There was no door either. Candace could see the fields turning into patchwork, and the clouds into something you could almost reach out and touch. As she watched the altitude reading climb higher and higher on the altimeter, she realized how different the real thing was from ground training.

It wasn't long before Candace heard the instructor order the pilot to cut the engine so that the first jumper could get out—and she knew that this meant she would be next.

Candace chewed on her bottom lip as the instructor took the static line hook from her parachute and snapped it to the roof of the airplane. She was thankful that the rip cord would be pulled automatically by the static line. After being given the signal, she moved slowly and awkwardly on her knees, to kneel facing the door. Now I know how a tortoise feels, she thought to herself.

The plane was going around again. It always had to be in the correct position so that the jumper would land on target. Candace clenched her jaw tight while waiting for that dreaded word.

"Cut!" yelled the instructor. Candace thought her heart stopped at the same time, only she knew that it couldn't have—it was pounding too hard in her ears! She sat frozen at the open doorway of the airplane

and stared at the clouds. The smaller clouds reminded her of stepping stones, and she couldn't help wishing that she could step out onto them and catch the first flight down. Through her thoughts, she could hear Denise and the instructor coaxing her on—it was too late. The plane would have to go around again. Candace was grateful for the delay. It at least gave her time to think.

As the airplane circled around, Candace imagined Lucy waiting by the landing target below, her face tilted skyward. Candace knew that Lucy was proud of her even if she didn't tell her so. They had been friends for so long that Candace felt she knew Lucy better than she knew herself. Lucy's "I told you so" look flashed through Candace's mind. Even worse, she imagined, would be Denise getting off the airplane into Cameron's waiting arms. They would both turn to look at her as she remained paralyzed inside the airplane. Then they would look back at each other with a knowing smile, and walk away.

Candace decided that her fear of humiliation was greater than her fear of jumping; so, in her mind, she quickly reviewed the procedure for opening the reserve parachute. The command to cut the engine was heard again. This time, Candace struggled through the doorway, the wind snatching greedily at her coveralls. She cautiously climbed out onto the wheel, forcing her feet to go where she had been trained to put them. Trembling, she gripped the strut firmly with both hands. With the command of "Go!" echoing in her ears, Candace flung out her arms and legs.

Immediately, she realized her mistake. She had let her hands go a split second before her feet. During the ground training, it had seemed so simple to push off with both hands and both feet at the same time. Of course, there hadn't been that force of air waiting stealthily to invade that space between your hands and the airplane.

Candace could feel herself somersaulting through the air for what seemed like forever. Suddenly, she felt

a firm tug at her shoulders, and looked up just in time to witness the orange and white canopy streaming out, fluttering around, and finally opening up like a flower in bloom. The wind whistled around her as she swung gently under the open parachute.

Realizing that she hadn't been breathing at all for the last few seconds, Candace took a deep breath and relaxed her whole body.

"Alright!" Candace yelled, as loud as she possibly could, delighting in the fact that no one could hear her. "This is great! It's so peaceful. There's just me up here, all alone. Wow! The cars look like ants. Hey, wait a minute! I'm going too fast!"

Candace could barely make out the florescent cross that was to be the landing spot, but she could tell that she was getting farther away from it. The wind had become stronger, giving the parachute a mind of its own as it picked up speed. Candace gripped the steering toggles firmly with both hands. She was closer to the ground now and could see hydro lines in the area below.

"Calm yourself!" Candace commanded herself. "Think about what you're supposed to do if you land in hydro wires!" She dismissed the thought as she then passed over the wires. Her new concern was the rapidly approaching grove of trees. Candace tried to remember what she was supposed to do in the event of a tree landing. She tried desperately to steer as the trees loomed below her. In her panic, she couldn't quite remember what she was supposed to do. Just then, a welcome clearing appeared as the ground rushed up to meet her. She quickly put her knees and feet tightly together as she landed abruptly in a heap.

Candace lay on the ground for a while, trying to apprehend what she had just done. It wasn't too long before she glimpsed a splash of pink through the trees. It was Denise, coming toward her—with Cameron.

How about that? I'd forgotten all about Cameron, Candace marvelled to herself. I really did do this for myself!

"Candace, are you okay?" asked Denise, looking genuinely concerned.

"Is she okay, you ask? She's great! Did you see that perfect double somersault she did?" Cameron was talking to Denise but was looking at Candace. "You are okay, aren't you Candace? You'll want to be able to dance at our prom. Sorry, I've been meaning to ask you before now. I hope you will say yes."

Candace stared back at Cameron. She felt as though she were still up in the clouds—only this time she was on cloud nine.

* * *

Bruce Trail, End to End (part 4) *Clay Williams*

In early June 2021, my good friend Debbie and I decided that we would hike the full length of the Bruce Trail, all 800+ km, by doing day hikes on weekends throughout the coming year. This is the next chapter in our adventures on and off the trail.

Day 3, November 27, 2021

Not all of the Bruce Trail consists of rugged rocky trails. Some sections are on roads where walking is easy, and some are on trails that are well groomed. For this first venture back onto the trail since Debbie's hip surgery and my gut thing, we were looking for something that wasn't going to be too rough or too steep. Neither of us wanted to cause a setback in her recovery process, but both of us wanted to get on with the quest and get some miles on the trail.

I had spent a few hours in the previous weeks plotting out the full length of the Bruce Trail on my favorite mapping software, and I looked for sections

that had straight lines indicating roads, and small elevation gains. I found an area near the Forks of the Credit that seemed to fit the bill. It was 8.7 km of the Bruce Trail that was mostly roads, with some gently sloping trails.

