



ONE THOUSAND TREES
JANUARY 2012

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Nicole Abouhalka
Because I Had a Mission



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Interview



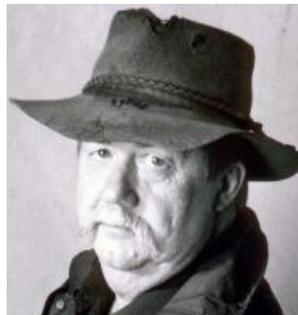
James Gordon
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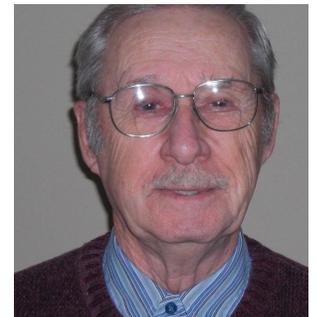
Barb McDowall
*The Healing Power
of Dialogue*



Jeffrey Morden
Cover Photography



Peter Smith
Memoir Writing Workshop



Pete Watson
The Other Side of the Veil

Thanks also to

Hayley Sheppard
Volunteer Centre of Guelph Wellington
Opportunities to Serve



EDITOR'S FOCUS: READING AND WRITING: THE POWER OF WORDS

I remember when I was in high school, one of my English textbooks was entitled "Words are Important". How true! Words have the ability to build us up, or knock us down ... to inspire us, and to move us beyond measure.

I am very pleased, therefore, to introduce writer and psychotherapist Melinda Burns as my interviewee this month. I am equally pleased to feature Action Read Community Literacy Centre as my Charity of the Month, and Action Read volunteer Carin Headrick as my Volunteer of the Month.

I am grateful to have been given permission to reprint Barb McDowall's article on The Healing Power of Dialogue, and to include articles from past contributors Pete Watson and Nicole Abouhalka, who have contributed their thoughts on the gifts (and, at times, challenges) their writing has brought to them.

I am delighted to include an article by singer-songwriter James Gordon, who tells us about his Songwriting in the Schools project.

There are many opportunities for writers, and I have included information on a few of them, namely, The Guelph Guild of Storytellers, Writing Your Life, Wordfest, and Timesketching: Memoir Writing with Connection.

Some words of wisdom, community events, opportunities to serve, and some warming winter recipes from Alex MacEachern, round out this issue.

As I am writing these words, it is Christmas Eve. As you are reading them, it is the beginning of a new year. May I take this opportunity to wish you every blessing in 2012.

Lisa



INTERVIEW

Melinda Burns

Melinda Burns is a writer and psychotherapist in private practice in Guelph for over twenty years. She offers groups, workshops and retreats in writing and creative process in Canada and the U.S. Please visit her website at www.melindaburns.ca.

Your practice consists of psychotherapy, writing workshops and retreats, and mentoring. What an interesting combination! Do you find that these three areas of focus are often intertwined?

They go very naturally together for me. They're all about stories. Psychotherapy is about stories that don't work anymore, that are too small or limiting for the person. Often they are the received stories from the culture or our families of how a woman or a man should be, how a certain age should be, what success means, how to protect yourself. Therapy helps people to find and create their own story that suits who they are and who they're becoming. Writing, whether fiction, poetry or memoir, is about creating stories from our lives, making art out of the raw material of experience that helps us to see a larger picture, from a different angle. Writing itself, aside from any product, is a most empowering tool for reclaiming our stories, defining and redefining who we are as we grow and change. Mentoring is a kind of therapy with a focus on the work that the writer is engaged in, listening for what the poem or story is trying to say and working together to help it come through more clearly and richly.

Where did you receive your training?

I started out in Math and Physics at the University of Toronto. After two years I switched to psychology, then sociology, and completed a Master's in Applied Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. But my real education for the work I do came from my time living in California for fifteen years and working with three other therapists at the Creative Arts Health Centre in Santa Barbara. We were a collective of therapists working with dance therapy, art therapy, music therapy and writing. I learned a great deal there as we co-led groups together in our different disciplines.

My other training is through pursuing my own writing, and classes with marvelous teachers at the University of Guelph, Banff Centre, and Humber College.

How long have you been writing? How did you come to incorporate your writing talents into your counselling practice?

I've been writing since elementary school when I composed poems in my head on the way to my piano lesson and my piano teacher typed them up for me. I've kept a journal almost continuously since I was 12. I recognized that writing in my journal was my way of therapy and started teaching journal writing as a therapeutic process in California. I started writing fiction about twelve years ago. When I won the Star prize for fiction in 2001 I felt emboldened to begin teaching fiction.

In addition to writing workshops, I use writing with clients who are so inclined, as an adjunct to therapy and a way to deepen the work and explore alternatives.

As you know, this month's focus is Reading and Writing: The Power of Words. What is your experience on this ... in other words, what do you think is the most powerful gift that comes from reading and writing?

Empathy. And clarity. Empathy from reading about other peoples' inner experiences of life, and from writing from the point of view of a character different from ourselves and imagining how they would react to situations. Clarity from sorting experience into words, giving language to often murky, undefined feelings and thoughts. Writing comes from a different place than conversation. It seems to tap into a different level of awareness. People write to see what they know and are surprised by it. Surprise would be another gift.

Tell us about The Writer's Way.

The Writer's Way is a series of groups and workshops, some three months long, some one-day, devoted to reclaiming words and voice and the power they have to change our lives. They include fiction and poetry workshops, memoir writing, journal writing, and workshops that involve meditation like "Day of Reflection", and art, like "Tracking the Wild Self". I also offer workshops in Improvisation, co-led with Improv coach, Rob Mackinnon, about applying the principles of theatrical improvisation to writing and to life.

The workshops are open to anyone interested in writing, whether for publication or for personal growth, beginners and experienced writers. The emphasis is on providing a safe place for the writing to come forward, and a community of writers to encourage and inspire one another with discerning feedback and response.

What brings you the most joy or personal satisfaction in the work that you do?

Seeing people becoming more of who they are and seeing writing becoming more of what it means to be. They're similar. People begin to act in a more authentic way, responding to situations differently, taking more risks, recognizing more choice. In the same way, when we work on a story or a poem, it becomes stronger, more itself, and that is very satisfying.

What gives you inspiration?

I find inspiration all over—in conversations with friends, in books, radio interviews with writers, my clients.

How do you think you inspire others?

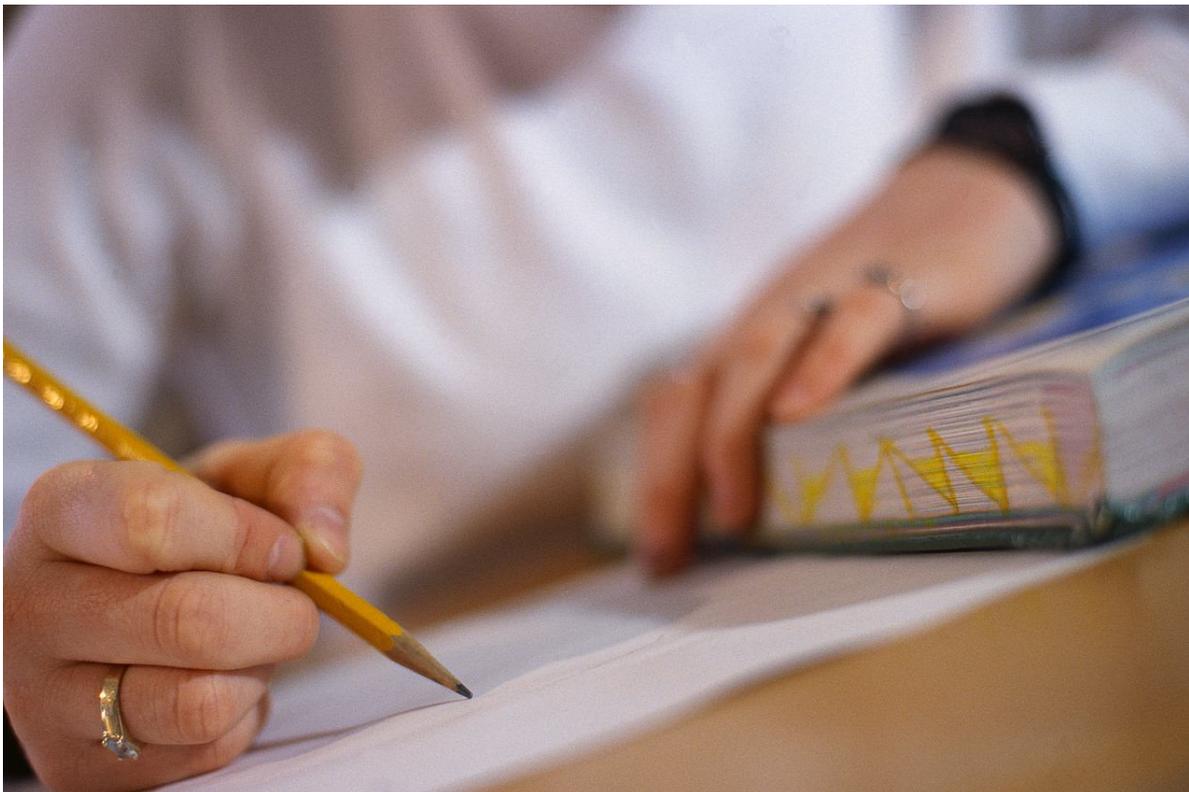
I think by doing my own work, being committed to good self-care, taking vacations, going to workshops myself, continuing with my writing.

