

PostScript

SPRING 2025



THE MAGAZINE FOR RETIRED EDUCATORS

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PostScript

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By BCRTA Member Denny Waag

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Sometimes it helps to take a walk. Oppressed on all sides by worries about crazy neighbours (local and international), the economy, all the other troubles that can pile up in our lives and in our minds, there are times when getting on the move can let us breathe and maybe shift our vision and change our thoughts. In this issue of PostScript we take note of those moments when we no longer ruminate in stillness, but get up and move for a purpose.

People throughout history have been walking to signal a change in their thinking. For at least a thousand years, pilgrims from far and wide have walked the Santiago Camino across France and Spain seeking changes in their circumstances and within themselves. **Marlene Legates** took to the Camino to mark both her retirement and her desire to not retreat from challenges. She relates some of the glories and trials of that unforgettable experience here.

Another teacher who made a pilgrimage of sorts was **Helmut Lemke**, who returned to the Germany of his youth to teach for a year. He offers some memories of teaching abroad, the friendships forged and what it meant to leave home to return home. **Susan Cheng** also ventured home, in her case to the birthplace of her father. There is a sense of both discovery and nostalgia in her recounting of the family's multi-generational exodus to Canada and her continuing ties to her Chinese roots.

While many of us won't contemplate a trip to the USA for the next little while, when we are ready to do so those of us who are interested in John Steinbeck's California history can look to **Janet Nicol** for some advice on where to go and what to see.

And on our theme of movement to deal with change, **Karen Cooper** relates how taking up swimming has been important to her during a tumultuous time in her life. In frigid ocean waters she discovers something about her physical limits (they are more expansive than she thought) and also finds a new and focused community of like-minded elders.

It's spring. It really is! We hope you get a chance to get out, to move, to renew some good habits and to try something new, to meet up with friends and to turn your face to the sun, should it appear.

The Editor
postscrip@bcrta.ca

contents

POSTSCRIPT MAGAZINE | SPRING 2025



- 4** EDITOR'S NOTE
- 6** PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
- 8** LETTERS
- 14** ANCESTRAL VILLAGE
- 20** IMPORTANT DATES
- 33** TEACHING ABROAD
- 40** BCRTA GROUP DEPARTURE
- 50** HEALTH FACTS

- 52** LEISURE AND SENIOR HEALTH
- 54** BOOKS OF NOTE
- 57** CLASSIFIEDS
- 58** CROSSWORD
- 59** SUDOKU
- 60** IN MEMORIAM
- 62** PHOTO FILE
- 63** RR SMITH



TAKING WING IN ALL WEATHERS

As I work at my computer and look out the window, I'm captivated by the antics of birds at the feeder. February snow has fallen in my neighbourhood and these little neighbourhood residents have been caught by surprise! House finches devour the seeds, their pink and purple feathers bright against a sparkling white landscape. Chickadees politely wait their turn on nearby branches while sparrows, banded thrush, and hooded juncos peck at seeds that fall to the ground. I even catch a glimpse of our resident hummingbird, iridescent feathers shining as it darts back and forth. As a flicker picks up scattered seeds beneath the feeder, a dozen bushtits peck at a block of suet and nuts suspended from the deck roof. These birds flock together and, while of various feathers and feeding habits, are connected by a common purpose.



In 2020, when all the world paused. I frequently found myself stationed at my computer, and my attention was caught by these birds, by their movements and colours just outside my window. Perhaps the same was true for you. Those moments offered a valuable connection to life outside as we all grappled with the abrupt changes in how we communicated and interacted. Before lockdown, I had seldom taken time to appreciate the birds' play. But in those days of isolation I developed a new appreciation.

The pandemic fast tracked our association's shift to digital platforms. At BCRTA, we've long embraced technology to stay connected to our members. Following our earlier use of email, we took our first steps into the world of social media ten years ago with Facebook. Recently, we've expanded our reach further by hiring a talented media specialist and diversifying our platforms to include Instagram, X, YouTube, and Blue Sky. Thanks to our Executive Director and office staff, our Directors also receive training and support for both Zoom and Microsoft TEAMS, enhancing our communication capabilities.

We are posting news about Branch events and BCRTA workshops on our website and other channels. Social media has bolstered our ability to engage with our members and a broader audience. It offers us a way to share important updates, connect meaningfully, and provide enriching content like our webinars, videos and articles. However, I'm also conscious of the pitfalls that accompany this connectivity. We must remain vigilant in protecting our personal information by limiting interactions to those we trust by using privacy settings to limit

I had seldom taken time to appreciate the birds' play...



and control our online contacts. We should also be mindful of the potential impact of excessive screen time on our sleep patterns and mental health. We need time outside, too.

The birds at my feeder have adapted to seasonal changes and have found what they need to survive and thrive. Similarly, we can navigate the digital landscape and find a safe space to connect. With care, we can experience the richness of online communication along with enjoying our lifelong connections to journaling, letter writing, books, magazines, and newspapers. But, however useful electronic connections

are, for me they cannot replace the in person experiences we offer one another. Isolation and loneliness have grown to epidemic proportions since the pandemic. Our BCRTA Branch gatherings, Zone, Committee and Board meetings and our Conference and AGM offer the essential ingredients of personal interactions: meaningful discussion amongst friends, all to a good purpose.

I suppose that in the end, it's about creating a flock—both in person and online—that enriches our lives and safeguards our well-being.

And showing our colours, of course! •

CAROLINE MALM is President of BCRTA

PostScript Letters

I Hear What You Are Saying

I was glad to see Doug Macleod's comprehensive article about hearing loss and hearing aids. It is a great contribution for everyone, especially those resisting the help they obviously need, and those near and dear to them who observe the results of resistance. Maybe some people will step up if only to try out all the fancy technology Doug describes.

I have premature deafness, and have worn hearing aids for decades. They enable effective work, better communications, and more joyous social gatherings, never mind the immense pleasure of being out in nature hearing birds, the rustle of leaves and the sound of water. A big bonus was renewed pleasure in live theatre where dialogue had become completely out of reach.

Now at 82 I have several friends who are hard of hearing, to put it mildly. For years I have strongly recommended hearing aids to anyone who asked for all the reasons given in the article. Every one of them makes perfect sense, but still there is much resistance, and especially among men I find.

I remember thinking that I would feel so old with hearing aids, but actually the opposite was true, because I was so much more responsive, so much more engaged to the point that some people forgot I even had a hearing problem. And these days so many people of all ages are out and about with assorted bits in their ears. Hearing aids are not that weird.

Of course there are issues, and these need to be sorted, especially starting out. Number one is wearing the aids every day and going for corrective help if they aren't working properly. Eventually and amazingly the brain is trained and responds so that even hearing in a crowded environment is possible. It helps to have a good specialist. I have found the Western Institute of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, now Wavefront, provides excellent service.

The one huge issue with hearing aids and all the immense improvements mentioned in the article is that of cost. The expense can be daunting, especially if you do not have extended benefits, or if for other reasons you are hard pressed financially. However, good hearing is a huge asset for a healthy and joyful old age. Sacrifice something to get it, would be my advice.

Much thanks to Postscript for publishing this thoughtful article.

Linda King

Not a Fan of GSC's New Hearing Aid Terms

It seems that our Pension Board has not done us any favors in negotiating a change to the benefits from Green Shield for Hearing Aids. The former benefit was for \$1,400 every 4 years. The new benefit is \$2,000 every 5 years. However, Greenshield is implementing this to add a year to the 4 year term. I purchased hearing aids in 2021 and needed new ones this year. Under the old contract, I would receive \$1,400 towards them, as 4 years had passed. But Greenshield is saying I am not eligible until 2026 because we are under 5 years now. I would have expected the 4 years ended December 31st, 2024 and the new contract began January 1st, 2025. But not Greenshield. I feel like the goalposts have been moved unfairly!

Ken H.
RMRTA

Editor's Note: As you know, BCRTA has no direct involvement in the Green Shield voluntary benefits plan - we run our own plan. However we do have an interest in the experiences of our members and have forwarded your concerns to the Teachers' Pension Plan Trustees.

Howdy, Neighbour!

What a nice surprise to see our former neighbour and colleague, Ken Berry's article about his Christmas display. We loved seeing each new addition every Christmas season. We moved from Williams Lake in 2001 and have lived in 4 communities since and in each one at Christmas time we tell our friends about his awesome light display.

Joanell and Larry Clarke
Salmon Arm BC

A Letter About Alma

Dear Editor,

Many thanks to Stephanie Koropatnick from my siblings and me for the surprise article "Letters from Alma" about our mom, Alma McGauley in the Fall 2024 issue of PostScript. It is a proud legacy for her name to be paired with the current legislation which requires bank deposits to be insured.

Her TIHC campaign was both tedious and exhilarating! I am remembering large rallies, the coup of getting onto a BCTF AGM agenda because

she needed to be heard, the boxes and boxes of correspondence, time spent with committee members both in Vancouver and Castlegar, her heartfelt feelings that justice must prevail for all the people who had suffered financial losses, standing up to a Jack Webster grilling, a cover photo and article in BC Business recognizing the win and my Dad's great pride in her public fight and voice. An ongoing treasure of hers was the commemorative plaque she was awarded at a

victory party at the end of the campaign. It was, she said, her "Stanley Cup"!

It is fitting that the TIHC collection will now be housed at UBC. Our mom was a lifelong social justice advocate and would be proud to know that her efforts to reclaim funds lost in the TIHC debacle are now on public record.

Marian Allingham
Retired Surrey Teacher

Miss Pelton Please Report to the Office for an Important Message

Dear PostScript

I just saw your magazine at a friend's house. I have looked for my grade 2 teacher and cannot find her - She was Miss Pelton, she taught at David Hoy Elementary in Fort St James from at least I believe 1977 or 78. Could you please put this in your magazine somewhere?

Dear Miss Pelton,

I don't think you know how much you influenced my life. I was in grade 2 and the quietest like mouse of a girl. This was at David Hoy Elementary in Fort St James. You were my idol. I remember very, very little from my childhood but I have one meaningful memory of you.

You made for our whole class awards. They were driftwood you had collected from the beach with pictures and writing on them then you shellacked them. I received best all around girl. It had a picture of an orange sunset. It was the most important thing to me for many years. I unfortunately lost it in a move.

I have always wanted to thank you for giving the young me confidence - you made me feel special. I have tried looking you up over the years but I am guessing your name has changed. If you recognize this please know that your investment in this kid has paid off and I am grateful.

Michelle Rolls
(Dempsey at the time)

Editor's Note: If someone can identify Miss Pelton, we would be happy to give her Michelle's contact info.