As Debbie was recovering and her walks were getting a little longer, I had joined her a few times with a weighted pack while she walked at first with a cane, then without assistance. I had some unused vacation time coming, so I asked her if she wanted to go for a walk on a Friday in late November. She said she was up for it and wanted to know if our usual park in town was a good place to meet.

I asked if she would be ok with walking on the Bruce Trail if I could find a section that was mostly road and not too challenging, and she was all for it. I let her know I had already found a good section to hike and started to plan the details. We would have to drive two cars again, leave one parked at the end point and drive the other to the start point. To determine a parking place, I used Google Streetview and looked for a wide section of road near the trail, and an area without any NO PARKING signs. I checked driving directions to get an idea of how long it would take us to get to the end point, then the start point by car.

I estimated it was going to be about a two hour hike, and I wasn't ready to carry my usual 50 pound weighted pack that far, so I planned to bring along a few things just to fill the backpack: some firewood, a folding wood stove, an emergency shelter, an extra layer of clothes in case it got colder. The total weight was only about ten pounds. Debbie mentioned that she had had an injection because of some swelling so I was very conscious of the terrain we were on and had planned alternate roadway options in case our walk of the trails got too rough and we had to change plans part way through.

We met at Debbie's place around 9:00 on Saturday morning and headed out in our separate cars, with me navigating and Debbie following behind. It seemed like a long drive to get there, driving down one of the

bumpiest back roads in Ontario, but we eventually got to the end point, parked my car, and headed in Debbie's car to the start point.

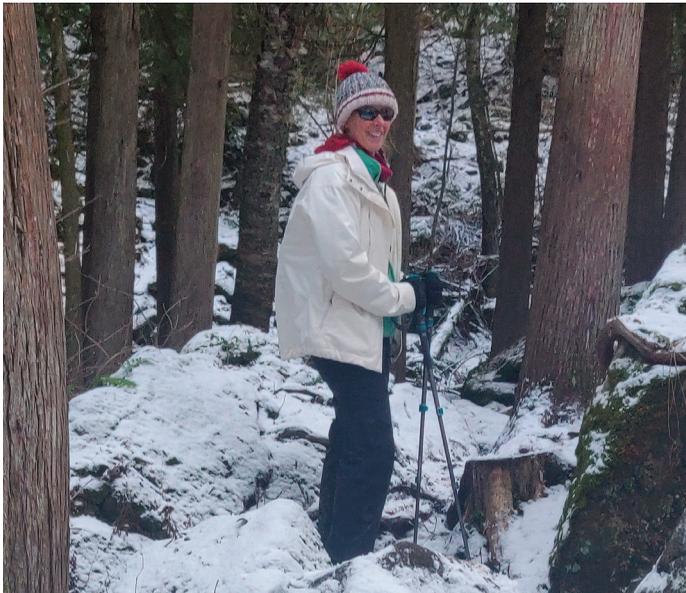
When we got to the start point, we found NO PARKING signs everywhere, so we had to drive a couple hundred yards down the road to find a place to park. We grabbed our things out of the car and started walking. Not far from our start point, we saw an unusual looking house. It was painted in bright colours and looked like it had Asian decorations on it. There was a colourful flag waving out front, so I took a picture of it and researched it a little bit later. I found that it was similar to a Buddhist flag but with an additional colour band on it. There was a statue of Buddha out front and a statue of a female Goddess, maybe Krishna.

We couldn't help but wonder who built this place and why, what kind of things happen there, it looked like a meeting place rather than a residence. As we continued our hike, we saw some huge homes along the route, and many long driveways leading to houses that were in the woods that we couldn't see. Deb was feeling ok, but because of the injection she had been given, her hip flexors were numb and she couldn't lift her right leg up normally. So on the inclines when she had to step up with her right leg it meant that she would have to go up on her tippy toe on her left foot. We encountered our first stile that day, a kind of ladder that allows the hikers to walk over a fence line.



I had to stop and take a photo, because I knew it was the first of many stiles we would be seeing on the Bruce Trail. We made it safely to the end point, uninjured, and not exhausted or dehydrated.

We went out again on December 4th and hiked a section that was about 13 km long and again was mostly Road. Again we drove down the bumpy road to get there. We hiked past a section that looked like the badlands in Alberta, something I hadn't expected in Ontario. The last couple kilometres that day were fairly rough, with more typical Bruce Trail broken stones and short steep hills.