What does wellness mean to you? How does your creativity contribute to your own sense of wellness?

Wellness means becoming yourself and contributing what wants to come through you into the world. "Doing what you love and involving others in it" is the way my daughter puts it. It means accepting who you are and being open to the surprise of change in all the ways it occurs. Creativity is an essential component of wellness, whether it's creating a good meal, raising a child, deepening a relationship, or writing a poem. Creativity is a partnership with the unconscious or with a higher power, something not in our control but available to us to enlarge consciousness and bring forth something new. I would be much less of who I'm meant to be without writing to help me along. Creativity is wellness, for me.

To finish up, is there anything else you'd like to address?

Another aspect of my work and my creativity is my Native background. My mother was Mohawk and my father English. I was raised in white culture but a Native sense of the interconnectedness of all beings and the earth informs my consciousness and influences my work. As well, my interest in Buddhist meditation and Buddhist psychology underlies a lot of how I approach therapy and wellness from a place of acceptance and awareness leading to action that is for the highest good.



TRAILBLAZERS

*Far away in the sunshine are my highest aspirations.
I may not reach them, but I can look up and see the beauty, believe
in them and try to follow where they lead.*
-- Louisa May Alcott

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH **Carin Headrick – Action Read**

Carin Headrick signed on to tutor at Action Read over six years ago. Immediately Carin demonstrated the key qualities the organization sees in the very best tutors. She is highly flexible and creative, which she recognizes as essential since “conventional methods of learning didn’t work for the student”. She is also incredibly patient and non-judgmental. As she says “learners will struggle and they can never be made to feel inadequate because they are having difficulties”. Carin has been extremely consistent and committed over these six years.

If that were not enough, Carin brings a world of personal experience to tutoring and to Action Read that enriches those she works with beyond measure. As a fully blind adult, Carin knows what it means to struggle first-hand with taking in information. Graduating from University, working for a software company and taking a leadership role on Action Read’s board of Directors and other accessibility-related organizations has honed Carin’s problem-solving skills, communication and resourcefulness skills. Furthermore, she freely and generously shares her experience and knowledge through such activities as testing websites for accessibility, helping to set up Braille signage around the centre or offering her many insights and organizational skills on the Action Read Board of Directors, to name a few.

Below Carin writes about her experience as a tutor at Action Read.

“When I came to Action Read to become a tutor, I had a pretty limited idea of what I’d be doing. Maybe I’d be reading along with someone and helping them sound out words. But I have learned over the past five years that tutors end up doing so much more than practicing reading.

For one, tutors have to think outside the box and think of alternate ways of doing things. It really tests your ability to teach a concept that comes second nature in different ways and make it enjoyable for the learner.

For another, we end up doing so much more than just reading. Who knew I’d be teaching typing, how to use a cell phone, how to find helpful devices, how to find a polling station? But it’s neat because I see my learner feel more empowered to do things for himself, and I hope he feels more connected to his community.

Finally, the community atmosphere and the attitude that we the tutors can learn from our learners is refreshing. Lots of places have the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ attitude. Tutors teach, learners learn. But Action Read really feels that we all have things to learn from each other. And I have.

It feels so nice to give back to somebody. Being blind, I’ve had lots of help along the way. I grew up before the internet, so reading and research translated to “Hey mom, can we go to the library and you can read to me for hours?” So it’s nice to be able to return the favour in some way and express my thanks for all the help I have received to reach my full potential. Why not help someone else reach theirs?”

January 27
is
Family Literacy Day
in Canada

THREE RIVERS

"If you nurture your mind, body, and spirit, your time will expand. You will gain a new perspective that will allow you to accomplish much more."

-- Brian Koslow

THE HEALING POWER OF DIALOGUE

by Barbara McDowall

"Dialogue is the most important tool we have to repair the difficulties in our world right now. We must learn compassion not just for those we love, but also for those who are our enemies or those with whom we fundamentally disagree. We can best do this through dialogue."

--The Dalai Lama

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines dialogue as "an exchange of ideas and opinions; a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution." Debate, on the other hand, comes from the Old French, from de- + battre to beat. You might remember the federal leaders' debate during the most recent Canadian election. What you might have witnessed was an excellent example of mean spirited combativeness and disrespect. Little of it was helpful in learning more about the issues for which these men stood - issues that will significantly affect each one of us.

Almost from the dawn of time, the world has been a violent and warring place. As individuals and nations, we can and often do fundamentally disagree with each other. Rarely is there room for compromise or understanding. The solution over and over again has led us to violence and wars. According to psychologist, Rollo May, we have been and continue to practice insanity - doing the same things over and over again, expecting different results.

The greatest single antidote to violence (or any disagreement) is conversation, speaking our greatest single fears, listening to the fears of others, and in that sharing of vulnerabilities discovering a genesis of hope.

--Jonathan Sacks, Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations

Here are some tips I would like to share for creating successful dialogue:

a) Be present – keep your thoughts on the present without attachment to the past or to a future outcome

b) Actively listen – listen with a clear intention and caring to understand, to hear what is really being said.

c) Follow a clear set of guidelines/rules of the road – ensure that the space for safe sharing is intentionally created with clearly stated guidelines for effective communication that encourage respectful listening, compassion and understanding. e.g. we will only use respectful language or we will agree to disagree

d) Be aware of the language used – is it uplifting or harmful; does it include or exclude; is it respectful? If it is not uplifting, inclusive or respectful, change it.

e) Apply any one of the 6 defined templates for conscious living listed below:

1. A Course in Miracles tells us there is only love and fear (**False Evidence Appearing Real**). Fear is really illusion. Communication is either an expression of love or a cry for it. What we often hear are the cries for love that may challenge our ability to love unconditionally in response. But love we must. Be mindful of what you are about to say. Ask yourself if what you are about to say will uplift or will it undermine and contribute to an end to communication, to connection. Will it be divisive? Ask for Divine guidance in seeing it in a different way allowing you to remain in communication with that person. Miracles happen when we shift our thinking from separation to connection.

2. The Eight-Fold Path of Buddhism talks about the conscious use of:

Right Speech - do not gossip, tell lies or hurt others with your words

Right Intent – think of others at all times

Right Conduct – behave in a way that will hurt no one

Right Mindfulness – always be aware of what you are doing and thinking

Right Livelihood – do not do any job that will hurt any living being

Right Effort – get rid of those things, which produce less than good in you

Right Concentration – stop worrying and being jealous of others

Right View – see life as it is

3. The Golden Rule

Don't do to anyone what you wouldn't want done to you

4. The Prayer of St. Francis

Make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is discord, unity.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is error, truth.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is sadness, joy.
Where there is darkness, light.
O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console.
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved...as to love.
For it is in the giving that we receive. It is in the pardoning
that we are pardoned. It is in the dying that we are born
to eternal life.

5. The lives of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and other great spiritual teachers:

If all you ever did was to emulate the life of just one of these inspiring people, your life would be transformed and transforming.

6. The Four Agreements

Don Miguel Ruiz in *The Four Agreements* tells us there are really only 4 agreements we need to make in our lives.

a. Be impeccable with your word: Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using your word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

b. Don't take anything personally: Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

c. Don't make assumptions: Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

d. Always do your best: Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.

"Our friends may test our patience now and then, but rarely do they challenge us to grow our goodness the way an enemy does."

--Mary Manin Morrissey, *The Living Enrichment Center*

Throughout our lives, we will meet people or situations we may not agree with. We can choose to be proactive in our interactions with others that allow us to continue to dia-

logue, learn more about our commonality that allow us to make decisions that are respectful, compassionate and understanding.

Never before has there been a more pressing need for respectful, compassionate dialogue in healing our planet. We need it in our personal lives and as a global community. The world is in need of a new way of being, of interacting with one another. Everything we say, think, and do counts. By changing one thought, one action, one word in our personal world (microcosm), we shift the energy globally (macrocosm). We become aligned with our God self. And so it is within our power to change the world through our thoughts, words and actions.

How might your relationships and your world view change, if you were to actively listen to someone? What would happen if you consciously applied communication guidelines/rules of the road to your interactions? How would the awareness of language ensure ongoing, productive conversation? What might happen if you applied a template for conscious living such as The Four Agreements to your life?

Be the change we seek in the world, take the first step to finding new ways to encourage dialogue/communication in all your relationships, personal and professional. What action will you take, and if so, when?

Barbara McDowall is a spiritual healer and guide helping others to wake up to their authenticity and purpose in the world. She has training in etheric healing and quantum touch and is a graduate of the interfaith seminary, The New Seminary in New York City. She lives and practices (www.AuthenticLives.com) in Toronto.

BECAUSE I HAD A MISSION by Nicole Abouhalka

Like pregnancy and the delivery of a baby, writing is a fascinating and scary experience. One wishes for the best but cannot tell how it will turn out, guess the time and difficulty it will take.

Fascinating, because of the magic behind the writing. How an idea comes to one's mind and develops into words and sentences. The magic and music in each word and the power of syntax.

Sometimes one goes through dry inspiration periods and other times the fingers are not fast enough to follow the rush in one's brain. Inspiration is capricious, follows its own rules and schedule. It can cause insomnia if one resists it.