Write us at postscript@bcrrta.ca

Steinbeck's California Coast

SUNSHINE AND LITERARY REVELATIONS

BY JANET NICOL



Escaping BC's early December rains, I enjoyed nine days of dry, sunny weather along California's West Coast while following in the footsteps of American novelist John Steinbeck (1902-1968). First stop was a hotel in Monterey strategically located near the street named for Steinbeck's light-hearted novel *Cannery Row*. The author based his characters on actual residents dwelling around the sardine canneries and working on fishing boats during the 1930s. Following the novel's publication in 1945, curious readers began visiting the area. Nine years later, Ocean View Avenue was officially changed to Cannery Row. It seemed fitting to begin my literary exploration with a stroll along a thoroughfare commemorating Steinbeck's beloved story.

Doc, the central character, was based on Steinbeck's good friend Ed Ricketts. A marine biologist, Ricketts worked out of 'Doc's Lab,' also known as Pacific Biological Laboratories. The modest building, once cluttered with marine specimens, scientific equipment, and books, has been preserved and can be viewed from the street. Steinbeck's lesser-known sequel, *Sweet Thursday*, carries forward the adventures of Doc and his pals.

The author based his characters on actual residents dwelling around the sardine canneries...

Monterey's lucrative fishing industry collapsed following the Second World War. A revival of the neglected area gained traction in the 1970s. Today Cannery Row is lined with shops, high-end hotels, cafes, sculptures, and plaques honouring Steinbeck's literary achievements. At the end of Cannery Row is the must-see Monterey Bay Aquarium, offering a wealth of exhibits about diverse marine life. Also of note is a side exhibit featuring the social history of the local canneries. The gift shop sells Steinbeck's gem of a book, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, about an expedition Steinbeck made with Ricketts in 1940 aboard the *Western Flyer*. This purse seiner has since been refurbished in commemoration of the journey, operating as an educational and research vessel and plies the waters around Monterey.

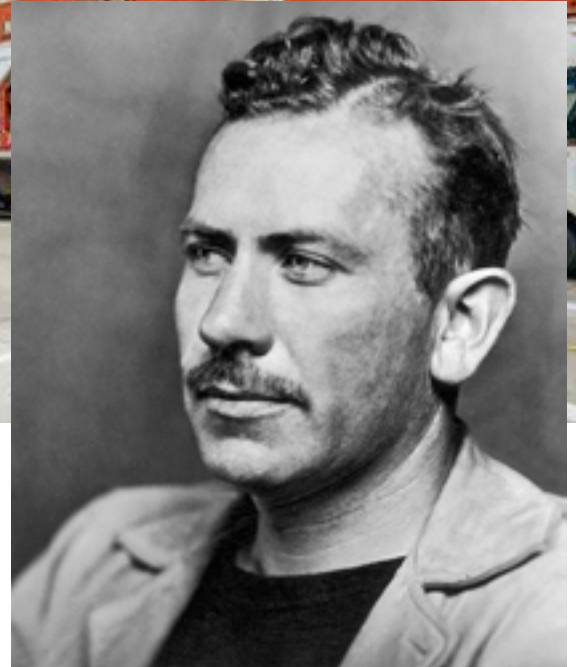




Above: Cannery Row (iStock/Getty)

Inset: John Steinbeck in 1939 (Wikimedia Foundation)

Below: Doc Rickett's Marine Biology Labs (iStock/Getty)



Steinbeck wrote his early books from a family cottage in neighbouring Pacific Grove. I ventured on the coastal trail around back of the Aquarium and visited the community, armed with a sketchbook and tourist map. On one side of the trail are rows of heritage-style houses and on the other, the turquoise waters of the Pacific. Near Pebble Beach golf course, I turned inland past Point Pinos Lighthouse to Lighthouse Avenue. Here I circled back to Monterey, with stops to view an open-air habitat for monarch butterflies, a pair of deer wandering about, and a cluster of shops and cafes.



The next day I traveled 40 miles inland by public bus to Steinbeck's birthplace of Salinas all while reading his most ambitious novel, *East of Eden*. In the late 1930's, Steinbeck interviewed dozens of migrant farm workers in the Salinas Valley for a series of newspapers articles. Out of these experiences emerged the Pulitzer Prize winning 1939 novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Then, during the early post-war decades, Steinbeck revisited his birthplace in Salinas to explore his family roots in *East of Eden*. The multi-generational story, published in 1952, opens with a description of the region's rolling hills, narrow river, and fertile soil, once a destination for displaced American families, especially many from Oklahoma. The novel drew on the biblical story of Cain and Abel and offered a powerful study of good and evil. Steinbeck family members reflected in secondary characters included his grandparents, his

father, a Salinas businessman, his mother (a public-school teacher), and his three sisters.

The Steinbeck Center in downtown Salinas offers exhibits highlighting a remarkable body of writing for which the author was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. A clip from the 1953 film *East of Eden*, starring James Dean, plays on a loop in one exhibit. Another shows a clip from the 1940 film *The Grapes of Wrath*, featuring Henry Fonda. A life-size replica of a pony recalls Steinbeck's story, *The Red Pony*, which was required reading in my Grade 8 English class in Toronto. Also on display is the vehicle Steinbeck drove across America in 1960, accompanied by his dog, Charley. The town of Salinas was on the itinerary and the author observes its many changes in *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*.

A few blocks from the Center is the Steinbeck House and Restaurant, an impressive Queen Anne style Victorian property purchased by Steinbeck's parents in 1908. Much later, the house was rescued



Steinbeck House (iStock/Getty)

from potential demolition by the Valley Guild, a group founded by eight civic-minded women in 1971. The house has been a popular luncheon venue for locals and tourists ever since. I was welcomed at the door by a friendly Guild member, seated at a table in the Steinbecks' former parlour, and then enjoyed a fresh green salad, clubhouse sandwich, and a 'Cup of Gold' vanilla ice cream dish (named for Steinbeck's first novel). All food on the menu is locally sourced and served by volunteers, with a minimum of paid staff.

Afterward, I visited the house's basement gift shop then returned to Main Street and poked inside more shops, including a fine book store and an artist gallery co-operative. Salinas is still a working-class town, a shopkeeper informed me, in contrast to upscale seaside locales.

At noon the next day, I boarded the Amtrak train at the station not far from Main Street to travel south through the valley and rolling hills that had provided so much artistic inspiration for Steinbeck. With glimpses of the Pacific Ocean out my window, my train rolled into downtown Santa Barbara at 6 PM. My pre-booked hotel was only a few blocks from the station—and the beach. With the Steinbeck books now packed away, I embarked on another sort of sunny travel episode before the flight home. •

JANET NICOL lives in Vancouver. She is a retired high school history teacher, freelance writer, and author of *On the Curve: The Life and Art of Sybil Andrews* (Caitlin Press, 2019).



Depression-era migrant worker family in Salinas (Wikimedia Foundation)

THE ANCESTRAL VILLAGE



A RETURN TO MY FATHER'S CHINA

BY SUSAN CHENG

Diaolou Tower (photo by iStockphoto/Getty)

For the past few years, several of my elderly aunts and uncles have been reminding me that I should return to our ancestral home in China. After much contemplation, I decided to visit my great grandfather's rural farming village on the outskirts of Enping, in Guangdong, China, which he left in 1913 at the age of 34. Everyone in this rural village had the same surname which is "Jung." Before I embarked on this trip, I asked my father many questions including how to get to the village, who was still living there and what to expect, since he had been back in 2013 along with my mother, sister and brother. After flying to China, I boarded a high-speed train from Guangzhou and arrived in Enping just over an hour later. Hiring a driver was the only option to get to the rural farming village, as it is about forty minutes by car from Enping.

I am the first generation born in Canada; I have reaped the benefits of living a comfortable life in Canada because of my great-grandfather. My great-grandfather left his rural farming village and travelled to Victoria, B.C. on a ship called the Chicago Maru. He left his young family behind to join his brother-in-law who was already there seeking better opportunities. His family was well off but not wealthy; however they did have the means to pay for his journey overseas. A five-hundred-dollar head tax was collected when the ship docked in Victoria on June 14, 1913. Shortly after, two of his other brothers also followed.

I am the first generation born in Canada; I have reaped the benefits of living a comfortable life in Canada because of my great-grandfather...

He first found a job at a sawmill in Duncan but eventually settled in Vancouver's Chinatown where most of the Chinese were. Money earned was sent home to support the family and any extra money was used to purchase land.

At the end of WWII, my great-grandfather returned to China briefly to see his family including my father and then in 1949 came back to Vancouver with my Uncle Stan who is a few years older than my father. My great-grandfather became a Canadian citizen on October 21, 1953.

Prior to my own father's arrival in Canada, my great-grandfather had saved enough money to purchase a 3-storey house in the Strathcona area with yet another of his brothers. My great-grandfather lived there until he died from kidney stone complications in 1955, two years before I was born. He is buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act was lifted in 1947, arrangements were made for my fifth great uncle and my father to come to Vancouver. Several of my father's cousins also left at the same time. They boarded a ship from Hong Kong, then stopped in Tokyo, Hawaii, San Francisco and finally in August of 1950, after a month on board, they docked in Vancouver.

My father enrolled in English language classes at Lord Strathcona Elementary School. This was the same school that I later attended from K to 7 as our family lived in the house that my great-grandfather



The \$500 head tax receipt. Photo by Susan Cheng



*Above: The ancestral altar with the five cups.
Below: The new family village sign and pond.
Photos by Susan Cheng.*



had bought. The house was to remain in the family until it was finally sold in 1970.

In 2013, at the age of 80, my father returned to his rural village for the first time in 60 years. When he arrived the village was completely deserted except for his cousin and his family. Everyone else in the village had emigrated to Vancouver in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

When my father sold his hot towel business in 2004, he sent money back to build a four bedroom home for his cousin and family since they had been living in and taking care of my great grandfather's home. My father was disappointed to find that after nine years, the house was still only partially finished. The two storey house was being built behind my great-grandfather's original house. My father insisted a flushing sit-down toilet be installed in the house which created some tension. Eventually the builder agreed to the request. Such toilets are not



Photo by Susan Cheng

common in the rural villages and even many new malls in Enping today still have squatting toilets as it is believed to be more hygienic.

Today, my aunt lives in the house with her grandson and his family. The family does not work outside the village but instead remain there to take care of my aunt. In addition, they have two young children who take a bus to a school outside the village. My aunt's eldest daughter (her grandson's parents) and son-in-law run a business in Venezuela and send money home to support them. When I was visiting, my aunt's grandson FaceTimed an aunt in Vancouver and she was impressed that I had found my way to the rural village where she once lived. My Chinese cousins have access to modern communication technology but still use scooters to get around their neighborhood.

Some of the farmland that my great grandfather once owned has been sold off over the years. In terms of improvements, a concrete pond was built in 2013 about 20 metres in front of my great-grandfather's house. This project was funded by the overseas relatives including my father. This was a purely sentimental project. There was no logic to this addition of this new feature for the village residents since it is only my elderly aunt and her family who live there.