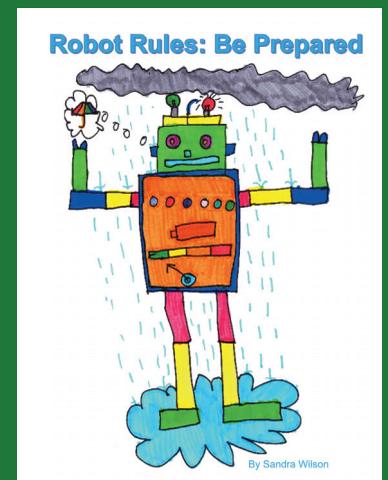
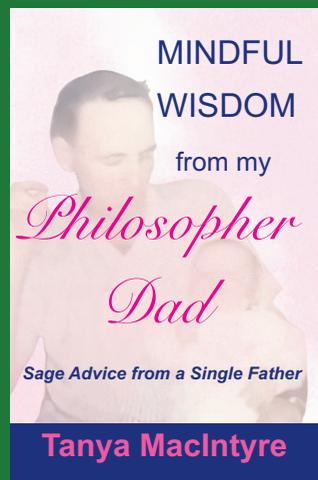
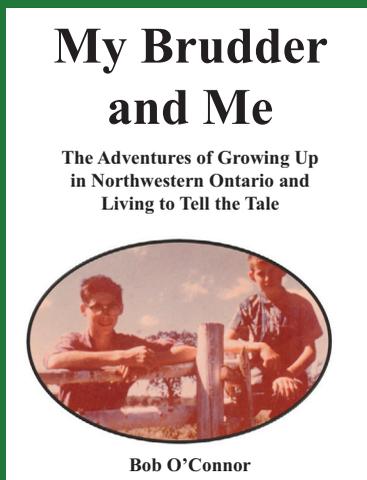
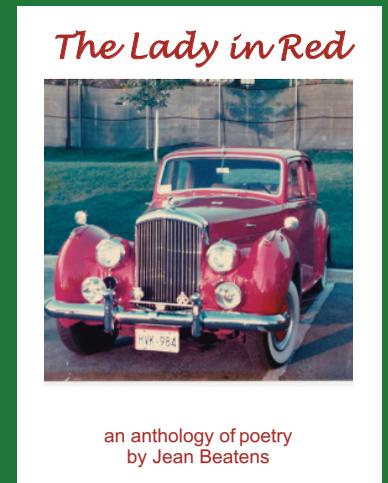
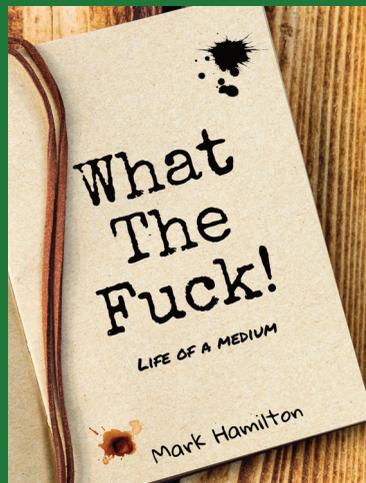
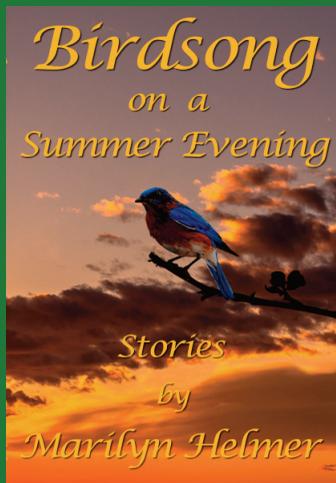
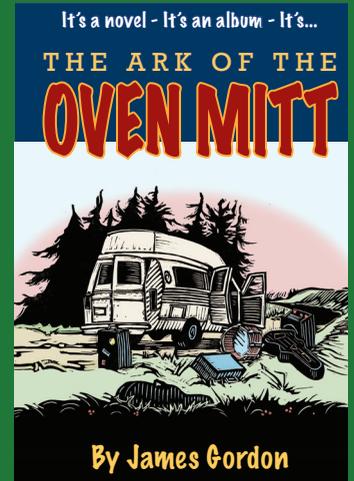
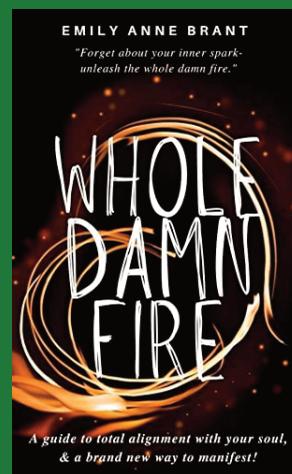
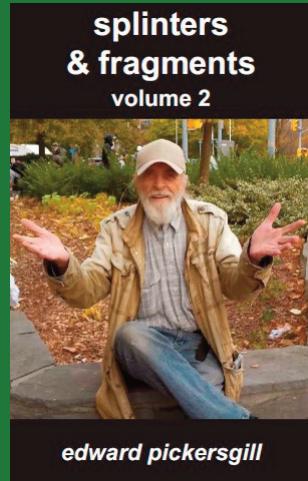
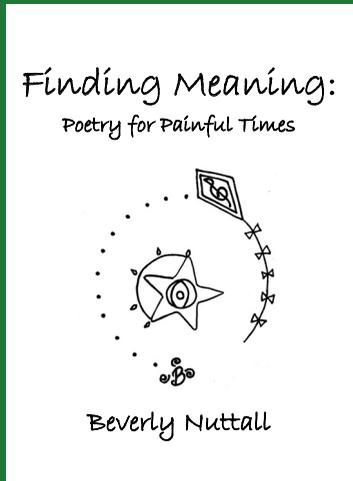
Sticking with shorter treks, we headed out again on December 12th for a section that looked like it was about 17 km and mostly roads. After the hour long drive on that same bumpy road, we got to our start point. It was a cool, fairly windy day, just below freezing, so we were bundled up, well layered, and prepared to be out on the road in the open and in the wind for a couple of hours. Shortly after the trail went off the road and into the woods, we came across a little pond with a windmill and a few small long-abandoned outbuildings. It was like the ruins of a western town and we couldn't help but think about what might have been going on there so many years ago when it was first built.



As I had expected from putting the map together, there was about 16 km of easy road and trail hiking. But there was something I didn't see; the last 2 km was a hike up the escarpment. It started with a stairway followed by a couple more stairways, then a very steep climb with switchbacks up a rocky slope with a cable running up the slope that we could hang on to for stability. It was the kind of climb that scares me; long, steep and slippery, and without any handrails I have to rely on my own questionable balance and arthritic hands to hold onto a slippery cable. It didn't seem to faze Debbie, the mountain climber, at all, but I know her hip was pretty sore by the time we reached the top. That climb was another reminder, like the ones we had seen in days past, that the Bruce Trail demands respect. So far we've hiked about 165 km, and have about 725 to go.

Thank you ...