In my school days, the best I could write, even for a philosophy essay, was half a page, to the frustration of the professor. I stated my point and that was it. I was more inclined for math and sciences.

My writing experience started in July 1982, when we had to flee Beirut, following the relentless bombardment of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. We ended up having to wait overnight at the Larnaca airport, in Cyprus, for our flight to Paris.

For our safety, I had to stay awake. Reading not being the solution, I started to write about our memorable first boat journey from Lebanon to Cyprus. After that, thoughts started to form in my mind and harass me till I put them on paper to be relieved; it was like getting rid of a spell. The first poems were in French, then I was challenged by a friend to write in English. I laughed at that time and very soon I found myself using the language of Shakespeare. I am unable to sit, think of something or a feeling and write poetry. It has to come on its own, as a whole unit. I could eventually change a word or a comma, but the idea and final form are there. For prose it is a different ball game, I can play with the words and sentences like a sculpture, with the advantage that a mistake is not irreversible.

Strangely enough, when we were in France, the words came to me in French and in Cyprus, it was in English.

Since we came to Canada, I kept writing on and off, being busy with a restaurant. Then I had brain surgery.

I have always been very active at all levels. Seeing me miserable, painfully pacing the house, my sons suggested that I write about our experience and anecdotes since we landed in Canada. It was a saviour.

My memory being clouded, to find my words when speaking, I had to look into my sons' eyes for help. I started to scribble few notes at random. It was hard to hold a pencil and form decent letters. Then I moved to use a computer. The brightness of the screen bothered me; when typing, the movement of the letters and lines was overwhelming my brain; the coordination of my mind, my eyes and fingers was another difficulty. I was determined to overcome these hurdles "because I had a mission".

With the loving support of my family and friends, I succeeded over a period of two years to write, in English, a collection of anecdotes, fictional short stories, comments and some poems under the title of "Oh! Canada". Later on, I gave my neurons the challenge to translate it into French.

Nicole Schouéri Abouhalka was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon. In 1966 she started a family and after going through 14 years of war there, the five of them came to Canada in 1987 as visitors and decided to stay. The first two years they lived in Montréal, Québec, then in 1989 they moved to Guelph, Ontario, where she and her husband, now suffering from Alzheimer, still reside. The writing of "Oh Canada" , a collection of anecdotes, short fictional stories and some comments, helped her recover from a major brain surgery. The book was initially written in English, then Nicole translated it into French.

With a few friends she opened a non-profit organization www.nicolesdreamsfoundation.org, to which she gave all the rights of the book and its derivatives. (charitable status still pending). In the meantime the buyer will receive a temporary receipt, but the portion of the donation included in the price of the book is already being given to the beneficiaries. (see beneficiaries' list on the website for 2010).



SONGWRITING IN THE SCHOOLS by James Gordon

Rhyme Capsules: That's the name of the songwriting-in-the-schools program I've been doing in schools all over the world for close to 20 years now.

In that time I figure I've been the midwife at the birth of at least two thousand songs composed by students working co-operatively as a class, usually in under one hour from beginning to end.

And you know what? Some of them are really good songs, and some of the participants have gone on to become pretty decent songwriters on their own.

I've written songs with college students in Vietnam, songs about Terry Fox with students in Japan, helped Ojibway students in Pikanjikum Ontario write about life on the reserve with the highest suicide rate in Canada; helped an entire school near Boston Massachusetts deal with a serious problem with bullying through a whole CD of anti-bullying songs; written songs with kids on the Bear Creek Reserve in Nova Scotia and then listened as their elders translated them into Migmaw, their almost-extinct language;

Of course I feel that I've learned more from the students than they have from me, and together we've all learned about the Power of Song. That a little song can be an accessible, effective tool for communicating, inspiring, creating.

While it's almost always a positive experience, these days there is a bittersweet quality to the creative output of the students: many times my visit is their only musically creative experience in their whole school year. Music in schools has become a luxury not a necessity, even though it uses the same part of the brain that we use for mathematics. Creativity equals 'trouble' in many classrooms, and it goes out the window, (though a lot of classrooms are losing their windows too!)

The songs produced through Rhyme Capsules have become 'community builders' too.

In Canmore Alberta, some of the more farsighted locals noticed that the last of the coal miners who built the town were dying off, taking their stories with them. They arranged for me to develop a project for them where the old-timers went into the class-rooms and told stories to the kids, and then I went in and helped the kids create songs based on the stories they heard. For many it was the first time any of them had spent time with a senior citizen who was not one of their grand-parents. Strong friendships were created in the process as well as over a dozen pretty cool songs that became a CD called "Mining For Songs", a live concert, and the seeds for a new sense of community in this town-in-transition.

A similar process took place in Ingleside Ontario, one of the "Lost Villages of the Saint Lawrence" near Cornwall. 50 years ago corporate Bullies at Ontario Hydro forced seven ancient Empire Loyalist Villages to be abandoned to the rising waters of the new Seaway. The few remaining villagers who witnessed this historic tragedy had many moving tales to tell the kids, many of the stories still tinged with anger after all these years. I can still picture the silent wonder on the faces of elementary school kids listening as an elderly lady told about taking a rowboat out into the river and having tea above her old living room. That collection of songs became a lasting legacy in the local museum and in the memories of many in the area.

The new 'big box school' movement in Ontario has really influenced what kids want to write about. The small local schools that still have a sense of community write about, well, community! The big schools, where the kids seem to be a 'product' in a 'factory'.... write about the consumerist world that they are being blindly led into. They write about shopping and money and 'stuff'.... Little kids are fond of writing about pets and candy... bigger ones write about sports a LOT.... (mostly because they still HAVE sports in school, but next to no ARTS!)

Giggly adolescents try to write about young love, but often are too shy. More and more, to my delight, there are courageous classes that are looking past their own surroundings and writing about climate change, The Japanese Tsunami, the Haiti disaster, even the inequalities pointed out by the "occupy" movement and they are discovering that through song they can express themselves in a way that means they can really be heard and make real connections with their songs.

In Cambridge Ontario the Giant Nestle Corporation threatened legal action against a school who 'allowed' a song to be written condemning bottled water! I was so proud of those kids and that school when they stood up to those bullies! (If only parents knew that My secret mission is to not only create little songwriters but future activists!)

These days the songs can be heard round the world via Facebook and Youtube the same day that they are written and performed as a group for my portable recording studio. They are noticing that they can make a difference with what they say in a song, and that has changed what they choose to say in those songs!

There are some disturbing signs when I start each class with asking what they'd like to write about. Often the boys can think of nothing other than video games and hockey. It's the girls who want to stretch themselves artistically. It's not cool for boys to do so in many places, and one wonders what this will do for them as they become adults. The video games that pervade the lives of many of the young male songwriter are of course very violent and sexist, and since I always let the topic be chosen democratically by a vote in the class, sometimes these attitudes come out in the songs.

Right here in Guelph a Grade 8 class wrote the most violent mean-spirited, racist song that I've ever heard. The principle caught wind of it and demanded that I destroy the CD we made of the song and to not tell the parents what their kids had been writing about! I found myself defending their right to free speech even though I was appalled by the 'kill kill kill' message of the song. The school asked me to come back and write a 'nice' song with the kids. I refused and then the foundation that sponsored my visit told me that funding for the whole project was in jeopardy if I didn't go back. That little song was creating quite a stir... which is part of the power of song!

Of course I destroyed the CD because the master recording was still on my computer! I DID go back on the condition that the original song was allowed to be heard..I felt a responsibility to let parents know what was happening in that school! What would you have done? When I asked one of my songwriter pals about it she said "what if the song was about rape? would you have defended it?" I don't know the answer to that.

I DO know that I'm continually inspired by what comes out of the minds and mouths of our young people.

In a tiny rural village in northern Manitoba one class wrote about how there was nothing to do there and they wished they could leave.. and the next class wrote a sensitive love song to their community.. reveling in their appreciation of nature and grateful for the space from the hurly-burly and for their proximity to nature and agriculture! "Rhyme Capsules" has produced songs that are sometimes frustrating, sometimes offensive, often times banal and derivative or really silly, and every now and again something beautiful, touching, with a gorgeous spontaneous melody and a heart-felt message. When the song is done I look around the room and you can see a look of delight and amazement on the faces of the new songwriters.

"We Made that"! "We made that TOGETHER, and it's something unique and wonderful!"

It's that moment that keeps me doing this -- after 2000 songs I know that tomorrow there just could be a song that changes the world, or the little corner of that world that I have the privilege of being in that day.

James Gordon is one of Canada's most prolific songwriters, well known for his songs about social justice, heritage and environmental issues. His classic "Frobisher Bay" has been recorded and performed by hundreds of acts worldwide and was an audition piece for "Canadian Idol." His song "Mining For Gold" was featured on the Cowboy Junkies' landmark album "The Trinity Sessions" and was heard in John Sayles' film "Silver City."