Fast forward to November 2024. It was my turn to visit and I was looking forward to seeing my great

grandfather's home and meeting my father's cousin and family for the first time.

My great-grandfather's original house is over 200 years old and is the oldest on the block. My father lived in this house when he was growing up in China. The family was fairly well-to-do so they built four houses in a row for the various family members. The house is constructed of bricks but then plastered over with concrete. Upon entry, the house was very dark inside; it has been empty for nearly 10 years. In the dark I could see that a ceiling fan had been installed years ago. The house has concrete floors, the walls are built of bricks and there is a tiled ceiling. Surprisingly, there was no damp smell.

In the old house there is an ancestral altar. The altar has names of the family members that have passed away, separated into lists of male and female. On either side of the altar there is a poetic message of some sort. I noticed five cups left on the ledge for serving wine to the ancestors. My aunt and her grandson's family still use the altar to make traditional offerings to the ancestors on special occasions and to burn incense.

On the main floor, there is a small cooking area, a brick stove, two bedrooms and a small sitting area. In the dark and state of disrepair, I chose to not go up to the second floor, but my father said there are two additional bedrooms behind either side of the ancestral altar.

Near the family village, the Kaiping Diaolous and Villages were named a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2007. Diaolous are fortified multi-storey watchtowers in rural villages generally made of reinforced concrete. These clusters of towers are located mainly in Kaiping. They were built to protect the rural villages from bandits and floods. Most were built from the late 19th century to the early 20th century with a fusion of Chinese and Western architectural styles, often by returning Chinese citizens who had made their fortunes overseas. There are also residential towers built by rich families as fortified residences to showcase their wealth.

We drove approximately an hour to Chikan, also historically significant for its 19th and early 20th

century houses which feature a mix of European and Chinese architecture. Chikan has some of the best-preserved streets of continuous buildings from this era. Many shops' original signage in traditional Chinese style have traces of paint that are still visible. The local government has plans to convert the entire town into a major tourist attraction. Nearly 4,000 households were uprooted to preserve this area. Plans are being made to restore some of the buildings and convert them into hotels, restaurants and shops.

Now you can enjoy a boat ride along the river or hop on the sightseeing train if you don't want to walk. There is a stage where they filmed movies; cameras were rolling when we visited the place. The movie studio was where notable TV shows and movies were filmed with titles like "Let the Bullets Fly," "The Grandmasters" and "The Legend of Drunken Master II." Special performances such as dancing shows and skits are held hourly throughout the grounds and there is a nightly fireworks show.

The next day we visited Li Garden which is a private garden of the late Mr. Xie Weili, an



Above: The luxurious Chikan. Photo by Susan Cheng

Below: Well-preserved streets in Chikan. (iStockPhoto/Getty)

“overseas Chinese” who lived in the United States. The construction began in 1926 and took about 10 years to finish all the buildings. There are six villas and one watchtower on the garden grounds. All the villas were built for members of his family. In 1999, the family gave a large sum of money to the Government of Kaiping City to repair and protect the garden. The garden was also expanded. In 2000,





Li Garden was opened to the public. We entered some of the villas which are open to the public and this is a great example of the grand diaolou residences built by rich families. Outside each villa there was a brief description of the extravagance and wealth that went into building the interior and exterior of the villa.

Finally, we also visited the Zili village. We spoke to a few elders gardening outside as we couldn't



Top left: A diaolou tower.

Top right: Extravagant interiors show the wealth of the age.

Above: Abandoned Zili village house. Photos by Susan Cheng

find a ticket office. Walking around the village we saw many abandoned and dilapidated homes. As is so often with these ancestral towns, the younger generation have left the village to go to the big cities.

Visiting my father's ancestral village has left an indelible mark in my memory. My father is now 92 and he will not be returning to the place of his childhood. Today it is different from when he grew up - there is the concrete pond in front of the house, a new sign with the village name, and while the road leading into the village is now paved, this place will soon become another abandoned village. I know that I will also not return in the near future, perhaps ever. With this in mind, it was very touching to meet my elderly aunt who is the only surviving relative of my father's generation still living in the village.

After our time in Enping and Kaiping, it was time to move on. We made our way back to Hong Kong via high-speed train to catch a flight to Tokyo the next day. I had now done what my aunts and uncles had suggested and seen our ancestral home. A fantastic and meaningful trip to cross off my bucket list. •

SUSAN CHENG retired from SD 41 (Burnaby) and loves to travel.

important dates

CPP and OAS

Payment Dates

- March 27, 2025
- April 28, 2025
- May 28, 2025
- June 26, 2025
- July 29, 2025
- August 27, 2025
- September 25, 2025
- October 29, 2025
- November 26, 2025
- December 22, 2025

Teachers' Pension

Payment Dates

- March 28, 2025
- April 29, 2025
- May 29, 2025
- June 27, 2025
- July 30, 2025
- August 28, 2025
- September 26, 2025
- October 30, 2025
- November 27, 2025
- December 23, 2025

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A stone marker with a scallop shell and a yellow arrow pointing right, set in a grassy field. The marker is a weathered, rectangular stone with a blue square at the top containing a yellow scallop shell. Below the shell is a large, hand-painted yellow arrow pointing to the right. The marker is surrounded by tall green grass. The background is a misty, green landscape.

My Camino

A 500 km Pilgrimage for Retirement

BY MARLENE LEGATES

Memories are meant to be forever, and some, such as my Camino de Santiago, actually are. It's as fresh in my mind now as when I walked it to celebrate my retirement over 15 years ago.

The Camino, or Way of St. James, developed as a web of pilgrimage routes in the early 10th century, spanning much of Europe. The most popular route today stretches 700 kilometres from the French/Spanish border in the Pyrenees across northern Spain to the city of Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia. It promised just the challenges I craved to celebrate the start of a new life stage.

The physical challenge was daunting. Since I knew Galicia from a previous trip, I decided to walk from Roncesvalles, near the French border, to Villafranca del Bierzo, "only" the first 500 kilometres! I had previously backpacked for ten days at the most. For nine months I trekked all over Vancouver, two hours to downtown, 1½ hours out to UBC, gradually increasing the weight of



Photo by Marlene Legates

my pack. Still, I packed light. I didn't imitate a friend who cut off the handle of his toothbrush, but at check-in my pack and contents weighed only 6.5 kilos. I would later add food and water.

As for the emotional challenge, I wanted to do it solo. For almost 50 years I had luxuriated in the comfort of being part of a couple. Now I needed to test my resourcefulness.

Sunday, May 17, Day 8

Threatening clouds and the occasional rain drop along with cold wind alternating with hot sun. On and off with rain gear. Thrilling to walk on an authentic Roman road. Beautiful rolling hills, fields with rape and grains. Lorca, the nearest village, was six kms, not four as the guidebook said, but I pulled into the first bar/cafe and had a prosciutto sandwich and tea. Met my first Canadian or should I say, Canadienne, from Quebec. On the road, met again Jane, the talkative Australian, Rolf, the creepy German with long white hair who seems to be following me around, the South African woman, and various others.

Lots of birds (they come in brown, white, black, red, and yellow and sometimes all colours in one) but still haven't seen the loud one that hangs out in the almond trees.

Flowers: wild roses, honeysuckle, daisies, geraniums, thrift, euphorbia, hellebores, cornflowers, red poppies, chives, thyme, thistles, and orchids. And the sound of the cuckoo from afar. In next town, Villatuerta, I stopped for a delicious chocolate-filled pastry. Place was filled with locals having their morning coffee. I was in luck--the church was open! Gothic with a Romanesque tower, very impressive. After I spent about 10 minutes inside, peering around in the dim light, the sacristan turned the light on and explained the Renaissance altar.



Photo by Marlene Legates

*When meeting up with someone,
the first question was always, “How are your feet?”*

PILGRIMS

Many do the Camino for spiritual reasons - an Argentinian woman I met had done it before an eye operation and was doing it again to give thanks for a successful outcome. Others wanted the adventure or treasured the spectacular landscape, especially in spring with its glorious wildflower meadows and mountains sometimes distant, and sometimes underfoot. I was surprised at the number of repeaters; many do a few weeks, sometimes over the same route, every year.

But I met no one who shared my deepest reason, my interest in the historical culture of the Camino. As a historian, I savour the analytic challenge of tackling complex issues but even more, I love the aesthetic aspect, old churches in particular. My “bible” was the almost 500-page, small-print *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* by David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, who pioneered in reviving the Camino in the 1970s. The cover copy included a celebration of the Camino route’s “art, architecture, geology, history, folklore, saints’ lives, flora and fauna.” I walked much more than 500 km to see the treasures they described.

While the harmony and simplicity of the Romanesque had made it my favourite architectural style, the Camino opened my eyes to the stunning glory of northern Spanish Baroque, with all its gold extravagance. Stepping inside many such a church made me gasp with awe. A great disappointment was that many churches were closed. They are managed by volunteers, who may be available or not. Once I waited four hours, in vain, to see a church whose keykeeper had gone to market. In Estrella, two of the four churches I wanted to see were “permanently” closed and a third was closed for that day only, and it was a Sunday!

That experience highlights the main difficulty I encountered: how to balance the desire to see everything, the need to be at an acceptable hostel at opening time to secure a bed, and the need to pace myself - not to mention accessibility to food. Most restaurants offered a pilgrim’s dinner of pasta or salad, main dish, dessert, and a bottle of wine or water per person for 10 Euros. But during the day you had to hope for bars that might or might not be open. Supermarkets generally opened at 8 AM, too



Photo by Marlene Legates

late for an early start. I learned to buy something for breakfast the night before, always carry chocolate and snacks, and hope for a lunchtime stop where I could get a sandwich.

Monday, May 18, Day 9

Finally got to Villamayor by 10:30 (11 km) and had a huge half sandwich (prosciutto of course). I had stopped in the small church but couldn't find the silver cross supposed to be there. Persistent, I asked in the hostel and was told where to look for it. Found it this time, hidden behind grillwork. Wonderful silver Romanesque cross with the crucifixion on one side with a graceful, melancholy Jesus and a lamb on the other. Highlight of the day, along with the views and colours - blue sky, green rippling fields of wheat punctuated with red poppies, white strands of clouds, red soil and path, daisies, thyme and the blues and purples of borage, salvia. I also saw bright blue butterflies with delicate tracery on their wings

WAYPOINTS

At the hostels or albergues, you got what you paid for, that is, not much. The first one after Roncesvalles had bunk beds so tightly packed that I found myself inches away from the guy in the next bed. Even though I had walked 30 km that day, I struggled on to find one a tad more spacious. Another had triple bunks, and I had the misfortune to find myself on the top. And the snoring! What a treat to find a hostel in Trinidad de Arte with a garden, thick mattresses, separate gendered showers and four-bed rooms.