... to all the clients whose books I published in 2021. I appreciate your trust. Congratulations on telling your stories and speaking your truth!



The Package **Joan Almond**

Christmas had come and gone in the blink of an eye. Maggie had barely noticed the holidays; her mother's death sudden and unexpected. "December 31st," she said, looking at the calendar. "Mom's birthday."

Maggie's mother was a 'holiday force' to be reckoned with! She was known for her kind heart, not to mention her: homemade shortbread cookies, Christmas cakes, and trays filled with sweets of every kind. The memories of Christmas flooded Maggie's senses. This year, the store-bought desserts with their empty calories, and over-done packaging, left Maggie feeling alone.

Lost in her thoughts, suddenly, a knock came to the door.

"Who could that be?" Maggie asked herself.

She shuffled to the door in her housecoat and slippers. The wind howled outside the old red brick house. The floor boards creaked as Maggie walked to the door. She passed an old tin pan catching drips from a leak in the roof.

Maggie couldn't bear the thought of selling her mother's home, but finances said by the New Year, she must.

A gust of wind caught the door, as Maggie opened it, making it impossible to hide from her unexpected guest.

"The postman?" Maggie said to the man, standing in front of her. "What are you doing here?"

He smiled. "That's what I'd like to know," he said. "No seniority. I have to admit, the extra pay at time and half is nice, especially over the holidays." He smiled at Maggie again.

Maggie did her best to return the greeting, but grief made it difficult. Shivering with cold, and a little embarrassed by her shabby wardrobe, didn't help matters.

"Do you have anyone to shovel your walk?" asked the postman. "I have a few minutes to spare."

Maggie looked down at herself and frowned. "Thank you," she told him. "I'll get it done. I need to get some fresh air."

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Wouldn't take a minute."

"Thanks," Maggie answered. "I need to get out of the house for a bit. By the way, do postmen often shovel for their customers?"

He laughed. "I suppose not," he said. "Your sidewalk looked like it hadn't been shovelled in a bit. I just thought..."

He stopped himself, as Maggie's eyes filled with tears.

"Look," he said. "The holidays can be a tough time. No shame in that."

"You are kind," said Maggie. "Really, I'm fine."

"I know you are," he answered. "But if you don't have it shovelled by tomorrow, I'm doing the job."

Maggie laughed. It felt good. She couldn't remember the last time she had laughed, or smiled for that matter.

"I mean it," he said. "I'm on this route all week. I'll be keeping my eye on you..."

"Maggie," she told him, introducing herself. "I didn't catch your name."

"Dillon," he told her.

He turned to leave, then stopped. "I almost forgot," he said. "Your parcel. There's a message with it."

"A message?" asked Maggie.

"We seldom get these kinds of detailed instructions with a Christmas parcel," he told her.

"Christmas parcel?" Maggie inquired. "I can't think of a soul who'd be sending me a gift in the mail."

"A secret admirer maybe?" said Dillon. "You're to sign for the parcel, after I read you the message."

"Okay," said Maggie, with a whisper of hesitation.

"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written," he read.

Maggie stepped back from the door, putting her hand to her mouth. Tears filled her eyes, like water filling an ocean. She paused, gathering her composure.

"That was my mother's favourite quote," Maggie told him. "She read it to me every New Year's Eve. I'm a writer."

"Wow," the postman said. Dillon looked at Maggie, before he went on. "Before you sign, there's an instruction with the parcel," he said.

"Messages?" said Maggie, with a puzzled look on her face. "Instructions? This is some parcel!"

"I'd say so!" said Dillon, rifling through some paperwork. "Where is it? Found it! You're not to open the package until midnight."

"Strange," said Maggie, shaking her head.

Dillon shrugged his shoulders. "Signature please," he said to Maggie. Maggie held the side of the electronic signature pad, while Dillon held the other.

"Done!" he said, turning to leave.

"Don't forget the instructions." The postman paused. "And get this sidewalk shovelled," he said, winking at her. "I'll be back."

Maggie smiled. "You won't be back," she answered him. "It's a fluke."

"It's New Year's Eve," he told her. "Remember the quote." Maggie smiled and closed the door.

She moved to the kitchen, putting the parcel on the table. "Puzzling," she said out loud. "Dillon will be back alright, to tell me there's been a mistake."

Maggie paused, looking out the window at the blowing snow. The parcel brought with it a kind of warm curiosity. For the first time in a long time, Maggie felt hopeful. "Time for a cup of tea," she thought to herself. "I'm freezing. Then I'd better get dressed and start the shovelling."

The wind had stopped. Outside, the house was covered in blanket of fresh snow. Maggie put a warm coat over her pajamas, and threw on a pair of boots. "What did it matter?" she thought. "No one is coming for New Year's Eve."

She opened the front door, and started shovelling. By noon, Maggie had cleared a path to the driveway. "The rest will have to wait," she said, "I'm too tired to finish."

She went inside and lay down on the couch, buddling herself up in a quilt her mother had made. Drifting in and out of sleep, in the next moment, the doorbell rang. "What?" she said, rubbing her eyes. "Oh, it must be Dillon coming back to get the parcel." Maggie went to the door and opened it.

"Surprise!" said Dillon.

"Surprise?" said Maggie.

“Yes,” the postman said. “You’ve got another parcel.”

“Another?” said Maggie, in disbelief.

“Yes, another,” answered Dillon. “Same message, same instructions.” He paused.



“The New Year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written.” Dillon read, waiting for Maggie’s reaction.

This time Maggie smiled. “Am I awake?” she asked. “Or is this a dream?”

“Oh, you’re awake!” said Dillon. “And btw I shovelled your driveway. You are going to be busy opening parcels later.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“There are five more parcels like this one in the truck,” he said. “Same message, same instructions. I’ll go get the rest.”