James has made countless appearances on television and radio, and was a resident songwriter on CBC radio for 12 years, with weekly songs on shows including "Basic Black." His Rhyme Capsules songwriting-in-the-schools program develops young writers all across North America. He tours as a solo performer and with his sons, and has released over 30 albums as a solo artist or with the legendary folk trio "Tamarack." In 2009 BerLen Music published the Pipe Street Songbook, an anthology of his 50 most loved songs. Between tours, James is a record producer, playwright, community activist and theatre director.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE VEIL by Peter Watson

When Lisa asked me to write something about writing for this issue, I thought, "What in the world can I say?" The words that I had expressed some thirty odd years ago flashed before my eyes, "I don't even write letters, how could I possibly write a book?" As I contemplated the thought, I tried to reason why I shouldn't; other people do this every day. As I really did write a book, and have actually sold some fifty odd copies already, what did I have to lose? A book, after all, is just a bunch of words strung together, somewhat like talking at great length about subjects that you enjoy.

Then there are the times when you write those words without having the ability to shut them off. I had that strange experience and can tell you now that it can be exciting, frightening and very gratifying all at once. What I am talking about is the act of channeling a book through the process of "automatic writing". From what I have been told, this is a method that is as old as time itself. I can only tell you of how I was affected by this, as I am well aware it is not that common to the average person. "The work of the devil," say some, but to many others their interest in this subject is quite active.

It was through a conversation with a friend one evening that I was talked into my first attempt to reach out to the next dimension, using this method of communication. I had no way of knowing whether this was an invasion of spirits' privacy or if what happened next was a routine in-

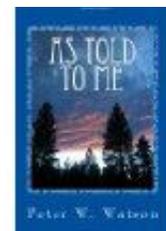
terruption in their evening. I say evening, but I don't know what time of day it would be on the other side of that veil, as they told me often that time is an earthly thing, that they have no need for it.

So for the next year I found myself conversing with spirits that told me stories, prayed for me, and enlightened me on a number of subjects. Have you any idea how it feels to sit at a desk and carry on a dialogue with the dearly departed? I assure you I spent a great deal of time wondering, "Why am I sitting here doing this?" One thing was very evident; they had things to say and they would not be happy until they had expressed themselves on the subject at hand. That subject was God and His kingdom. The written material soon took on the depth of what it was like in the place we call Heaven.

Now I must tell you that by sitting writing these spiritual messages day after day, I became quite attached to the entity on the other side of the veil, and at times it would become very emotional. In the very beginning, the entity that first made contact with me was someone that I knew. This, I was told, was so that I would be more likely to continue the connection. From there I was to be guided through this experience by a spirit I was to come to know as Sara. Sara took me under her wing and revealed to me many stories of past lives, and some not so impressive lives, that I had lead. In time, Sara became an important part of my life; the bond between us grew quite strong. Then suddenly, to my dismay, Sara told me that she was on a mission to continue her progression to yet a higher plane, and she must say goodbye. The loss I felt was something that to this day I cannot think about without shedding a tear. She told me she would be there if I was ever in need of her guidance. That was to happen a few months later when my eldest sister died suddenly. Her words at that time were truly comforting.

From that time on a new entity entered, a spirit by the name of Martha. As high as Sara had taken me on this journey to a higher understanding, Martha was a Master in her teaching. Martha encouraged me to continue the daily writing sessions and to prepare a group of selected messages for a book and to do my part in spreading the word of God to all that are looking for the comfort that this would bring.

The book "AS TOLD TO ME" by Peter W Watson ISBN-9780986795800 has become a reality and is available through Amazon .ca. It is also available at the Bookshelf in Guelph. Learn more about Pete and his book at <http://www.petewatson.ca>



TENDING THE GARDEN

When we reach out to others with mercy and compassion and help them however we can, we tend the seeds planted within us, and we participate in the sacred work of tending God's garden, the world.

CHARITY OF THE MONTH

Action Read Community Literacy Centre by Mira Clarke

About Us

Action Read is a Guelph community-based organization that has offered adults and families free help with reading, writing, math and other basic skills since 1987. We offer a warm and welcoming environment where people feel supported and challenged to work toward their goals. Our approach is highly individualized; learning plans are based entirely upon each learner's needs and goals. Adult learners are free to choose one-to-one tutoring, small group or computer-based learning. In order to minimize barriers to learning, we offer childcare and bus fare. In addition to teaching literacy and numeracy skills, an important part of our work is to connect individuals to the community services, programs or resources that support their learning goals.

Action Read's Family Literacy Program provides opportunities for parents/ caregivers and preschool aged children to engage with each other in early learning activities and to further develop early learning partnerships. The program helps children build the skills that will lead to success at school right from the start. Our program celebrates and emphasizes the joy of learning. We recognize that fostering early learning is vital to creating healthy families, adults and communities.

Action Read Volunteers

Action Read is fortunate to have the support of a diverse, skilled, and enthusiastic group of volunteers. Their work contributes immeasurably to the lives of all of our learners, and to the city of Guelph. Over this past year alone, 157 volunteers donated close to 4500 hours of their time. Approximately 75% of volunteers are involved in teaching people reading, writing or basic math, either one-to-one or in small groups. The remainder are involved in board governance, committee and office work, fundraising, special events and computer support.

Action Read volunteers are truly amazing. They go through a lengthy application process which involves several meetings and much reflection on their motivations and ideas about learning, education and diversity. The majority of our volunteers then undergo almost 14 hours of training!

Action Read volunteers provide a service that is extremely valuable. In addition to their obvious economic value, Action Read volunteers also bring many other benefits such as community ownership and involvement, teaching skills, community linkages and support, diversity of skills, knowledge and opinions, dedication and commitment to literacy and literacy students. Above all Action Read volunteers are characterized by a deep sense of social justice and a desire to contribute positively towards social change.

At Action Read we speak of the tutor-learner relationship as a partnership based upon compassion and mutual respect. As our volunteers become more involved in Action Read, they are often surprised by the blurring of the lines between learner and volunteer. Just like learners, each volunteer has a unique reason for coming here. Their initial goal may change over time as new opportunities and situations present themselves. To be successful as a volunteer at Action Read, our volunteers have to challenge themselves to think in new ways and to re-examine their assumptions.

Working in an environment where people give so freely and generously of themselves is extremely inspiring. In this context it is very difficult to single out the contribution of individual volunteers. That said, some volunteers contribute in unique and particularly valuable ways to the life of the organization.

Action Read is currently looking for volunteer tutors. Please visit us at www.actionread.com or call Joanne Morant at 519-836-2759 if you would like more information or an application. We would be happy to speak with you!

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Guelph is looking for a Fundraising Assistant. In this position, the volunteer will solicit donations for an upcoming fundraising gala and the annual bowl-a-thon. Other duties will include soliciting corporate sponsorships, attending event committee meetings as a note-taker and assisting the Fund Development Coordinator in event management tasks as needed. This is a great learning opportunity for those interested to work in communications, fundraising, not-for-profit business or event and volunteer management. Students are welcome to apply and hours can be used towards the 40 hour requirement for graduation. For more information, contact Stephanie Blight at 519-824-5154 or email stephanie.blight@bigbrothersbigsisters.ca.

Brant Avenue Public School is looking for Library Volunteers to assist with shelving books, creating displays, and assisting with book sign out. Volunteers will also have the opportunity to interact with students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. For more information, contact Jennifer Nelson by phone at 519-824-2671 ext. 401 or by email at jennifer-aenelson@gmail.com.

Canadian Red Cross, Meals on Wheels needs Delivery Volunteers year round to pick up meals from St. Joseph's Health Centre and deliver them to client homes. Meals are delivered in teams of two – work teams, family members and friends are welcome. Extra volunteers are needed at Christmas and during the winter when regular volunteers are away. For more information, contact Karen Innes at 519-836-3523 or email karen.innes@redcross.ca.

Chalmers Community Service Centre needs Centre Volunteers to assist with set-up, serving food and clean up as well as providing clothing and household goods on Wednesday evenings and Thursday or Friday mornings. Chalmers Downtown and Chalmers West provide food, clothing, bedding, and household items, mending of clothes and support and referral. For more information, contact Sandi Leach at 519-822-8778 or email sandi@chalmerscentre.ca.

College Heights Secondary School requires Administrative Assistants to support their community-based co-op classroom at the Shelldale Community Centre. Volunteers will assist the teacher with filing and sorting student documents, contacting employers and liaising with community organizations, and interviewing students for placement in the program. This is a great opportunity to support at-risk youth while gaining administrative experience in an educational setting. For more information, contact Ron Aimola at 226-820-2651 or email ron.aimola@ugdsb.on.ca.

Guelph General Hospital is looking for Co-Presidents - Volunteer Association Board of Directors. Volunteers will co-chair all board and general meetings, attend conferences as required, meet with the Director and volunteer services on a regular basis, attend hospital events repre-

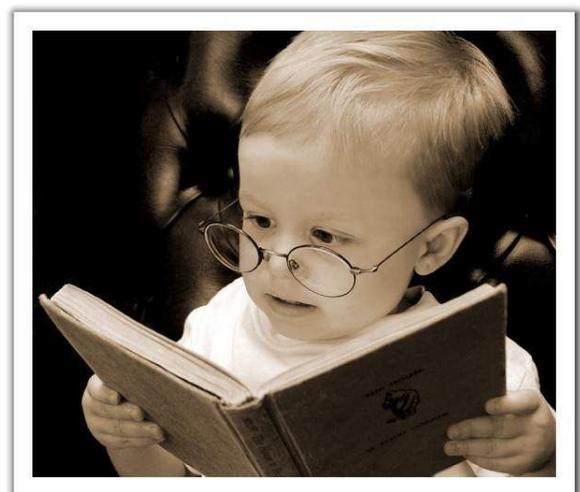
senting the Volunteer Association, supervise and support the Board directors, and evaluate tasks and activities to ensure the mission is being met. For more information, contact Laura Hutchings at 519-837-6440 ext 2398 or email lhutchings@gghorg.ca.

Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph is looking for a Receptionist. A volunteer is needed to assist with answering phones, greeting clients, receiving donations, selling merchandise, and clerical duties. Students are welcome to apply and hours can be used towards the 40 hour requirement for graduation. For more information, contact Leanne McCann at 519-824-1250 ext 241 or email volunteer@ignatiusguelph.ca.

Scouts Canada, Wellington Area requires a Note Taker. A volunteer is needed for taking minutes, taking attendance and distributing minutes after they have been approved by the executive committee and maintaining email communication. For more information, contact Shawn Jones at 519-766-3467 or email growth@scouter.ca.

Sunrise Therapeutic Riding and Learning Centre is looking for Therapeutic Riding Lesson Volunteers. Volunteer leaders will be responsible for grooming, tacking, and leading the horse throughout the lesson. Volunteer side-walkers will walk alongside the horse and offer confidence and instruction to the rider. This is a great opportunity to support children with special needs. For more information, contact Nikki Charbonneau at 519-837-0558 or email nik-kic@sunrise-therapeutic.ca.

Westwood Public School is looking for Reading Tutors. Volunteers will read with primary students, assist students in practicing sight words, and record the progress of the students they are working with. This is a great opportunity to spend individual time with young children and to help students benefit from working with literate adults. For more information, contact Karen Sims at 519-823-5450 or email karen.sims@ugdsb.on.ca.



THE CAMPFIRE

Our campfire is virtual, and every day we invite you to come sit around it with us to talk about the places you've been, the people you've met, the experiences you've had, and the communities you've been a part of.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WRITERS

GUELPH GUILD OF STORYTELLERS

by Brian Holstein

Once upon a time.

Sometime in the early 1980's a handful of people came together in Guelph to form a Children's Literacy Group. These included Fred Dack, Jean Alexander, Liz Haythornwaite, Jean Little and Robert Munch. Over a period of months the group changed its direction as the writers bowed out and the embryonic Storytellers Guild was formed. First telling in member's homes, the group became stronger as Ann Estill, Vince Wall, Beve Matson, Leslie Robbins and Paul Conway added their voices and their stories to the ensemble. Over the past fifteen years the guild has fluctuated in size and strength as tellers move away and others join.

My first encounter with the guild was as a newcomer to the city and frequent patron of the Boathouse, that treasure on the banks of the River Speed, the Boathouse. Lured by the advertising on the table I ventured out on that second Wednesday of the month to hear what this group was all about.

I was enchanted by the events of the evening: the complexity of some of the stories and the simplicity in the telling of the tales. I decided then and there that I wanted to join this group. Too, I realized that for the fifteen years before my retirement I had taught a Special Education class where I had used tales and anecdotes to get facts and concepts across successfully to my class. I was already on my way!

As the group helped me hone my skills I joined the several of the guild who have been invited to tell at many venues, both locally, regionally and further afield. Vince Wall and I were part of a National Storytellers' Convention in Ottawa some years back. It was there that I first met Tom Lipps who has an incredible style of telling that surpasses anything that I could possibly achieve. So impressive was Tom that he was brought to Guelph to be our one of our many

star attraction for a "By Word of Mouth" concert sponsored by the Guelph Civic Museums.

For over a decade the storytellers performed at the Boathouse, where Brenda Tremblay afforded the guild a fitting place for tellers to tell, for listeners to listen.

Moving closer to the Downtown core the guild now meets upstairs at the Main Branch of the Guelph Public Library. They have changed their performance time to 7:00 pm; they currently tell on the first Tuesday of the month; their season now begins in September and concludes in May. But otherwise, all else remains the same: they still invite out-of-town guest tellers to perform on occasion; they do encourage would-be tellers to try their story during an Open Mic each month and they do not charge admission, relying on donations from the audience.

The guild has been described by a former city councillor as "one of Guelph's best kept secrets". Judge for yourself by joining them for their January 3, at 7:00 p.m. performance upstairs at the Main Branch of the library.

Brian Holstein was born on a dairy farm in rural Australia, where he was educated in a one-room school and eventually became a secondary school teacher, teaching on the verge of the Outback. In 1967 he decided to take a 5-year working trip around the world and left for his first job - with the Brampton Public School Board. He remained teaching there until his retirement, his circumnavigation halted.

But not all was wasted: he was the first teacher to insist that the Peel School Board actually and formally call his paternity leave a . . . Paternity Leave when he took off a year with each of his two infant children; he reconstructed a log house in Caledon; the first with solar panels and supplemented with a wood-burning furnace

On retirement in 1998, he made two vows: to travel more often to his homeland, and to get out of Brampton! Seeing Guelph as a Gentle City he made his home here and the metamorphosis began: the annual trips across the Pacific - arranged entirely by him - began and grew to include

other people; the trips became longer, having stumbled upon the magnificence of Asia and the history of Europe and rediscovering the South Pacific.

He began to write and to act: mainly in the Woodlawn Spirit Walks and in street theatre, more recently depicting Tiger Dunlop at municipal events; he recognized a talent in tale telling and have been a member of the Guelph Guild of Storytellers for several years; he became heavily involved in municipal activism during the last term of the local council, attending every meeting to record votes, and began regularly broadcasting his views on two local radio shows.

His stories are often in the background of his stories, which he continues to write or discover and to present them a guild telling.

WORDFEST **by Donna McCaw**

Wordfest is an intimate evening of writers, storytellers and listeners held at the Elora Centre for the Arts twice a year since 2007. It is an open mic with previous sign up by calling 519 846 9698 as well as a featured writer or storyteller or two. Poetry, drama, short stories, excerpts from longer works, lyrics to original songs, party piece recitations, stories come pouring forth from teenagers to seniors.

Most of the written work is original but we have had Robert Service poems recited too. We have had science fiction readings to humour, haiku to spoken word rants, musical ballads to Irish island visits through images, art, and poems.

It is held each October and April. The next one will feature a spoken word artist from Alton, Harry Rosen, and another writer.

Donna started her first novel at age 11, a Trixie Belden/Nancy Drew knock off. She hid it in the hay mow of the barn but it may have been fed to cattle because it disappeared. Her love of reading and writing continued through high school and university but she did not go public until she was asked to read one at of the early Elora Writers' Festivals. The positive response had her hooked on public readings and she also discovered storytelling at The Storytelling Barn in Baden. A live audience is a great place to try out a story!

She has self-published four books: Sing a Song of Six Packs and Under the Apple Boughs are stories, and Spiral to the Heart and The Spell of Crazy Love are poetry. The latest, It's Your Time, deals with retirement readiness and was published by BPS Books in Toronto.

TIMESKETCHING: MEMOIR WRITING WITH CONNECTION **by Peter Smith**

Have you ever asked yourself: "What's it all about?" You probably rush to work most mornings, dashing from one meeting to the next, only to get home exhausted and then climb on the same treadmill the next day. You begin to notice those around you are getting older, you are getting older and time is marching on. You take a deep breath and ask yourself that same question again: "What's it all about?"

Emotional connection makes us balanced and happy as people. Connecting with who we are, understanding where we have come from and having a sense of where we are going is important for a healthy and rewarding life.

Are you ready to get off the treadmill? Take one day out of your busy life for yourself and attend our exclusive Timesketching Memoir Development Program. It explores the purpose and meaning of your life through the process of reflecting on and developing your own memoir. At the end of the session, you'll walk away with the start of your personal memoir along with some great insights into your life.

Peter Smith's ability to integrate the human need for connection, emotional wellness and productive living has touched many people in both his professional and personal life.

He is an expert on understanding what motivates people to live with more balance and productivity. His insights and experience come from over two decades in corporate Canada building, leading and mentoring individuals and organizations to surpass what they believe is possible.

Peter describes his work on memoir and legacy as a calling:

"So many people struggle in an ocean of dislocation and are lost because they are not anchored to what is critical to their being. When a person develops a deeper understanding of their life, they approach their vocation, their family and their community more positively and productively. I want to help people develop this deeper sense and in the process, help them create something about themselves that is timeless."

Peter is currently writing a book that explores the building blocks of legacy, and chronicles the journey of ordinary people who have created extraordinary legacy in the service of others.

In addition to being a dad, a husband and a mentor, Peter is an Ivey Scholar and holds an MBA from the Richard Ivey School of Business, The University of Western Ontario.

For further information contact Peter at (905) 299-4512 or by email at psmith@timesketch.com.

WRITING YOUR LIFE by Nikki Hammond

It is through words that we discover who we are and what we are about. Language gifts us with the ability to name things and thus tease out meaning from the sometimes confusing events of our lives. Our “mother tongue” is the tool we use to capture what we imagine and then communicate what we have imagined to others. It also allows us to ask the questions that help us find our truest selves. Writing is a way of bringing the inside out so that you can look at it all and pick out the good parts. As Socrates said, “an unexamined life is not worth living”. Writing is an excellent way to examine one’s life.