Photo by Marlene Legates

Sunday, May 24, Day 15:

Today was mucho adventure. Left at 7:00 AM and a few seconds later it began raining, then hailing, then a real downpour. Lightning started, very close, and deafening thunder. Terrified. Stand next to a tree or away from one? Couldn't remember. Path turned into rivers of mud, heavy rain. No question of lying on the ground. More lightning, very close. Alone. Thought of Martin Luther. Should I make a vow to a saint to save me (as he did during a thunderstorm)? But then I'd have to be a nun the rest of my life. Not appealing. No shelter for the next 12 kms. After what seemed like hours, saw a dark figure up ahead. Death waiting? How many pilgrims are killed by lightning every year? The dark figure turned out to be part of the Polish couple who spoke only a few words of French but through gestures communicated that they, too, were terrified. Then, finally, descent, and a pastoral scene. San Juan de Ortega ahead with open bar and church, how lucky can I get?

I revelled in all the different people I met and walked with: Tinie, who had walked from her home in Amsterdam and who I've since visited; the two Jose Carmens (father and son) from Valencia; Wili and Magda from Germany; the unhappy Australian who had just found out that her family, including the eight-year old granddaughter she had helped raise, were moving to Saskatchewan. One day I stopped to admire storks' nests with a Brazilian, ate lunch with a Quebecker, continued afterwards with a pilgrim from Lisbon. That said, I did treasure the moments when I was alone on the Camino, with no human voices around. (I was lucky to have those moments, given that fewer than 150,000 pilgrims walked that year, compared to almost 400,000 nowadays).

Monday, June 1, Day 23

Very nice in the morning but then sweaty by 10:30. Camino parallels highway, stony path, everything hurts - feet, blister on heel, back. By noon, face a fork. Left the normal way, alongside highway. Right, the old Roman road, which guidebook praises. No brainer for me. Book warns that there are "fewer facilities." Meaning there's nothing, just stony path, and fields out to the horizon. Eat orange, watch other pilgrims come, study sign and map, turn left. Oh well. Cazadilla de los Hermanillas (the smallest places have the longest names) is only eight kms. No sweat. Ha! Eight km seem like 80. Hotter - over 30°C easily.

Love the heavy scent of thyme; at times a bit of breeze comes but I'm dragging. It's so long, so hot, and everything hurts. I belt out yoga mantras at the top of my voice, then count to 400 several times. I'm trekking through the desert at mid-day. Can't stop because it's too painful starting up again. Screw the birds. If a quetzal flew in front of me, I wouldn't care. Try to ration my peeks at the pedometer. Finally see a roof ahead. Then it disappears. Mirage? On and on. Finally hit the edge of the village, asphalt. Yay!

I saw so many people hobbling with bandaged knees and toes. Many, of course, fell by the wayside. I accompanied Rachel, a young Australian, to a health centre to act as translator. She was limping and was told to give it up. She was preparing herself to hear that, but still... When meeting up with someone, the first question was always, "How are your feet?"

I overcame the difficulty of staying in touch with family and friends by using a *locutorio*, the Spanish equivalent of an internet café.

My Camino ended a few days later not with a bang but a whimper as I dragged myself and my blistered feet into the B and B where I met Al and our rental car. I regretted not having brought a camera (no smart phones back then) nor a sleeping bag. I brought a sleep sack instead but was taken aback by the words of a hostel manager



Photos by Marlene Legates

*The smallest places
have the longest
names...*



who, when I requested a blanket, asked, "How often do you think we wash them?"

But my enthusiasm for the Camino was not dimmed and two years later I revisited the Navarre portion, this time with Al and a camera to photograph what I had missed before. •

MARLENE LEGATES taught History and Women's Studies at Capilano University until her retirement in 2008. Since then, she has balanced travel with teaching in the SFU Liberal Arts and +55 Program.

An aerial photograph of a group of people swimming in the ocean. The water is a deep, vibrant blue, and the swimmers are scattered across the frame, creating white splashes and ripples. The swimmers are wearing various colored swimwear, including red, blue, and black. The overall scene is dynamic and captures the movement of the swimmers in the water.

Swimming With The Elders

BY KAREN COOPER

SWIMMING WITH THE ELDERS

Photo by iStockPhoto/Getty

In August 2021, as a 67-year old, I left a 44-plus-year marriage, and with it a sizeable chunk of my old life. While my close friends remained, my very extroverted ex had been the source of much of my wider social world and this created a void. As I came to face the realities of going it alone I realized that I needed a positive distraction from what was only the beginning of a long and difficult process.

My sister has been open water swimming regularly for years, and I had done some fair-weather ocean swimming myself, including one memorable evening swim with a friend in the waters of Porlier Pass at the north end of Galiano Island, where the phosphorescence of phytoplankton lit up our bodies in the dark ocean.

So I was following in my sister's fin-steps when in January of 2022 one of my friends took me to join two people she knew who swam at Jericho Beach in Vancouver year-round. We began weekly, and then twice-weekly swims. Within about a year seven of us were regularly in the ocean together, some wearing wetsuits, some going "skins" with just their bathing suits, some only dipping, and others swimming. I'm in the skins-swim group, though with the addition of a thin "rash guard" shirt to protect from the sun.

This challenging ritual has been, if not quite a "lifesaver", a definite soul-saver.

A typical winter swim ritual runs like this: We undress on the beach and get into the water as quickly as possible. We wade to our waists, take two minutes to let the shock fade, and then get going. I expel a scream every time; it seems to help me, though the impact on my companions might be otherwise.

My coldest day so far has been 5.7°C; during the coldest part of winter, the water hovers in the bottom of the 6's most of the time. Air temperatures, too, vary from below freezing to around 5 or 6°, and there can be a breeze or wind. Water this cold actually *hurts* initially and convincing myself to put my face and then my whole head in is very difficult. I can almost hear parts of my body saying, "She's trying to kill us. Again!" Then I settle into my stroke. Though I



The author at a swim meet.

must still work hard to stay calm and breathe, I'll often lift my head after about two minutes, look around me at rain hitting the water, or at sun on the mountains, and say to my companions, "Isn't this amazing!"

We listen to our bodies, keep an eye on our watches, keep an eye on each other, and stay near each other. In winter we swim close to the beach. Nevertheless, I am, throughout, overcoming not just the water, but something in myself which twinges periodically to say, "This is too hard. Get out!" When we finally do get out, we rush into our clothes and say to each other, "We did it!" Every time. For a group of mostly 60- and 70-year-olds, it's extremely heartening to emerge glowing bright red from the cold, feeling, frankly, like a group of bad-asses.

Most important, by far, has been the community of women I swim with. Initially, I told them very little about my new life, though I also didn't feel like pretending to feel better than I did on some days. Their support mostly has taken the form of a word or a phrase. A day after I received my divorce papers, I heard, "When you divorce, you don't just lose what you had, you lose what you dreamed you would have." It was freezing cold out. It was 2C on land and 6.2C in the water, and neither before nor after our swim could we risk getting any colder via chit-chat. Yet I went home deeply better for having someone name in one sentence a feeling I couldn't name for myself. Others in the group have been

“My head was too high,
my feet too low.
My kick too fast,
my arms too slow...”

through the death of a family member, floods, and various other life problems. When one of us had knee surgery, we all pitched in. I spent the night, others came by almost every day, or shopped.

Each and every swim, the water, the challenge, and the fellowship alter me. Whatever state I've been in when I showed up—which these last few years has often included depression, anger, and anxiety at high levels—even if my teeth are shaking as I've dressed, I've gone home in a state of profound well-being which usually lasts the rest of the day.

Many people report other health benefits from cold water exposure, especially improvements in their immune systems, and there is some evidence for this effect and others, though adequate research is still lacking. Well-established is that cold water exposure can have profound effects on anxiety and bad mood, so much so that taking a cold-water shower or bath is being prescribed for people having panic attacks.

As we leave the beach, we often say, “I wouldn't have come on my own.” This is common sense, and a large body of research also shows that health and fitness routines are easier to attain when you are part of a group. The mutual support, and a sense of responsibility to others, act to pull us into a healthy behaviour we might otherwise find too hard to accomplish regularly.

Soon I decided to do some lessons. I've never had depth perception, and on land, I am really, truly, a klutz. I have never been on a sports team

and never done more serious athletic training. The coaching was excellent, introducing one new skill per week but running true to form, I felt rickety and un-coordinated. My head was too high, my feet too low. My kick too fast, my arms too slow (there's a limerick here somewhere). Slowly, over 21 lessons, with practices in between, my brain and body decided that talking to each other more might be a good idea. I began to convert the coaching into changes in the water much more quickly, and this has continued.

Meanwhile, some of my ocean group women kept urging me to join their swim team. I'm still a slow front crawl swimmer and was afraid I would hurt the team. All the rules and details about starts and finishes intimidated me, too. But in October 2024, I finally gave it a try.

Masters swimming is unlike any sports activity I've ever watched or heard about. While there are some very fast swimmers, the ethos is co-operative and supportive. Every skill level is included, and the overall goal is to “get in the water, swim, and have fun.” The other people in your heat could be in another age bracket, so you aren't necessarily competing against them anyway.

Scores are based on age-graded groups of five years; mine right now is 70-75. In my first meet, I had two firsts and two seconds, a total of 74 points for my team! Of course, it helped that I was swimming backstroke and breaststroke, where there

Karen gets a hug after an open water swim.

Photo credit: Dan Kearly





Photo supplied by author.



Photo credit: Dan Kearly

are fewer competitors; I was the only person in my age group in two of the events, and one of two in the others, but who cares! Winning points for my team by being old! Not the oldest, though; our meets have 80- and 90-year-olds, and Betty Brussel, a 100-year-old from White Rock who only began to swim competitively at 68.

The last person in almost every heat gets cheered in by nearly everyone. Hearing a very loud “GO!” each time my head comes up may not make my muscles burn less, but it certainly makes me happier. Betty, of course, gets cheered every time for the entire race, but then, she is also usually setting a world record.

As with my open-water group, there’s no expectation of becoming best buddies, just the camaraderie of pursuing the same activity together, and pulling together for team points.

During a “loneliness epidemic” in which around one third or more of all seniors report being lonely significant amounts of the time, and 5% report being lonely all the time, the value of a frequent, shared activity can’t be overstressed.

Swimming is an incredibly versatile sport. You can learn one stroke, or many. You can swim for pleasure or to compete. It’s not very expensive compared to many other sports and requires little equipment. It can be a solo sport but also offers the chance to become a part of informal groups or organized teams.