Maggie put her hands to her mouth, but this time it was to stop herself from giggling. In moments, Dillon arrived at her door. The parcels were stacked above his head.

“Come in for a minute Dillon,” Maggie said. “It’s cold out there. You can set the parcels on the table by the door.”

“Thanks,” he answered. “That’s kind of you.”

“That makes two kind people in the room,” said Maggie, smiling at him.

Dillon smiled back. “That’s the nicest thing a customer as said to me all day,” said the postman.

“Can I tell you something Maggie?”

“Sure,” she said, looking at him.

“I’m a writer too,” Dillon told her. “I’m studying at the university.”

Maggie smiled. “No kidding?” she asked.

“No kidding,” he told her. “I moved here from the East Coast to go to school. It’s kind of been rough this holiday, without my family.”

“I understand,” said Maggie. She paused. “Dillon,” she said. “Would you like to come back later and open the parcels with me?”

“Seriously?” he asked.

“Seriously!” Maggie told him.

“That would be great,” he told her. “I’d love nothing better than to spent my New Year’s Eve with a successful writer.”

“Who might that be?” said Maggie.

Dillon laughed.

“Then it’s set?” she said. “Do you like homemade pizza?”

“My favourite!” said Dillon. “I’ll be back before midnight.”

Maggie closed the door, set the parcels on the table with the others, and ran to get dressed.

Suddenly, Maggie's New Year's Eve had a new chapter that was writing itself.

Later that evening...



"Mmmmm, that pizza was amazing!" said Dillon. The clock on the wall said fifteen minutes until midnight. "It's almost time." Dillon said, looking at Maggie.

Maggie pulled the parcels towards her. Carefully, removing the packaging tape, she peered instead the first parcel. "Notebooks?" she said, pulling out the contents of the box.

"Open them," Dillon told her. "Maybe there is something inside."

Maggie nodded, looking at the first page, and then the second, and the third. She began to cry.

"What does it say?" asked Dillon.

"Nothing," answered Maggie.

"Nothing?" said Dillon.

"When were the parcels mailed?" asked Maggie. "Do you have a way of tracking the date?"

Dillon, opened his phone, and punched in some numbers.

"December 20th," he said. "They were all sent on December 20th."

Maggie put her hands to her face once more.

"What is it?" said Dillon. "Maggie what is it?"

"That's the day my mom passed away," she told him.

Maggie opened the rest of the packages. Each parcel contained a colourful notebook, not one of them the same. Every one was filled with empty pages, yet to be written on.

In the distance, the church bells announced the arrival of the new year. As Maggie listened, Dillon read the message that had come with each parcel.

"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written," he said. Reaching across the table, he took Maggie's hand.

* * *

**The Art of You:
Living a Life of Purpose
and Having a Little Faith
Serena Hubercheck**

(Originally written in February 2021)

What can transpire in the course of a year is nothing less than incredible. In January 2020 I was standing at the base of the Eiffel Tower. Numb from the accumulation of years that had chiseled away at who I thought I was. As I glanced around at the crowd, I wondered what each of their lives might look like. What stories they may have swirling around in the depths of who they really are? I curiously watched an Asian family gathering in the queue. They were each donning a mask, protecting them from the immediate environment. COVID-19 was unknown to us at that moment, so this practice seemed a bit odd to me. I thought, "What a strange

world we would live in if that were the norm?" The irony behind my observations, and the pictures I took that day, would not come to light for me until almost one year later.



The Uncertainty of What Lies Beyond the Fog

Standing at the base and looking up, one could not see the structure in its entirety. The fog gave a mysterious and obscured view of what existed on the other side. I knew for certain that there was more to this building than the weather was permitting me to observe with my eyes.

In reflection, I am in awe of the foreshadowing that was taking place at that moment. How were any of us to know that we would be blindly walking into what would become one of the most life-altering global events of our time? One where masks would be the norm and the law. And me, how was I to know that this would be the year that I broke through the dark clouds and thick barriers that had been holding me hostage for so long? My life moving forward, and the lives of every human on this planet, in that moment were for me represented in the knowing that there was more to the Eiffel Tower, but not able to comprehend what that more looked like until I/we journeyed through the thick clouds and witnessed it for myself/ourselves.



*One Foot Infront of the Other,
Especially in Times of Uncertainty*

As I toured the magnificent structure that day, I reveled in its history and the efforts that it took to create and erect such a monumental piece of architecture. At the time of its resurrection, the controversy and division that ignited as the result of its completion is very much symbolic of the unrest that exists today. Ironically, it was being created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and yet there was a divide as to how the tower was perceived by many in Europe. Was it an atrocity or art? Was it a waste of money and space or a necessary contribution to society?

The beauty and significance of this symbolic structure were in the eye and the imagination of the creator. It would eventually prove its importance too in the eyes of the world. But that would not take place for many years. And, not without the persistence of someone who knew its potential. Politics versus the people. Somehow there seems to be a separation when these two entities are thrown together in the recipe of life. How sad, and yet at the same time, seemingly necessary for our evolution.

As a collective I can see the division in my country and that of our American neighbours. The power of politics and misuse of or lack of shared vision creates the unrest, mistrust and uncertainty that we are witness to time and time again. This is not a new

phenomenon; it has been well recorded and repeated throughout history. But, if left unchecked will certainly continue to cultivate anxiety, anger, fear, doubt and division between us. Perhaps we all need to exercise some faith and learn to listen with open ears. Learn to see with open eyes. Learn to find compromise and communicate from a place of love rather than ego.