Without writing I would not be the person I am today. I did not set out to be a writer, but a writer is what I have become, through, well, through writing. I wrote poems and letters as a very young woman, then I graduated to journals – the earliest ones were burned for a reason that now escapes me. My writing at that time was self absorbed, totally frank and helped me stay sane through the tough times of my life. It helped me catch hold of my chaotic feelings by naming and taming them. Much later I joined a writers’ group and sharing my writing with others gave me the confidence to step out and start my own small, writing services business. Because the writers’ group profoundly influenced me, I wanted to nurture others in the writing life, so I developed an eight week series of writing workshops that I called, “Writing Your Life”.

The “Writing Your Life” workshop series is for people who want to start writing, to get past a writing block, to change their writing style, to discover something new about them selves or to just have fun with words. Writing courses like mine attract curious, brave and open people since reading your thoughts and creations aloud to others carries a risk – it’s a little like being the only nudist at a fancy dress ball.

Once a week participants meet for two hours, and I put them through their paces, giving them three different types of exercises to do, after which they read what they’ve written aloud. One is a warm-up exercise, another aims to give a fresh perspective to how we see ourselves and the third encourages participants to play creatively with words. In between the workshops are writing assignments that focus on a particular area of life experience. It is a writing course that uses the participant’s own life experiences as the raw material for exploring creativity.

I get excited when I see participants surprise them selves with the power of their words to move or entertain others, and I love it when they discover the uniqueness of own “voice” - that style, phrasing, tone that identifies each writer. Most of all I like it when I successfully outwit that confounded inner critic who whispers discouraging little messages such as, “you have nothing original to say”, “no one wants to know what you have to write”, “you can’t write – why you can’t even spell!”

“Writing Your Life” is not a how-to course; it is a get-up-on-the-horse-and-ride course. By the end of the series participants have a lot of their own written material, a sense of their own value as a writer and an awareness of the benefits gained by writing with others.

Nikki Everts-Hammond is the owner operator of Scripted Images, a small writing services business. Under its umbrella she provides writing and editing services to a broad range of individuals, organizations and businesses; produces nonfiction, poetry and fiction pieces; and both creates and facilitates writing workshops.

Reflecting her eclectic interests, Nikki Everts-Hammond has produced a varied assortment of works over her career. Her feature article, “Farming in the Shadow of the City”, was published in the Guelph Mercury, her poetry won first prize in the Elora Writers’ Festival, as well as a place in the Fringe at the 2010 Eden Mills Writers’ Festival. She has co-authored a scientific article about the results of her MSc research on plant genetics, edited a book about The Friendly Home, a non-profit organization in Montreal, and she currently writes book reviews for Off-the-Shelf, a small newspaper put out by The Bookshelf in Guelph, Ontario. Her education began with a bachelor degree in Genetics from the University of California in Berkeley. She then completed a Masters degree in Cytogenetics from McGill University in Montreal. Finally she has also acquired a Diploma in Education from McGill. Blending her interests, Nikki is sharing her passions for science, the environment, poetry and fiction with others through her writing and in the classroom.

WORDS OF INSPIRATION

THE BRICK (author unknown)

A successful executive was driving down a neighbourhood street in his new BMW going a bit too fast. He thought he saw something between two parked cars, but as he passed no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the BMW’s side door! He slammed on the brakes and backed up. The angry driver jumped out, grabbed a boy standing there and screamed, “Who are you and what was that all about? Look at what you have done to my new car! It’s going to cost a lot of money to fix! Why did you do that?”

The boy was apologetic. “Please mister ... please, I’m sorry but I didn’t know what else to do.” He pleaded, “I threw the brick because no one would stop ...” With tears dripping down his face, he pointed to a spot just around the parked car. “It’s my brother,” he said. “He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can’t lift him up.”

Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive, “Would you please help me get him back in his wheel-

chair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me." Moved beyond words, the driver lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair, then took out his handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him the boy was OK. "Thank you mister," the grateful child told the stranger.

Too shaken for words, the man watched the boy push his wheelchair-bound brother down the sidewalk. It was a slow walk back to the BMW. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to have it repaired. He kept the dent to remind him of this message:

"Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention."

God whispers in our souls and speaks to our hearts. Sometimes when we don't have time to listen, He has to throw a brick at us ...



HEALTHY RECIPES by Alex MacEachern

While reading or writing (or anytime!), try these wonderfully warming recipes on a cold winter's day!

Ontario Sweet Potato Coconut Curry Soup

*Preparation and Cook Time: 1 hour
Serves 10 as a main course*

5 cups of Ontario sweet potatoes, chopped
3 cups of Ontario onion, chopped
2 cups of Ontario carrots, chopped
6 cloves of Ontario garlic, whole peeled
4 tbsp of butter
3 cups of coconut milk
7 cups of water
1 cup of Ontario cilantro, thoroughly washed and chopped
¼ cup of curry powder
Salt and pepper to taste

Heat butter in a pot over medium heat, add onion and cook until golden brown.

Add garlic, sweet potatoes, carrots, water, coconut milk, and curry powder.

Cook over medium heat until the vegetables are tender. Add salt, pepper, and cilantro.

Cool soup and puree in batches or use a hand blender to puree the soup in the pot.

Heat soup and top each bowl with a dollop of sour cream, yogurt, and a few cilantro leaves.

Serve soup with a slice of rustic bread as a main course or in a teacup as an hors d'oeuvre.

Ontario Mushroom Soup

*Preparation and Cook Time: 40 minutes
Serves 10 as a main course*

6 large Ontario onions, thinly sliced
6 cloves of Ontario garlic, minced
2 bay leaves
10 cups of vegetable, chicken or beef stock
3 tbsp of fresh Ontario thyme, chopped
5 lbs of button mushrooms chopped
5 lbs of Portobello mushrooms roughly chopped
5 tbsp of butter
1 tsp jalapeno, seeded and finely chopped
Salt to taste

Place the onions and jalapenos, 1 tbsp of salt, and butter in a pot and cook over medium heat until the onions are soft and golden brown.

Add the chopped mushrooms to the pot and cook until they are light golden brown.

Add garlic, bay leaves, soup stock, and chopped thyme. Simmer soup for 30 minutes until all of the flavours are combined and add more salt as needed.

Ontario Cherry Chili with Zucchini Corn Bread

*Preparation and Cook Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
Serves 8*

Zucchini Corn Bread

1 cup of Ontario flour
¾ cup of Ontario corn meal
1/3 cup of maple syrup
2 tsp of baking powder
1 tsp of baking soda
¾ cups of butter, melted
1 tsp of salt
1 tsp of pepper
1 cups of milk
1 cup of zucchini, shredded or finely chopped
2 eggs

Mix together flour, corn meal, maple syrup, baking powder, baking soda, salt and pepper.

In a separate bowl mix cooled melted butter, milk and eggs.

Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and zucchini and mix thoroughly.

Pour batter into a greased baking pan.

Bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes or until a tester comes out clean.

Chili

2 lbs of Ontario ground beef
1 cups of cooked kidney beans
2 cups of Ontario corn, frozen
1 cup of cilantro, chopped
3 cups of Ontario diced tomatoes, canned
1.5 cups of onion, chopped
½ cup of garlic
1 cups of carrots, chopped
1/2 cup of dried cherries
¼ cup of chili powder
2 tbsp of cumin
¼ cup of cocoa powder
1 tbsp of salt
2 tbsp of butter

Heat butter in a pot and cook onion over medium heat until light brown

Add beef to the pot and break apart with a fork.

Add tomatoes, garlic, carrots, cherries, chili powder, cumin, cocoa powder, and salt.

Cook over medium heat until the vegetables are tender and the flavours are combined.

Add cilantro and corn, adjust seasoning as needed.

Serve with zucchini corn bread.

Ontario Caramelized Onion Poutine

Preparation and Cook Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes
Serves 6

Gravy

1 tsp of Ontario garlic, minced
1 tbsp of butter
4 cups of beef stock
5 tbsp of corn starch
2 tbsp of water

Heat the butter in a sauce pan and add the garlic; cook over low heat for 2 minutes.

Add the beef stock and bring to a simmer.

In a small bowl, mix the cornstarch with the water.

Add to the beef stock and simmer until the mixture thickens.

Poutine

2 pounds of Ontario potatoes, washed and cut into wedges
5 tbsp of vegetable oil
4 large Ontario onions, thinly sliced
3 cups of Ontario cheese curds (you can find these at the St. Lawrence Market)
3 tbsp of butter
2 cups of gravy
2 tsp of salt

Heat butter in a pan over medium heat.

Add onions and 1 tsp of salt and cook until they are golden brown and completely soft.

Toss the cut potatoes in a bowl with 1 tsp of salt and oil.

Transfer potatoes to a baking sheet and bake at 375 for approximately 30 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Remove potatoes from the oven and transfer to a platter or individual plates.

Place the caramelized onions on top of the French fries. Top with cheese curds and gravy. Serve immediately as a fun side dish with meatloaf or your favourite hamburger.

Enjoy as a main course by topping with cooked ground beef or turkey.

WRITE TO HEAL **by Lisa Browning**

I am so excited!! These are the words that greeted a friend of mine on the morning of December 10, as I was preparing this issue. I was, and am, excited about a new component of One Thousand Trees – a blog entitled “Write to Heal”.

The idea came to me from a great deal of personal turmoil during December. So many sad things happening in my life, and in the lives of those I love and care for ...