You can be a lifelong swimmer or start for the first time at any age. As a child in Northern Botswana, Nicola learned very basic swimming from her mother, and later breaststroke from the nuns at her school. She dabbled around in people’s pools but never had a serious formal lesson. Then at 55 she decided to “learn to swim properly” through lessons at Kits Pool. Now 72, she remains lithe and fit. She has continued to swim in the ocean at Kits Beach weekly over the winter, and in summer many times a week. Becoming competent in an area where she had felt weak has made her feel powerful and becoming confident in this “completely different element” has made her “free” to swim in the pool, and to enjoy the ocean as well. While she does other exercise, swimming provides her with a “full-body experience and challenge nothing else does”.

Anne, too, started swimming later in life. When she turned fifty, a friend gave her goggles, a swim cap, and a swim pass to Kits Pool. Initially, she could do a few strokes of freestyle but couldn’t do a full length of the pool. But she had started biking a few years earlier and wanted to do a triathlon before she turned 51, which, indeed, she did! A few years after that, she began cold-water swimming, first in a wet-suit, and then “skins”. She says she’s good at most things she’s tried, but when it comes to swimming, she’s “never worked so hard at something I’m bad at.” Now 62, she has a long



Photos supplied by author.

list of benefits, including fitness, social connection, meets, and travel, where she experiences new places in a different way through swimming. Asked what is important about her swim experience she takes a few moments and then answers precisely, as one might expect from an instructor in computer science. “Being part of such an inclusive sport, with older and disabled people included, and unlike many other sports, with people of all levels of ability swimming in the same meet. It’s all about the team and participation.”

Now 79, Alan Woolf has loved to swim his whole life. When he retired in 2014, he says he had two ambitions: “to master the art of freestyle swimming, and to master the art of oil painting.” Both, he says, are “still works in progress.” Preferring to make this a personal sport, he’s not a part of a team but he’s currently training on his own for a 400m free, a 100m breaststroke, and a 1500m open water competition in and near Tel Aviv this July.

Staying physically active can take many forms, but Iain Cumberland, a former swim coach and current physiotherapist in Vancouver, has a long list of the ways research shows that swimming is especially valuable as we age. Swimming is a whole-body sport, working the upper body, lower body, and core, even for beginners. And it involves whole-body nerve stimulation, which is helpful for fibromyalgia and chronic pain. Improvements in arthritis pain, balance and co-ordination, cardiovascular fitness, and the retention of lean muscle mass are all proven effects. It’s also low impact, which is good for older joints, and flexible, since there are many strokes, not just the four official ones, but also side stroke, elementary back stroke, and others which can help avoid irritation or injury.

There are cognitive benefits of any vigorous exercise, including the likely protection it helps to give against dementia, and as Iain notes, swimming has a “high ceiling”, “you are always going to learn something new. It’s great for life-long learning,” which I think makes it a good fit for BCRTA members, who already exhibit this tendency at a high level.

As Alan Woolf says, “I simply love the experience of streamlining through a different medium. It is exquisite.”

So come on in – the water’s freezing! •



A DEEP DIVE INTO ELDER SWIMMING

BETTY BRUSSEL AND LATE LIFE EXERCISE

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/99-year-old-swimmer-betty-brussel-1.7101711>

LIST OF BC MASTERS ASSOCIATION SWIM CLUBS

<https://www.msabc.ca/find-a-club>

WHY NOT SWIM: SOME GOOD ARTICLES AND VIDEOS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsKS7uA6Xik>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/10/08/1204411415/cold-plunge-health-benefits-how-to>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/premium/article/is-swimming-the-ultimate-workout>

RISKS OF COLD-WATER SWIMMING:

<https://www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/risks-cold-water/>

OPEN WATER SAFETY ADVICE:

<https://www.vovsa.bc.ca/safety-swim-advice/>

KAREN COOPER is a retired English post-secondary instructor, a member of BCRTA, and Assistant Editor of PostScript.

Photo supplied by author.



LIFEGUARD NOTES

Don't start swimming as a new activity, or up your intensity, without first talking to a doctor about your personal risks.

Risks: Drowning, especially in open water. Don't be afraid to use assistive devices. Stay in shallow water until you are a very strong swimmer, and even then, never swim alone. Know your open-water safety.

Joint and muscle strains: Build slowly, and consider some lessons at your local pool, since proper technique helps avoid injury, and helps to build and maintain more muscle. Good warm-up and stretch routines also help.

Vestibular issues: if you have or are prone to vertigo, you should avoid backstroke.

Cold water issues: Cold shock, cold incapacitation, and hypothermia are all risks. Give your body time to adjust either by entering slowly, or by entering up to your waist and waiting to adjust. Swim with experienced cold-water swimmers and set a maximum time you will be in the water. Get out then, no matter how you feel. Know the signs of hypothermia, and act quickly to get warm if they appear.

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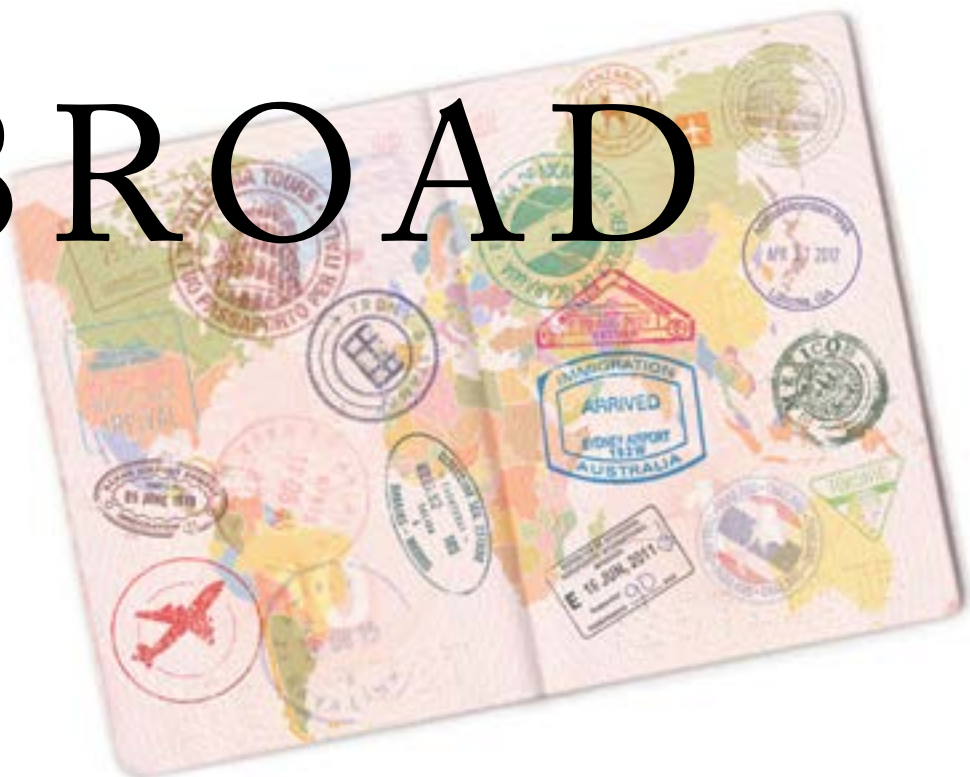
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TEACHING ABROAD



BY HELMUT LEMKE

One afternoon in 1988, my friend Fred, a teacher at Emily Carr College of Art and Design, called to say, “A teacher from a German art college is interested in a teacher exchange with Emily Carr but nobody from our staff wants to take her up on it. Would you like to teach for a year in Germany?”

I thought about it for a moment and then said, “Why not, I could give it a try.” He gave me the address for one Hildegard Banneyer, in Bielefeld. The same first name as my wife, I noted. (I will

call the German Hildegard HB in this article.) I wrote to tell her I was interested in an exchange if she would be prepared to teach art at my senior secondary school. She wrote back enthusiastically; she wanted to come to Canada, and she would like to do that work. We applied for visas and work permits. Here at my school in Canada, I had to ask the principal and the schoolboard for permission to leave for a year since they would have to continue to pay my salary. The principal had no objection; indeed, he thought the students might like a



Central gate of Old town Nicolai church, Bielefeld (iStockphoto)

change! The school board, however, concerned about her knowledge of English, were hesitant. I phoned HB to tell her that my schoolboard would call her to test her English. She told me later she practiced vocabulary and simple English sentence structure all night.

The visa and work permit were granted, our medical examinations were positive, and we had permission from our school boards. My wife wasn't working anymore, so we were free to go ahead with the exchange.

My summer holidays were over sooner than HB's in Germany, so she came before I had to leave. Her son Wenzel also came with her for the year as opportunity to improve his English. I had rearranged the second floor of my house for them: two bedrooms, bathroom, living room, and a utility room served as their own kitchen. There was one problem: our dog. HB said she was very afraid of dogs. But when Thorin, our black lab, looked so innocently at her, wagging his tail, she thought she could trust him and that she might be able to live with him. After one year, Thorin had won her heart

and taken away her fear of dogs.

I had also asked Gisela, our German-speaking teaching assistant, to care for HB while she was in Canada; sure enough, the two became good friends by the end of the year.

My wife and I had already packed two big suitcases with our clothing and utensils, purchased tickets to Bielefeld, and we were ready to go.

At the Bielefeld station we were enthusiastically greeted by old friends of ours who wanted to see us again. We exchanged news and hugs, and they left. I had noticed a young man standing in the background observing us. He now came forward and introduced himself, "I am Hubertus, Hildegard's husband, I will take you to our place". He had stayed to continue his work as a teacher in Bielefeld. He had set aside a living room and bedroom for us in his house. We shared a kitchen and bathroom with him. He was a polite and accommodating person and gave us the freedom to use the kitchen and bathroom whenever we needed them. We had agreed to exchange cars and had assessed 10 DM for 100 km use of the car. It worked out fine. In the end I even made some money, since I took the bike to get to school and "distances are much shorter" in Germany.

Hubertus, in his dual role as a teacher and my host, took me to my new school and introduced me to the principal, who was a somewhat reserved person. The principal discussed my assignments: sketching, drawing, and composition. Since I was over 60, my teaching load was reduced by 10%.



Rudolf Oetker Hall in Bielefeld. Photo by Wikimedia Commons.



Old town in Bielefeld (iStockPhoto/Getty)

At the introductory staff meeting, my fellow teachers were friendly, welcoming me as their new colleague. When I had any problems, they willingly helped me out. They invited me to their socials and their sing-alongs, where we sang German folksongs which I still remembered from childhood.

My wife, Hildegard, and I were originally from Germany, and I was back and teaching in German, but it did take some getting used to since I had spoken the language only casually for 35 years, unless teaching German in the classroom. My students were older, and Art was their main subject. They were more motivated than my students at home and often asked difficult questions about the subject at hand. Sometimes if I did not know a word in German, I would tell the class, “This is the way we say it in English,” and they would laugh and say, “We use the same word; only we pronounce it a little differently.” I enjoyed a good relationship with my students. Two even visited me later in Burnaby and I took them out for lunch on Burnaby Mountain with the beautiful view of the ocean and coastal mountains, which I had told them about.