In my own life I have allowed the influence of others to skew my perception. Believing more in what others had to say and trying to live up to what I thought their standards were. Whatever that may have looked like. How exhausting to try and wear so many masks and hats. How confusing. But there were also times in my life when I did have a voice. However, my efforts would be observed as defiant or rebellious and uncharacteristic to my patterns of people pleasing. This division in myself would become the very thing that would combust and break me into a million pieces. Anxiety would come calling and pretend to be my friend. Depression would move in and unpack its unwanted bags. I became an empty vessel for whatever filled me.

We are born perfectly who we were meant to be, and then society and its standards feed us this toxic soup that poisons our perceptions along the way and forces us to see life through different lenses. I am not saying there is anything wrong with being able change lenses to see what others see. In fact, I would encourage it. I am saying that it's important to observe from a place of curiosity and not to feel less than or insignificant if you do not share the same views as others. It's important to honour your beliefs and to know who you are, where you came from, and where you are going. To believe that you are significant. If we don't know what or who that is then we are at the mercy of losing those beautiful and unique gifts, that only we can bring to the world.



*We are Carefully and Poetically Crafted,
Perfectly Imperfect*

Back in the day before its completion, the project was met with enormous criticism and nay-saying. It was slated for demolition and could have permanently been disassembled had it not been for the greater vision and persistence of the master designer himself. In 1889, Gustave Eiffel had been faced with incredible adversity, despite his earning such prestige and accolades for his many renowned creations. After the financial scandal associated with the locks of the Panama Canal, Mr. Eiffel walked away from his former profession. It is said that he struggled with intense embarrassment and humiliation as the result of the scandal, which later he would be pardoned from.

He regrouped and redirected his energies into reinventing himself and the tower. He would create a practical purpose for the tower, despite it having been the center of such controversy for so many years. I believe that Mr. Eiffel's passion for living a life of purpose and honouring who he knew he was, freed him from his demons. It was during that time that he created many historical and important contributions in radio, communications, meteorology and aerodynamics.

I have so much empathy and admiration for this man! In his struggles I can see glimpses of my own life, visual metaphors. Eiffel held onto a vision, he picked himself up and carried on. He chose not to believe in

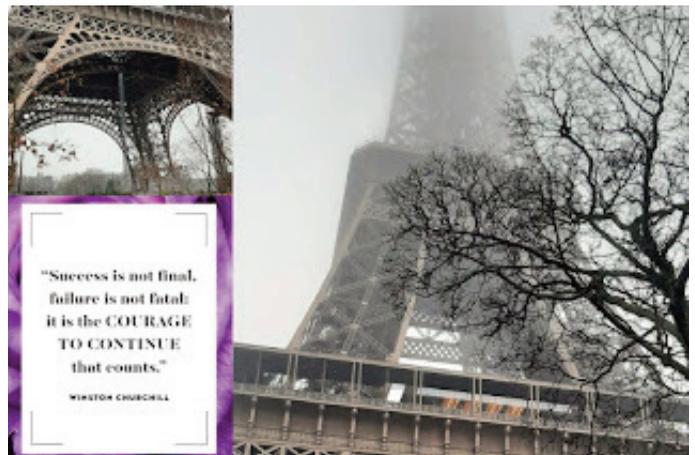
the harsh words of others and instead held fast to a life of purpose. His purpose was the accumulation of gifts unique to him. Those gifts were shared with others and found an important place in our history. What gifts are yours to share? We are a collection of millions of magnificent and unique creations. Behind us are those whose lives, like that of Mr. Eiffel, have helped to form the world we live in today. Ahead of us are those who will look back on the gifts and the lessons we are cultivating. It requires challenging and defying the negative forces of this world. The nay-sayers and the finger pointers and the hypocrites. Letting go of ego and embracing the possibility that we can make a difference in the lives of others just by being exactly who we were born to be. Do people make mistakes? Of course, we do. And, some more serious than others. What makes us human is the ability to learn from and grow from our adversity. What makes us Divine is the ability to forgive.



Embracing the Unknown

2020 was a year of uncertainty. We could not have predicted what we were facing. Individually and as a collective we have had to walk through the invisible forces that presented themselves to us. Unsure what lay on the other side but knowing there will be something. Personally, for me, it was the exercise of moving beyond what was known to me, onto a platform which challenged my personal growth. Stepping into the “fog of the unknown” and allowing my vulnerability, my life lessons, to be exposed. Learning to have faith in who I am and realize that

perhaps my purpose in life is unfolding just as it is meant to. Could I consider that my story could be a beacon of light through the fog for myself and others? Is it my unique gift? Yes, I think so. As for the effects of this pandemic? I am sure that we will never see life exactly as we once did. Life has changed all around us. There is a shift in our collective consciousness. With this shift comes the knowledge that adversity is our teacher. We cannot rise above something if there is nothing to rise above. We cannot grow if we know no challenge. We cannot evolve if we are not forced to go beyond our egos and find that place within that is the common thread to everything that exists. There will be light on the other side of this metaphorical fog. We just must, as my incredibly wise grandmother would tell me time and time again, “Have a little faith.”



* * *

Gratefulness ***Brenda Cassidy***

The birds, the flowers, the trees and the bees;
Very good reasons to get down on your knees.
There's no need to look very far;
There's the sun, the moon,
and the wish upon a star.

* * *



SHARING

our stories, our selves, our success



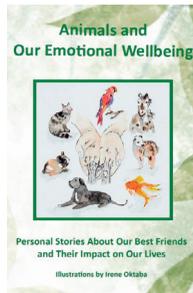
Call for Submissions

What better way to start the new year than to think, and write, about someone or something you are grateful for?

20 spots are available for this anthology.