Words have incredible power. We have focused on some of the detrimental power, especially in last month’s issue, which marked the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women in Canada.

But words can also have an incredibly positive power. It has been said that, once we put down our intentions on paper, we are far more likely to fulfill those intentions. Equally true, then ... words of pain, when written down, can be released and transformed into words of healing.

The blog can be found on the Links page of the One Thousand Trees website. Please visit frequently, and contribute if you feel called to do so ... anonymously or otherwise.

We all deserve the “right to heal”.

THIRTY THINGS TO STOP DOING TO YOURSELF *When you stop chasing the wrong things you give the right things a chance to catch you.*

As Maria Robinson once said, "Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending." Nothing could be closer to the truth. But before you can begin this process of transformation you have to stop doing the things that have been holding you back.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Stop spending time with the wrong people. – Life is too short to spend time with people who suck the happiness out of you. If someone wants you in their life, they'll make room for you. You shouldn't have to fight for a spot. Never, ever insist yourself to someone who continuously overlooks your worth. And remember, it's not the people that stand by your side when you're at your best, but the ones who stand beside you when you're at your worst that are your true friends.

2. Stop running from your problems. – Face them head on. No, it won't be easy. There is no person in the world capable of flawlessly handling every punch thrown at them. We aren't supposed to be able to instantly solve problems. That's not how we're made. In fact, we're made to get upset, sad, hurt, stumble and fall. Because that's the whole purpose of living – to face problems, learn, adapt, and solve them over the course of time. This is what ultimately molds us into the person we become.

3. Stop lying to yourself. – You can lie to anyone else in the world, but you can't lie to yourself. Our lives improve only when we take chances, and the first and most difficult chance we can take is to be honest with ourselves. Read *The Road Less Traveled*.

4. Stop putting your own needs on the back burner. – The most painful thing is losing yourself in the process of loving someone too much, and forgetting that you are special too. Yes, help others; but help yourself too. If there was ever a moment to follow your passion and do something that matters to you, that moment is now.

5. Stop trying to be someone you're not. – One of the greatest challenges in life is being yourself in a world that's trying to make you like everyone else. Someone will always be prettier, someone will always be smarter, someone will always be younger, but they will never be you. Don't change so people will like you. Be yourself and the right people will love the real you.

6. Stop trying to hold onto the past. – You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading your last one.

7. Stop being scared to make a mistake. – Doing something and getting it wrong is at least ten times more pro-

ductive than doing nothing. Every success has a trail of failures behind it, and every failure is leading towards success. You end up regretting the things you did NOT do far more than the things you did.

8. Stop berating yourself for old mistakes. – We may love the wrong person and cry about the wrong things, but no matter how things go wrong, one thing is for sure, mistakes help us find the person and things that are right for us. We all make mistakes, have struggles, and even regret things in our past. But you are not your mistakes, you are not your struggles, and you are here NOW with the power to shape your day and your future. Every single thing that has ever happened in your life is preparing you for a moment that is yet to come.

9. Stop trying to buy happiness. – Many of the things we desire are expensive. But the truth is, the things that really satisfy us are totally free – love, laughter and working on our passions.

10. Stop exclusively looking to others for happiness. – If you're not happy with who you are on the inside, you won't be happy in a long-term relationship with anyone else either. You have to create stability in your own life first before you can share it with someone else. Read *Stumbling on Happiness*.

11. Stop being idle. – Don't think too much or you'll create a problem that wasn't even there in the first place. Evaluate situations and take decisive action. You cannot change what you refuse to confront. Making progress involves risk. Period! You can't make it to second base with your foot on first.

12. Stop thinking you're not ready. – Nobody ever feels 100% ready when an opportunity arises. Because most great opportunities in life force us to grow beyond our comfort zones, which means we won't feel totally comfortable at first.

13. Stop getting involved in relationships for the wrong reasons. – Relationships must be chosen wisely. It's better to be alone than to be in bad company. There's no need to rush. If something is meant to be, it will happen – in the right time, with the right person, and for the best reason. Fall in love when you're ready, not when you're lonely.

14. Stop rejecting new relationships just because old ones didn't work. – In life you'll realize that there is a purpose for everyone you meet. Some will test you, some will use you and some will teach you. But most importantly, some will bring out the best in you.

15. Stop trying to compete against everyone else. – Don't worry about what others doing better than you. Concentrate on beating your own records every day. Success is a battle between YOU and YOURSELF only.

16. Stop being jealous of others. – Jealousy is the art of counting someone else's blessings instead of your own. Ask yourself this: "What's something I have that everyone wants?"

17. Stop complaining and feeling sorry for yourself. – Life's curveballs are thrown for a reason – to shift your path in a direction that is meant for you. You may not see or understand everything the moment it happens, and it may be tough. But reflect back on those negative curveballs thrown at you in the past. You'll often see that eventually they led you to a better place, person, state of mind, or situation. So smile! Let everyone know that today you are a lot stronger than you were yesterday, and you will be.

18. Stop holding grudges. – Don't live your life with hate in your heart. You will end up hurting yourself more than the people you hate. Forgiveness is not saying, "What you did to me is okay." It is saying, "I'm not going to let what you did to me ruin my happiness forever." Forgiveness is the answer... let go, find peace, liberate yourself! And remember, forgiveness is not just for other people, it's for you too. If you must, forgive yourself, move on and try to do better next time.

19. Stop letting others bring you down to their level. – Refuse to lower your standards to accommodate those who refuse to raise theirs.

20. Stop wasting time explaining yourself to others. – Your friends don't need it and your enemies won't believe it anyway. Just do what you know in your heart is right.

21. Stop doing the same things over and over without taking a break. – The time to take a deep breath is when you don't have time for it. If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll keep getting what you're getting. Sometimes you need to distance yourself to see things clearly.

22. Stop overlooking the beauty of small moments. – Enjoy the little things, because one day you may look back and discover they were the big things. The best portion of your life will be the small, nameless moments you spend smiling with someone who matters to you.

23. Stop trying to make things perfect. – The real world doesn't reward perfectionists, it rewards people who get things done. Read *Getting Things Done*.

24. Stop following the path of least resistance. – Life is not easy, especially when you plan on achieving something worthwhile. Don't take the easy way out. Do something extraordinary.

25. Stop acting like everything is fine if it isn't. – It's okay to fall apart for a little while. You don't always have to pretend to be strong, and there is no need to constantly prove that everything is going well. You shouldn't be concerned with what other people are thinking either – cry if

you need to – it's healthy to shed your tears. The sooner you do, the sooner you will be able to smile again.

26. Stop blaming others for your troubles. – The extent to which you can achieve your dreams depends on the extent to which you take responsibility for your life. When you blame others for what you're going through, you deny responsibility – you give others power over that part of your life.

27. Stop trying to be everything to everyone. – Doing so is impossible, and trying will only burn you out. But making one person smile CAN change the world. Maybe not the whole world, but their world. So narrow your focus.

28. Stop worrying so much. – Worry will not strip tomorrow of its burdens, it will strip today of its joy. One way to check if something is worth mulling over is to ask yourself this question: "Will this matter in one year's time? Three years? Five years?" If not, then it's not worth worrying about.

29. Stop focusing on what you don't want to happen. – Focus on what you do want to happen. Positive thinking is at the forefront of every great success story. If you awake every morning with the thought that something wonderful will happen in your life today, and you pay close attention, you'll often find that you're right.

30. Stop being ungrateful. – No matter how good or bad you have it, wake up each day thankful for your life. Someone somewhere else is desperately fighting for theirs. Instead of thinking about what you're missing, try thinking about what you have that everyone else is missing.

And another illustration of the power of words ...

Our previous article, 30 Things to Stop Doing to Yourself, was well received by most of our readers, but several of you suggested that we follow it up with a list of things to start doing. In one reader's words, "I would love to see you revisit each of these 30 principles, but instead of presenting us with a 'to-don't' list, present us with a 'to-do' list that we all can start working on today, together." Some folks actually took it one step further and emailed us their own revised 'to-do' versions of the list.

So I sat down last night with our original article and the two reader's revisions as a guide, and a couple hours later finalized a new list of 30 things; which ended up being, I think, a perfect complement to the original.

Here it is, a positive 'to-do' list for the upcoming year – 30 things to start doing for yourself:

1. Start spending time with the right people. – These are the people you enjoy, who love and appreciate you, and who encourage you to improve in healthy and exciting ways. They are the ones who make you feel more alive,

and not only embrace who you are now, but also embrace and embody who you want to be, unconditionally.

2. Start facing your problems head on. – It isn't your problems that define you, but how you react to them and recover from them. Problems will not disappear unless you take action. Do what you can, when you can, and acknowledge what you've done. It's all about taking baby steps in the right direction, inch by inch. These inches count, they add up to yards and miles in the long run.

3. Start being honest with yourself about everything. – Be honest about what's right, as well as what needs to be changed. Be honest about what you want to achieve and who you want to become. Be honest with every aspect of your life, always. Because you are the one person you can forever count on. Search your soul, for the truth, so that you truly know who you are. Once you do, you'll have a better understanding of where you are now and how you got here, and you'll be better equipped to identify where you want to go and how to get there. Read *The Road Less Traveled*.