At the beginning, I had to spend more time preparing my lessons, so I could not spend as much time with my Hildegard. So she was somewhat lonely until Hubertus invited us, along with several of his colleagues, to his birthday celebration. My wife now got to know several young women and, as was usual for her, soon became fast friends with

“We use the same word; only we pronounce it a little differently...”

them. They began to invite her for visits in their homes and to performances in town.

The chance to do excursions during my holidays and get acquainted with European culture was an additional reason why I had agreed to get involved in the teacher exchange. Once I was more comfortable with preparing my lessons, I found time to do more with Hildegard. We went to the theater, and concerts and lectures in the large Oetker Community Hall next door to us.

She was invited to join me as a chaperone on a class excursion to Florence where we explored the art galleries and saw Michelangelo’s famous sculpture of David and works by Raphael and Botticelli. After Florence we visited Venice for a few days, gliding along the Grand Canal in a gondola past the famous merchant estates, and strolling along the traffic-free streets. A few days later we walked across the large market plaza in the medieval gothic city of Siena. More European sightseeing followed as time allowed.

This was a very successful exchange, full of enjoyment. Before we headed home, Hildegard said, “I could easily live here again”. •

HELMUT LEMKE was Art Department head in Burnaby South Senior Secondary School. He has contributed a number of articles to PostScript.



SOUND LEARNING

THE LIFELONG BENEFITS OF MUSIC EDUCATION

BY LOUISE HERLE

S*nap. Click. Slam.* The massive storage compartments under two Greyhound buses were closed. The older students had loaded the largest items first—bass drums, tubas, lower brass, sound equipment, and music stands—then, cases of other brass, percussion, and woodwind instruments, music folders, sleeping bags, and backpacks. Most students were already aboard the buses, which were equipped with bathrooms but no seat belts. Teachers and chaperones sat in the first three rows while the loudest students shuffled towards the back. *Ready to roll*—another Regina Catholic Schools High School Concert Band Tour hit the road!

Music was part of the school day like any other subject. The Regina Catholic Schools Division was (and is) a public school system; no one paid for this music education, or to play in the band. Band

parent associations and teachers worked tirelessly to organize and conduct fundraisers for extras such as uniforms, but band and music programs were also integral to Regina Catholic School Division budgets.

So growing up, I assumed that every child had quality public school music programs like we did. Beginner Band in Grade 4 accentuated instruments that squeaked and honked, with a booming bass drum. Our intermediate Band in Grade 7 included small ensembles, concert band performances, and nerve-racking but rewarding adjudicated solos. Performances were recorded on state-of-the-art cassette tapes. I joined Marching Band in high school; a Senior Honour Band with 86 students from all four Catholic high schools in Regina, Saskatchewan, my home town. Our marching band



Left: Louise Herle's intermediate band. Right: Honor Band, 1975.

also featured flag carriers and a team of baton-twirling majorettes!

We played in festivals at Estevan (now a festival for 60 years), Yorkton, Weyburn, Qu'Appelle Valley (a 65-year-old festival), and Assiniboia (now running for 90 years), but the biggest was the Moose Jaw Band Festival (73 years). I will never forget our *mile-long* annual parades of *nothing but marching school bands*—no floats or other distractions—down Main Street in Moose Jaw. As youngsters it seemed such a long way to march and play; parents would even bring us water from the sidelines. But by high school we kept pace and tempo with ease.

On tour, our band performed school concerts, sometimes two a day, often joining forces with the town's own school band. It was inspiring and fun. While we were there the teachers could discuss with each other their music program pedagogy and share ideas and resources. As students, we admired one another, told stories, and ate sloppy joes with chips. Families billeted groups of two to four students, or we slept on school gym floors, girls on one side, boys on the other. 86 sleeping bags with keyed-up students until a teacher finally said: 'I don't want to hear another peep!' Sometimes, the girls would get to sleep in a school library with luxurious 'wall-to-wall' carpeting. News of our performances often made it into the local community papers which further helped promote music programs.

I loved the synchronicity and teamwork in competitive marching fancy drill. Our band was

divided into squads of five players, each with a specific series of marching moves: forward, reverse, mark time, and turns. We marched at half-time shows on football fields where our beloved CFL Saskatchewan Roughriders played. Band students had free seats, but we never sat in them; we ran around and ate cotton candy in the Rider Rookie Section while waiting to perform. Our performances consisted of straight-marching with the drum cadence, a stunning counter-march drill (at the 10-yard line every player turns right and reverse marches between the oncoming lines), break-outs into concentric circles, and more. One memorable year, nine school bands from other towns joined us. After the usual routines, the bands



"straight-marching with the drum cadence, a stunning counter-march drill..."



broke into ten blocks and each block marched into the formation of one letter; ten bands spelled: 'G O R I D E R S GO' across the field as we played the famous 'On Roughriders' theme song!

We travelled on classic Greyhound buses from Regina to play at CFL games in Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, and once in Vancouver. These trips never seemed long as we talked, laughed, and roamed about the bus. There were no electronic devices; we played cards and dice games and sang band parts. Of course, there were rules: smoke only in the back half of the bus (those 13 or younger needed their parent's permission note to allow them to smoke!) and **NO SMOKING IN UNIFORM.**

Our coveted uniform included a shako (tall cap with a visor), bib (black overall-style pants), marching band jacket (worn over bib), belt, and shoe spats (sharp white plastic shoe covers that highlighted our feet in sync). Intermediate Band players had a 'converter' bib that went over their Concert Band jacket to change to Marching Band.

Because of the momentum these music programs created, some teachers also offered extra-curricular High School jazz bands. They volunteered their evenings and weekends to ensure that students had opportunities to perform at local events and competitions. Directing rambunctious teenagers who thought that 'improvisation' meant playing random notes, teachers bravely faced adolescents accoutred with saxophones, trumpets, and trombones. The trumpet section vied for the loudest blasts in rehearsals. Sometimes, teachers spent less time conducting and more time explaining

that fortissimo was not an excuse to deafen the audience. Our teachers stayed late, enduring off-key solos, broken reeds, and drummers who forgot their sheet music. They sacrificed their sanity to turn cacophony into something resembling music. Somehow, against all odds—though with some hearing loss—they ordered our ragtag group into a jazz band that could really swing.

Thanks to our teachers' unwavering commitment, we thrived, earned accolades and a love of music. Their passion was contagious; it encouraged us to push beyond our limits, not just as musicians but as a team. All of these music programs provided long-lasting friendships and hilarious stories. They also instilled confidence, nurtured social skills and creativity, and taught me the importance of persistence, routine and self-discipline. It is no coincidence that so many of us in those programs later secured post-secondary degrees in math, sciences, economics, and the arts.

Fast-forward twenty years: I was hired as a music teacher in BC. I loved the energy of the students and valued the support from colleagues and parents. Some of my favourite performances were at seniors' care homes where we visited residents after choir concerts, connecting across the generations.

But I needed to work at three schools in order to secure full-time status. I taught and wrote report cards for over 350 students each year. I conducted five choirs and three bands and taught general music for K-7. That meant three different staff meetings, innumerable parent-teacher meetings, eight festival entries and countless Christmas





concerts. My assigned ‘classrooms’ were school gyms, libraries, and, when lucky, portables. One school year, my meager budget meant using fishing line to replace ukulele strings, a durable but not melodious remedy. Lunch ‘breaks’ were usually spent driving to the next school.

Programs can devolve from quality to quantity; 30 minutes of music per week does not constitute quality music programming. After teaching music in BC public schools for 30 years, I see the sad reality that most schools do not have quality music programs as part of the K-12 curriculum. Full-time music teachers with dedicated classrooms and adequate resources are rare.

I argue that music education is vital to BC Education’s Core Competencies: ‘...sets of intellectual, personal, and social, and emotional proficiencies that all students need in order to engage in deep, lifelong learning.’ (<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies>). Music and

the arts are not just entertainment; they yield long- and short-term positive results for students and they are a powerful force for connection, education, and celebration.

As a retired teacher, music is still part of my daily life. When I play piano, violin, and French horn with other musicians, it boosts my relationships, and provides a brain workout and, especially, joy. These enduring musical friendships are an opportunity for me to participate in the wider community as I perform in numerous concerts each year.

Let us insist that school board trustees and administrators defend budgets for full-time classroom music teachers in every school. Children’s optimal development depends on it. Music is sound learning and our students deserve nothing less. •

LOUISE HERLE, M.Ed. is a member of the Sunshine Coast Retired Teachers’ Association and serves on BCRTA’s Communications and Membership Committees.

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*Hosted by Garry Litke, a retired BC teacher who spends winters in Mexico and summers in the Okanagan. He recently wrote an article for PostScript magazine entitled "More Than Mariachi", in which he describes the pleasures and challenges of life and home ownership in Mexico. Garry and his wife Kendra love the family-oriented people, the flavorful food, the rich history and the dynamic culture of Mexico.

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MURDER MOST FUN

BY SYLVIA OLSON

We seem to be living in precarious times with all our worries about climate change, the cost of living, rents, mortgages, and shrinkflation. We don't like it when our bag is only half full of ketchup chips. In the news are ever-present reminders of on-going wars. Justice and fairness seem to be eroding only to be replaced by racism and discrimination. A recent study found that many people are in a state of mental exhaustion and even depression due to our global situation. The Germans call it *Weltschmerz*—world weariness. It's hard to get away from all this doom and gloom. No wonder so many people turn to TV shows for an escape.

A look at the TV schedule reveals murder mystery shows every day of the week. Each season you can watch more and more American CSI crime shows, British murder shows and even Canadian-made murder mysteries. Our thirst for murder mysteries is starting to border on addiction. Why are these shows so popular? It might be because they are satisfying to the psyche. The murderer always gets caught and pays for the crime, which is not always true in our Canadian justice system. These shows have satisfying endings, something we long for when chaos reigns. Or maybe it just helps to dispel our desire to murder someone after we've paid a hundred dollars for two bags of groceries.

Interest in murder mysteries is not new; we can thank Jack the Ripper and early newspapers for that. However, the internet and streaming apps plus the twenty-four-hour news cycle have made violent crime, including murders, more publicized. The proliferation of True Crime Podcasts seems to have played into this obsession. Studies have shown that exposure to too much murder and mayhem can create fear and paranoia and can also desensitize us to the pain and suffering of others. And this greater exposure to crimes such as murder can lead us to believe that these crimes are far more prevalent than they are.

Whatever the case, I enjoy watching two British crime dramas, *Vera* and *Death in Paradise*.