If you are interested in writing for this anthology, visit www.sharinganthologies.com for details, or email lisa@onethousandtrees.com.

www.sharinganthologies.com



Animals and Our Emotional Wellbeing: A “Paying It Forward” Update *Lisa Browning*

It was in March 2021 when Malcolm Bernstein, a client for whom I had published a children’s book in 2018, first approached me with an idea. “I wonder if we could have a conversation about my interest in doing a book on animals – pets – and our mental health. It would have stories and photos from people about how pets/animals have helped them endure life’s difficulties.”

Animals? Mental health? Hmmm ... two of the things I am most passionate about!! It took me no time to say yes, and the work began. *Animals and Our Emotional Wellbeing* was published in October 2021. I am proud to say that the following organizations/charities have been supported so far, by proceeds from sales:



Burlington Humane Society – Burlington, Ontario

Burlington Humane Society is a registered charity which operates on the generosity of donations from the public. They are dedicated to helping stray and abandoned animals in Burlington. Their mission is to improve the quality of life and welfare for animals

in their community, to provide a safe haven while they find forever homes for the cats and dogs in their care, and to make Burlington a more humane city for all animals.

www.burlingtonhumane.ca



Cats Anonymous Rescue and Adoption – East Garafraxa, Ontario

Cats Anonymous is a private, no kill cat adoption facility located in south-central Ontario, Canada. They are a registered Canadian Charity. Their “Cat House” is home to approximately 60 cats who are permitted to roam free within the shelter. Their cats need never fear euthanasia, and can stay as long as it takes to find the right adoptive home.

www.catsanonymous.ca



Collie Rescue Network – Hornepayne, Ontario

Collie Rescue Network is a national, all-volunteer rescue group dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of Rough and Smooth Collies in Canada who have been surrendered, abandoned, neglected or abused. Their mission also includes educating the public about responsible pet ownership in general, and the care of the Collie breed in particular.

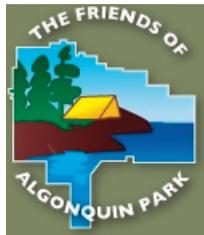
www.collierescuenetwork.com



**The Donkey Sanctuary of Canada
– Cambridge, Ontario**

The Donkey Sanctuary's mission is To provide a lifelong home to donkeys, mules and hinnies who are unwanted, neglected or abused, or whose owners can no longer care for them; and to promote the responsible stewardship of all animals through humane education.

www.thedonkeysanctuary.ca



Friends of Algonquin Park – Whitney, Ontario

The Friends of Algonquin Park (FOAP) is a non-profit Canadian registered charity for people passionate about Algonquin Park. They dedicate their resources to furthering the educational and interpretive programs to develop current and future stewards of Algonquin Park. They do this through research, the development and delivery of programs, workshops, and events, plus the production of educational materials.

<https://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/foap/>

Liberty Lane

Liberty Lane Retreat Centre – Erin, Ontario

Liberty Lane offers a unique, magical and tranquil setting that allows you to get away from your usual routine and connect to your true nature. Mena Canonico and the Freedom Herd – her 'Dream Team' of 8 former rescue horses – create a safe, sacred space to help clients overcome fears, gain clarity as they navigate challenging transitions and crises, experience life-changing perspective shifts, and access the courage and confidence to align with their soul's calling or purpose.



**The Healing Arts Mission, St. Paul's Hospital –
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

The Healing Arts mission is to enhance and support the holistic nature of the care offered at St. Paul's Hospital by creating opportunities where patients, families, community, and staff can connect and engage in the creative arts to create meaning and improve health and wellbeing.

www.stpaulshospital.org/about/healing.php



Pet Protect Guelph

Pet Protect Guelph is a pet fostering program to help those who are: precariously housed (homeless or seeking shelter); women or men fleeing domestic violence; veterans in support programs; individuals recovering from a medical procedure; seeking addiction and mental health treatment. **Their mission** is to provide a temporary, safe home for pets with our foster families; and use science-based practices to optimize animal welfare.

www.petprotectguelph.com



Rockwood Veterinary Clinic – Rockwood, Ontario

The Rockwood Veterinary Clinic is a CVO accredited facility, whose goal is to communicate with pet owners as part of a team, in order to facilitate the pet's care and wellbeing, as well as develop relationships with all pets in their care.

www.rockwoodvet.com



<https://scaarontario.weebly.com/>

Second Chance Rescue – London, Ontario

Second Chance is a not-for-profit foster-based rescue, which places rescue animals in foster homes until they are adopted.

<https://scaarontario.weebly.com/>



Sierra Acres Equine Assisted Learning Centre – Rockwood, Ontario

Sierra Acres offers clients a solution-focused perspective, helping them to create actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in their personal and work life. Emphasis is placed on action, accountability, focusing on client-directed solutions, and developing an awareness of the full present and future potential.

www.sierracres.ca

Stories: poetry, prose, and personal reflection



Toronto Humane Society

Toronto Humane Society provides a full range of services to support guardians and their pets at all stages: training and behavioural support, temporary sheltering, accessible veterinary care and pet food support. Their goal is to ensure that they are doing all they can to help animals get healthy, remain healthy and experience a better life together with their guardians, and strengthen the human-animal bond not just for their shelter animals but for all the animals in their community.

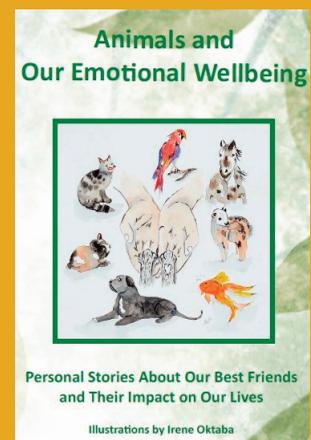
www.torontohumanesociety.com

I am grateful to the writers who shared their stories in this anthology, and especially those who have been active in raising both awareness and money for the organizations listed above. And, of course, I am grateful for, and want to acknowledge, Malcolm's work with The Benjamin Project, a non-profit initiative that he founded, with the mandate of educating children on responsible pet ownership and animal stewardship, and raising funds for shelters, sanctuaries, and animal rescue. For more information visit www.thebenjaminproject.ca.