4. Start making your own happiness a priority. – Your needs matter. If you don't value yourself, look out for yourself, and stick up for yourself, you're sabotaging yourself. Remember, it IS possible to take care of your own needs while simultaneously caring for those around you. And once your needs are met, you will likely be far more capable of helping those who need you most.

5. Start being yourself, genuinely and proudly. – Trying to be anyone else is a waste of the person you are. Be yourself. Embrace that individual inside you that has ideas, strengths and beauty like no one else. Be the person you know yourself to be – the best version of you – on your terms. Above all, be true to YOU, and if you cannot put your heart in it, take yourself out of it.

6. Start noticing and living in the present. – Right now is a miracle. Right now is the only moment guaranteed to you. Right now is life. So stop thinking about how great things will be in the future. Stop dwelling on what did or didn't happen in the past. Learn to be in the 'here and now' and experience life as it's happening. Appreciate the world for the beauty that it holds, right now.

7. Start valuing the lessons your mistakes teach you. – Mistakes are okay; they're the stepping stones of progress. If you're not failing from time to time, you're not trying hard enough and you're not learning. Take risks, stumble, fall, and then get up and try again. Appreciate that you are pushing yourself, learning, growing and improving. Significant achievements are almost invariably realized at the end of a long road of failures. One of the 'mistakes' you fear might just be the link to your greatest achievement yet.

8. Start being more polite to yourself. – If you had a friend who spoke to you in the same way that you sometimes speak to yourself, how long would you allow that person to be your friend? The way you treat yourself sets the standard for others. You must love who you are or no one else will.

9. Start enjoying the things you already have. – The problem with many of us is that we think we'll be happy when we reach a certain level in life – a level we see others operating at – your boss with her corner office, that friend of a friend who owns a mansion on the beach, etc. Unfortunately, it takes awhile before you get there, and when you get there you'll likely have a new destination in mind. You'll end up spending your whole life working toward something new without ever stopping to enjoy the things you have now. So take a quiet moment every morning when you first awake to appreciate where you are and what you already have.

10. Start creating your own happiness. – If you are waiting for someone else to make you happy, you're missing out. Smile because you can. Choose happiness. Be the change you want to see in the world. Be happy with who you are now, and let your positivity inspire your journey into tomorrow. Happiness is often found when and where you decide to seek it. If you look for happiness within the opportunities you have, you will eventually find it. But if you constantly look for something else, unfortunately, you'll find that too. Read *Stumbling on Happiness*.

11. Start giving your ideas and dreams a chance. – In life, it's rarely about getting a chance; it's about taking a chance. You'll never be 100% sure it will work, but you can always be 100% sure doing nothing won't work. Most of the time you just have to go for it! And no matter how it turns out, it always ends up just the way it should be. Either you succeed or you learn something. Win-Win.

12. Start believing that you're ready for the next step. – You are ready! Think about it. You have everything you need right now to take the next small, realistic step forward. So embrace the opportunities that come your way, and accept the challenges – they're gifts that will help you to grow.

13. Start entering new relationships for the right reasons. – Enter new relationships with dependable, honest people who reflect the person you are and the person you want to be. Choose friends you are proud to know, people you admire, who show you love and respect – people who reciprocate your kindness and commitment. And pay attention to what people do, because a person's actions are much more important than their words or how others represent them.

14. Start giving new people you meet a chance. – It sounds harsh, but you cannot keep every friend you've ever made. People and priorities change. As some relationships fade others will grow. Appreciate the possibility

of new relationships as you naturally let go of old ones that no longer work. Trust your judgment. Embrace new relationships, knowing that you are entering into unfamiliar territory. Be ready to learn, be ready for a challenge, and be ready to meet someone that might just change your life forever.

15. Start competing against an earlier version of yourself. – Be inspired by others, appreciate others, learn from others, but know that competing against them is a waste of time. You are in competition with one person and one person only – yourself. You are competing to be the best you can be. Aim to break your own personal records.

16. Start cheering for other people's victories. – Start noticing what you like about others and tell them. Having an appreciation for how amazing the people around you are leads to good places – productive, fulfilling, peaceful places. So be happy for those who are making progress. Cheer for their victories. Be thankful for their blessings, openly. What goes around comes around, and sooner or later the people you're cheering for will start cheering for you.

17. Start looking for the silver lining in tough situations. – When things are hard, and you feel down, take a few deep breaths and look for the silver lining – the small glimmers of hope. Remind yourself that you can and will grow stronger from these hard times. And remain conscious of your blessings and victories – all the things in your life that are right. Focus on what you have, not on what you haven't.

18. Start forgiving yourself and others. – We've all been hurt by our own decisions and by others. And while the pain of these experiences is normal, sometimes it lingers for too long. We relive the pain over and over and have a hard time letting go. Forgiveness is the remedy. It doesn't mean you're erasing the past, or forgetting what happened. It means you're letting go of the resentment and pain, and instead choosing to learn from the incident and move on with your life.

19. Start helping those around you. – Care about people. Guide them if you know a better way. The more you help others, the more they will want to help you. Love and kindness begets love and kindness. And so on and so forth.

20. Start listening to your own inner voice. – If it helps, discuss your ideas with those closest to you, but give yourself enough room to follow your own intuition. Be true to yourself. Say what you need to say. Do what you know in your heart is right.

21. Start being attentive to your stress level and take short breaks. – Slow down. Breathe. Give yourself permission to pause, regroup and move forward with clarity and purpose. When you're at your busiest, a brief recess can rejuvenate your mind and increase your productivity.

These short breaks will help you regain your sanity and reflect on your recent actions so you can be sure they're in line with your goals.

22. Start noticing the beauty of small moments. – Instead of waiting for the big things to happen – marriage, kids, big promotion, winning the lottery – find happiness in the small things that happen every day. Little things like having a quiet cup of coffee in the early morning, or the delicious taste and smell of a homemade meal, or the pleasure of sharing something you enjoy with someone else, or holding hands with your partner. Noticing these small pleasures on a daily basis makes a big difference in the quality of your life.

23. Start accepting things when they are less than perfect. – Remember, 'perfect' is the enemy of 'good.' One of the biggest challenges for people who want to improve themselves and improve the world is learning to accept things as they are. Sometimes it's better to accept and appreciate the world as it is, and people as they are, rather than trying to make everything and everyone conform to an impossible ideal. No, you shouldn't accept a life of mediocrity, but learn to love and value things when they are less than perfect.

24. Start working toward your goals every single day. – Remember, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Whatever it is you dream about, start taking small, logical steps every day to make it happen. Get out there and DO something! The harder you work the luckier you will become. While many of us decide at some point during the course of our lives that we want to answer our calling, only an astute few of us actually work on it. By 'working on it,' I mean consistently devoting oneself to the end result. Read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

25. Start being more open about how you feel. – If you're hurting, give yourself the necessary space and time to hurt, but be open about it. Talk to those closest to you. Tell them the truth about how you feel. Let them listen. The simple act of getting things off your chest and into the open is your first step toward feeling good again.

26. Start taking full accountability for your own life. – Own your choices and mistakes, and be willing to take the necessary steps to improve upon them. Either you take accountability for your life or someone else will. And when they do, you'll become a slave to their ideas and dreams instead of a pioneer of your own. You are the only one who can directly control the outcome of your life. And no, it won't always be easy. Every person has a stack of obstacles in front of them. But you must take accountability for your situation and overcome these obstacles. Choosing not to is choosing a lifetime of mere existence.

27. Start actively nurturing your most important relationships. – Bring real, honest joy into your life and the lives of those you love by simply telling them how much they mean to you on a regular basis. You can't be every-

thing to everyone, but you can be everything to a few people. Decide who these people are in your life and treat them like royalty. Remember, you don't need a certain number of friends, just a number of friends you can be certain of.

28. Start concentrating on the things you can control.

– You can't change everything, but you can always change something. Wasting your time, talent and emotional energy on things that are beyond your control is a recipe for frustration, misery and stagnation. Invest your energy in the things you can control, and act on them now.

29. Start focusing on the possibility of positive outcomes.

– The mind must believe it CAN do something before it is capable of actually doing it. The way to overcome negative thoughts and destructive emotions is to develop opposing, positive emotions that are stronger and more powerful. Listen to your self-talk and replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Regardless of how a situation seems, focus on what you DO WANT to happen, and then

take the next positive step forward. No, you can't control everything that happens to you, but you can control how you react to things. Everyone's life has positive and negative aspects – whether or not you're happy and successful in the long run depends greatly on which aspects you focus on. Read *The How of Happiness*.

30. Start noticing how wealthy you are right now.

– Henry David Thoreau once said, "Wealth is the ability to fully experience life." Even when times are tough, it's always important to keep things in perspective. You didn't go to sleep hungry last night. You didn't go to sleep outside. You had a choice of what clothes to wear this morning. You hardly broke a sweat today. You didn't spend a minute in fear. You have access to clean drinking water. You have access to medical care. You have access to the Internet. You can read. Some might say you are incredibly wealthy, so remember to be grateful for all the things you do have.

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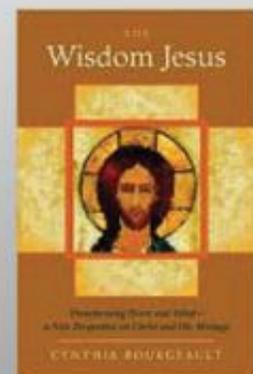


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