Vera exposes us to the gritty underbelly of Northumberland. The crime locations are usually old, abandoned factories, rusty machine shops, or auto wrecking yards. Events often take place at night in the rain and mud, leading Vera to bring her wellies in the boot of her vehicle to every crime scene. Finding a dead body in a gritty machine factory surrounded by mud and rain really brings the horror to the forefront. Aesthetically pleasing this show is not; the homes are grey tenement buildings with zero curb appeal. The scenery, too, is dull and drab, much like the weather and Vera's wrinkled raincoat. No wonder she's in a bad mood.

While Vera has her lighter moments, like when she says, "I'm sorry Pet, but I'm going to have to arrest you," her wardrobe says "I am depressed." There's very little socializing in Vera, as she chooses to eat a bag lunch of kippers in her car. Irritable, she often raises the tension level as she barks orders out to her staff, or yells at Kenny, a hapless DC.

Death in Paradise, with D.I. Neville Parker on some Caribbean Island, is less edgy. Finding a body on sandy shores surrounded by lush greenery can distract from the deadly horror of murder. Most of the police interviews are held outside in the Caribbean sunshine giving the audience a break from all the heaviness of the subject matter. These scenes are often shot on a lovely patio next to a sparkling swimming pool. Between those shots there are glimpses of the picturesque harbour, the colorful market, or the sea-side bar where the police hang out to have a beer. Even Catherine



Vera exposes us to the gritty underbelly of Northumberland... No wonder she's in a bad mood...

the bar owner adds to the ambiance by wearing colorful Caribbean fabrics. The location of *Death in Paradise* provides color and light to an otherwise dark subject, and all the socializing creates a lighter mood.

Neville himself is more laid back and he never yells at his co-workers. There is also more comedy in *Death in Paradise*. His Britishness often puts him at odds culturally which adds humour as he stands out at the latest spicy jerk feast.

Like Vera, I can be in a bad mood, even without a wrinkled raincoat. When watching the show, I may release my global-sized frustrations because I can see that things for me are not as bad as those in Vera's cases. While watching Neville solve murders my blood pressure goes down because the scenery lulls me into a vacation mood.

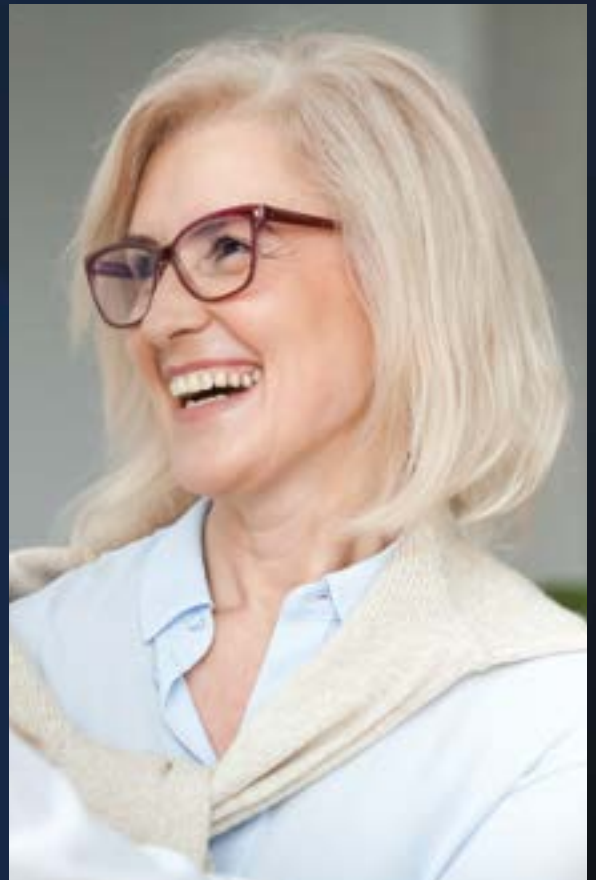
Vera is winding down to its end, and I will miss her. Perhaps someone else will take her place, but in the meantime those of us in BC will likely continue to watch murder mysteries to help us cope as we check our earthquake kits, stock up on canned salmon, and wait for The Big One. •

SYLVIA OLSON is a BCRTA member who retired from the Kamloops School District..

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A STORY TO TELL

DOING OUR PART TO PRESERVE AND SHARE HISTORY

BY LARRY KUEHN

V.S.B. Employees Picnic Bowen Island July 3/31

Vancouver School Board picnic at Bowen Island, 1931. Courtesy of VSB Archives.

Have you ever wanted to check up on some event that happened at a school you taught at for many years? Or maybe look at pictures of colleagues you taught with?

Or perhaps you have thought about what your children or grandchildren are going to do after you are gone with all those things you've kept that mean something to you but maybe not to them? Perhaps your teaching certificate or class photos of the students you taught over a career in the classroom? Or your first letter of appointment showing how much you earned when you started teaching?

Someone in the future with an interest in the social history of education might find them very useful in making sense of how education has developed and changed in the province. You have been a part of history, and your story can help preserve and inform an understanding of how education in BC evolved into what we have now.

Since joining the Heritage Committee of the BCRTA, I have become more conscious of the efforts of some retired teachers to preserve that history and make it publicly accessible. Examples from recent issues of PostScript include the

LARRY KUEHN was President of the BC Teachers' Federation from 1981 to 1984. He is a member of the BCRTA Heritage Committee.

Cowichan project to put plaques on all the historic schools in the district; the Teachers' Investment and Housing Coop files being placed in the UBC Special Collections and archives; and Rosemary Swinton successfully getting the records of the Exchange Teachers' Association into the SFU archives.

Other projects include: a collection of textbooks from the BC curriculum dating back to the 1800s collected and catalogued by Nanaimo-Ladysmith retired teachers (<https://www.nanaimoladysmithretiredteachers.ca/about/skipsey-collection>); digitizing historical high school annuals from the secondary school in Trail; a book on the history of schools in Campbell River; an oral history project in Prince George; plaques at locations of BCTF historical events, such as the first strike in Victoria in 1919, the 1921 strike in New Westminster, and the Terrace strike in 1971, placed by the BC Labour Heritage Centre; the Lower Island RTA research on the history of Victoria teachers (see link below); and the project in the Elk Valley in the Kootenays for students to learn the history of vanished schools in the district. (Expect future stories of these existing projects.)

So where would you go to find the artifacts or make your own contribution that reflects your role in the story of BC education? A group of retired Vancouver teachers went searching and found the place for them. Ros Kellett, president of the Vancouver Retired Teachers' Association organized a visit of a half dozen retirees to the Vancouver School Board District Archives. It is hidden away down in the bowels of the VSB district office on West Broadway and is protected in a large cage requiring fobs and keys to get through three locked doors.

The Archive looks like just a lot of shelves covered with numerous cardboard bankers' boxes, along with some artifacts of the history of education such as a Commodore computer and some paintings of old schools. But when history buffs dig into the boxes, they find remnants of the activities of teachers, students, and institutions—shadows of lives that contributed to building our society.



Nanaimo-Ladysmith Retired Teachers' Association created their impressive Skipsey collection to preserve educational history and artifacts.

Who is building this archive and looking after it? Currently four volunteers, most of whom are retired VSB school staff who come in once a week on Tuesday morning to work on making sense of the materials. A major task is creating an inventory of what is there. They organize boxes of school and district materials and create lists of what is in each box, then computerize the lists so the inventory is searchable.

Many filing cabinets hold photographs. These days we fill our phones with photos, most of which will disappear even if we archive them online somewhere. But for several decades before we all carried phones with high quality cameras, the VSB hired photographers to take pictures in schools. As professionals, they took careful note of when, where, and what school activity they were shooting. This record of photos is maintained in the Accession Books, which are also in the Archives; matching photos to the records is one of the main tasks in the current inventory process.

Fortunately, you don't have to descend into the lower reaches of the VSB office to get a better idea of the kinds of materials in the archives. Sitting at home, you can take a look at the VSB Archives and Heritage Website, primarily developed by one of the volunteers, Derek Grant. It can be found at <https://blogs.vsb.bc.ca/heritage/>.

The website is very rich. It has sections on photographs and on featured stories, as well as short essays on education development in Vancouver by decade, starting in the 1870s, which include some

context on the social and historical developments of the time.

The photographs section is organized into stories such as, “Kitsilano High School: Sixty Years in Photographs (1923-1982) and “Carleton Elementary School—Photos from 1914 -1959.”

A section on “Notable Alumni” lets you know that Ryan Reynolds graduated from Kitsilano, Artist Ken Lum from Gladstone, and from Britannia, Vancouver’s first Black teacher, Barbara Howard, and former premier Dave Barrett.

The section on “Features” is a mixed bag of interesting materials. The test that students had to pass in 1911 to proceed to the final years of secondary school. A glance at the entrance test will show why there were very few secondary graduates in 1911, and one of the questions lets us see some of the changing social conventions:

“(b.) Miss Sarah Althea Sharon writes a letter to a stranger and signs it “S. A. Sharon.” The reply is addressed to “S. A. Sharon, Esq.” What precaution

did Miss Sharon omit to take? How should she have signed this or any other business letter or document?”

One sees from the exam how much memorization was a central part of the pedagogy of day:

“3. (a.) Name the author of each of the following selections:— The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay; Hart-Leap Well; The Panthers; The Pied Piper of Hamelin; The Days that are No More; The Soldier’s Grave; Ax-Grinding; The Bird; The Red River Voyageur; To Melancholy.

(b.) Quote the first stanza of “Hart-Leap Well,” or of “The Days that are No More,” or of “The Red River Voyageur.”

A history of Oakridge School from 1951 to 1976 demonstrates the tremendous social change that has taken place in the inclusion of all students

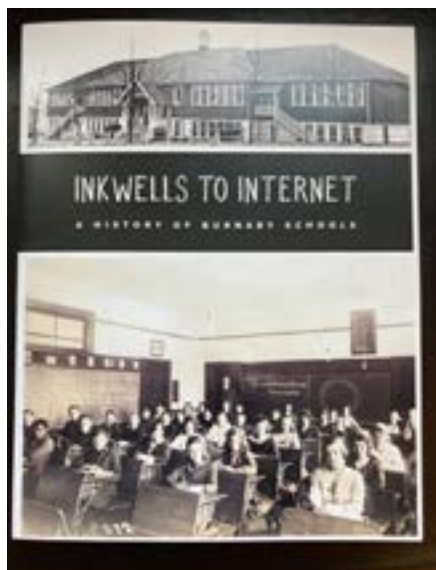


The Fall 2019 issue of PostScript highlighted the Cariboo-Chilcotin Retired Teachers Association’s support of the Little Red Schoolhouse project.



The history of Langley teacher Connie Jervis is compelling.

in our classrooms. The school opened as a separate school after a parent exerted pressure to get her child, who was excluded from any school, into a classroom. Her original appeal was initially rejected by the board. Section 158 of the Public Schools Act was used in support of the School Board's position. As "mainstreaming" and then "inclusion" policies opened regular classrooms to students with diverse abilities, Oakridge became a language assessment centre for the placement of immigrant students.