* * *

Buy a book, and support mental health and/or animal welfare charities!



Happy New Year!
Colleen Heighington

I hope that you had a Merry Christmas
And a very Happy New Year to you ...
Here's really hoping ...
That there will be some peace and normality
in the year 2022!!!

Just when we thought that things
We're getting better again ...
Another variant called OMICRON
Came along ... to be another Covid 19 friend!!!

I have been a good girl ...
Getting my two vaccine shots for Covid 19
Now trying to get an appointment
for my booster shot ...
Is getting a little frightening!!!

For you see ... everyone is getting one
Which is very, very good
I sure hope that everyone can get vaccinated
As quickly as possible ... as they should!!!

In the meantime, I will continue to do
what I have been doing
Wearing my mask, keeping my distance
And doing my very best ...
But most importantly ...
I believe and trust in my Heavenly Father
And in spite of all ...
I know that He is always with me ...
And I am at rest!!!

This Month's Contributors

Joan Almond

Joan is a Canadian writer and self-taught photographer. Mentored by Dan Needles and Joe Kertes, she has been encouraged to follow the “heart” in her writing. Most recently, the author’s short stories are published in *Our Canada*. A third publication in the October/November edition of the national magazine will show case her Children’s writing. A proud supporter of the Canadian Society of Children’s Authors, illustrators, and Performers, Joan’s great joy is reading Canadian children’s literature. Joan is thankful to award-winning author Marilyn Helmer, who encouraged her to submit her story to this anthology. The author extends gratitude to Lisa Browning who first gave her a voice in February of 2019, in the online publication known as *One Thousand Trees*.

Bill Brubacher

Bill is a long-time resident of the Region of Waterloo, a former successful business entrepreneur and an internationally published author of 15 national bestselling books. He is a Certified Bereavement Specialist, and a Certified Conflict Coach/ Elder Mediator, helping seniors and their families through difficult time through Caregivers Oasis, Pathfinder Canada, and Heart and Soul Bereavement for Seniors. Bill has recently authored a new book about his amazing life’s journey. His book, *Against the Odds*, is a ten-year testament to his incredible emotional, spiritual and mental tenacity as he fought to reinvent himself after experiencing tremendous loss. His model and message are an inspiration to all who struggle to survive in the face of defeat. His latest book, *The Secret Pond*, is a classic love story fantasy about the shared journey of a young boy and an unusual stranger finding healing from grief and loss at a mystical pond in the midst of an ancient magical forest. For more information about his books go to <https://legacypress.ca/> or contact Bill at billbrubacher@gmail.com.

Brenda Cassidy

Brenda has written two children’s books, *Who Needs Little Brothers Anyway?* and *Who Needs Little Sisters Anyway?* In addition to writing for children, she is also interested in writing about her spiritual journey, and hopes to achieve this in the future. In the meantime, Brenda also enjoys writing short poems and her own personal musings.

Colleen Heighington

Colleen is happily married to a wonderful husband named Ken. They have been blessed with three beautiful children, and four terrific grandsons. She enjoys reading, writing stories and poetry, and she keeps fit by walking 3 to 4 kilometres every day. Her summers are spent at their trailer in Orillia, and she really enjoys the time she spends with family and friends. She has been a volunteer with Hospice Wellington since 2015.

Francine Houston

Francine is an animal lover, transformational intuitive, and full-time creator. She spends her time writing, doing fibre arts, and supporting individuals in telling their personal stories.

Serena Hubercheck

Serena is the proprietor and facilitator of “The Art of You Inc”. She uses her diverse skills and rich life experiences to help others connect to the depth and beauty of their own life’s struggles. As a resilience, health and lifestyle coach Serena supports others to move through difficult setbacks, find their unique gifts and stand in the joy and freedom of their true and authentic selves. Serena uses a variety of modalities to create a unique experience, tailored to suite each clients needs and expression. Through her personal testimony, she believes that it is imperative that each of us possesses a customized and personalized “toolbox”, fueled with the necessary strategies and resources, which can aid in improving an individual’s life. She believes that ongoing inner work is essential to becoming the best version of oneself. Serena has been dedicated to lifelong learning.

Margreet Kuypers

Marge has immigrated twice ,and as a result has lived on three continents. As an introvert she prefers to observe, rather than share her views. Until now she used to communicate mainly through music and photography, since then it wasn’t necessary to put thoughts into words. Marge did an online Memoir writing course during 2020 which inspired her to share some of her experiences on paper. Visit her at www.walkingthewalk.life.

Clay Williams

Clay is a 61-year-old Manitoba-born father of two living in Elmira Ontario with his wife of 40 years. He manages the Engineering Department of a manufacturing company in Kitchener and has worked in Northern Ontario, Germany and South Carolina. Clay is an avid distance runner, having run dozens of marathons and longer runs, and creator of the Canal Pursuit for Mental Health, a 785 km run along two of Canada’s longest canals as well as The Monarch Ultra, a 4300 km run following the migration path of Monarch Butterflies.

STAY WELL STAY HAPPY KEEP WRITING!

**Deadline for submissions for February is
Friday, January 28.**

Here's a focus quote to inspire you ...

***“Gratitude is the single most important ingredient
to living a successful and fulfilled life.”***

— Jack Canfield