*The history of Burnaby's Schools was the focus of the book **Inkwells to Internet**.*

HOW CAN WE ENSURE OUR STORIES ARE PRESERVED AND ACCESSIBLE?

Creating a district archive may be too big a project, but there are many other less ambitious projects that could be carried out such as doing some research about a specific event or person of significance to you or the community, then writing an article. The Heritage Committee is asking the BCRTA to develop a section of its website with stories and information about projects that members have created, such as the article about the courageous Connie Jervis (see link below).

Start by finding out what already exists. Does your district already have an archive that you can access and contribute to. What about a local museum—does it maintain an archive? Does your BCRTA local branch have a Heritage committee? If so, find out what they are working on and join them. If no committee yet exists, put an invitation in a Branch newsletter to see if there are other people who might be interested in developing a local project.

Resources are available. The RTA Heritage Committee has funds for grants for projects that have the support of the local RTA branch. The grant criteria and application are available on the BCRTA website (see link below) Some of the projects carried out by RTA branches have had financial support from the local teachers' association or even school districts.

Don't let the history of the contribution of public schools just get thrown out with the trash; capture what is important for the future. As Mark Twain is credited with saying about the relationship between history and contemporary developments, "history may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes." •

Grant criteria and application are available on the BCRTA website (search "BCRTA Heritage Grants"):

<https://bcrt.ca/2023-heritage-grants-available-for-bcrt-branches/>

BCTF Plaques (search "BC labour heritage plaques"):

<https://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/projects/plaques-around-the-province/>

Connie Jervis (search "BCRTA Connie Jervis"):

<https://bcrt.ca/connie-jervis/>

Past issues of PostScript can be found here (search "BCRTA Publications"):

<https://bcrt.ca/publications/>

DID YOU KNOW?

FASCINATING HEALTH FACTS

BY PAT THIESEN

BCRTA WELL-BEING COMMITTEE

THE SCOOP ABOUT POTASSIUM



Potassium is the unsung hero of the mineral world. It doesn't get the attention it deserves, despite being needed for healthy cell function and fluid balance, nerve and muscle function, good bone health, helping the body maintain a healthy pH balance, and countless other critical functions. Women should aim for around 2,600 mg of potassium daily, and men for around 3,400 mg.

Fortunately, getting enough potassium in your diet isn't too challenging. Some great food sources for potassium include bananas, dried apricots, lentils and kidney beans, acorn squash, prunes and raisins, orange juice, milk and yogurt, spinach, chicken breasts, and salmon. Try popping apricots and prunes in your morning porridge, grilling salmon and baking spuds for dinner, or sneaking a handful of raisins when you're peckish. There's no shortage of options to choose from.

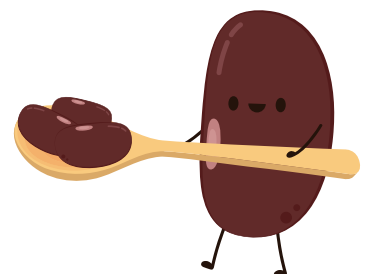
FIND OUT MORE ABOUT POTASSIUM

Mayo Clinic: "Low Potassium" (search on "Mayo Clinic Low Potassium", then click on "Definition" and "Causes" on left):

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/low-potassium/basics/definition/sym-20050632>

Harvard's Nutrition Source: "Potassium" (search on Harvard Nutrition Potassium):

<https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/potassium/>



THE POWER OF TAPIOCA - YES, REALLY!

Tapioca pudding brings back memories of an old-fashioned dessert. We now also see it in “bubble tea”. But tapioca is so much more than a semi-exotic addition to your meal; it can be quite good for you and packs a nutritional punch that can boost your health.

Tapioca is a purified starch extracted from the cassava root. It is native to the northern region of Brazil, but can now be found all over South America, and around the world. It has been a staple food in South America for thousands of years and has become quite popular in Asia and Africa as well. Its benefits include:



1. Increased energy levels
2. Better digestion
3. Improved blood iron levels
4. Stronger bones
5. Healthy weight gain

But there are some sticky things about this pudding: Anything labelled “tapioca” is completely safe, but raw cassava contains cyanide, which is poisonous. Tapioca also has a high glycemic index, so people with metabolic disorders, including diabetes, need to take this into account.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318411>

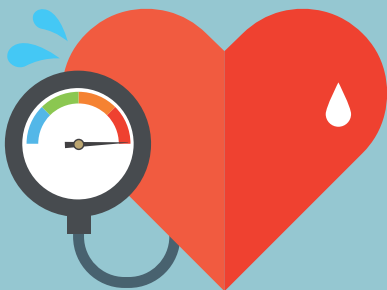
TO ARMS! TWO ARMS! OK, JUST ONE ARM (A B.P. ABC)

High blood pressure (hypertension) and low blood pressure (hypotension) may signal underlying health issues, and can also lead to heart disease, stroke, organ issues, dementia and other conditions. *The optimum way to measure blood pressure is with your arm at your side and supported so the cuff is at heart height.*

Other common arm positions for blood pressure readings may result in inaccurately high readings and overdiagnosis of high blood pressure. Systolic blood pressure readings for participants who supported their arms on their laps were overestimated by about 4 mmHg, while readings for those positioning their arms unsupported by their sides overestimated systolic blood pressure by almost 7 mmHg.

Researchers were surprised by the magnitude of the difference. They hope to alert health care providers and patients to the importance of position and support in blood pressure measurement.

Search “Arm Position and Blood Pressure Readings”



NOT ONLY CROSSWORDS AND EXERCISE

THE ROLE OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN ENHANCING THE HEALTH OF OLDER ADULTS

BY SHLOMIT ROTENBERG

It has been widely recognized that maintaining an active lifestyle is crucial for older adults' health and quality of life. While physical exercise and cognitive stimulation are often highlighted for their health benefits, the role of leisure activities in supporting the health of older adults is often underappreciated. This piece explores how leisure activities can contribute to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of older adults, and support healthy aging.

PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS

It is easy to understand why physically demanding leisure activities, such as fitness classes, walking groups, or sports, significantly improve physical health. Indeed, physical exercise of moderate to vigorous intensity reduces the risk of dementia, and improves muscle strength, balance, and cardiovascular health. However, leisure activities often involve a physical component even if they are not categorized as exercise. For example, gardening, photography or bird watching involve walking, bending, squatting, and climbing, making them physically engaging activities. Pottery and sculpting involve kneading and shaping clay, which requires hand strength and endurance, providing a physical element to the creative activity. Activities such as yoga and tai chi incorporate breathing and meditation elements that can improve cardiovascular health, while also help reducing stress.

BETTER EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Leisure activities enhance mood and emotional well-being through various mechanisms. First, leisure activities often serve as a distraction from daily stressors, providing a break from routine and

a sense of escape. Engaging in enjoyable activities can lead to a relaxation response, decreasing stress hormone levels and promoting a sense of calmness and contentment, which can be therapeutic and rejuvenating.

Second, engaging in leisure activities that offer cognitive and/or physical challenges can enhance mood by fostering feelings of competence and accomplishment. For example, successfully mastering a complex new quilting pattern or building a garden planter for the first time can be fulfilling and instill a sense of achievement. Third, leisure activities involving interacting with others provide social support and a sense of belonging, which can combat feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Participating in group activities like clubs or social gatherings helps maintain social networks, providing emotional support and contributing to well-being. Group activities, specifically those that provide opportunities for informal social interactions, like chatting over a cup of tea, enrich the lives of the participants and foster an emotional bond. Moreover, activities that involve contribution to others, such as volunteering, mentoring, or supporting a friend, improve mental well-being by providing a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Acts of giving and kindness can activate positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and love.

Giving to others is also perceived as a moral or spiritual act that aligns with one's personal values and beliefs and can provide a deep sense of satisfaction and integrity. Thus, leisure activities that offer a positive escape, a "just right challenge", and/or positive interactions with others, can boost mood and support emotional well-being.

COGNITIVE HEALTH BENEFITS

Engaging in cognitively stimulating leisure activities may help maintain cognitive health in aging by reducing age-related cognitive decline. This does not include only crossword puzzles, chess or bridge. The cognitive stimulation provided by activities such as music, art, and new learning are highly significant for maintaining brain health. Brain health is achieved through the process of neuroplasticity, whereby cognitively stimulating leisure activities result in new or improved neural connections. Engagement in complex leisure activities that require problem-solving, strategic thinking, or learning new skills keeps the brain active and resilient against cognitive decline. Furthermore, it is possible that leisure activities enhance cognitive health indirectly, through their positive impact on physical health and mood, which are proven to improve cognitive functioning.

CHALLENGES TO TAKING UP NEW ACTIVITIES

While the benefits of leisure activities for older adults are clear, several challenges may make it difficult to take up new activities.

1. Physical limitations such as reduced mobility or chronic health conditions can make participation difficult or undesirable.
2. Motivation: Some people may lack motivation to try new activities, especially if they have been inactive or isolated for a long time. Post pandemic, some people find it difficult to re-establish active routines.
3. Emotional barriers: Trying new activities can be intimidating, especially if it involves meeting new people or stepping out of one's comfort zone. Some may also experience fear of injury or a lack of confidence in their ability to do a certain activity.
4. Access to activities: Logistical issues like transportation difficulties, lack of accessible facilities, or absence of age-appropriate activities can prevent engagement. Cost can be another barrier, especially for activities that require membership fees or equipment.
5. Lack of social support: Some older adults may

lack social support or encouragement to try new activities, which can make it harder to take the first step.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND GETTING ENGAGED

Despite these challenges, there are several strategies to overcome barriers and get more engaged in leisure activities:

1. Adapt activities to your abilities: If you have physical limitations, look for activities that can be easily modified to suit your needs. Many organizations offer adaptive programs for older adults.
2. Explore different options: Explore opportunities for engagement by seeking out community centers, senior centers, or local clubs that offer activities for older adults. Look for activities that fit your schedule and interests. Don't be afraid to try a variety of activities to find what you enjoy.
3. Set realistic goals: Start with small, achievable goals to build confidence and momentum. For example, aim to attend one new activity per week.
4. Seek social support: Enlist the support of friends, family members, or others to help you try new activities and stay motivated. You may be more motivated to take part in a group activity.
5. Focus on enjoyment: Choose activities that you find enjoyable and fulfilling. The more you enjoy an activity, the more likely you are to stick with it.

By addressing these factors and taking proactive steps to get engaged, older adults can reap the numerous benefits of social leisure activities and enhance their overall quality of life.

SHLOMIT ROTENBERG is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto. This article was submitted to PostScript by the BCRTA Well-being Committee. It first appeared in the Summer 2024 issue of **Senior Living Magazine**. Reprinted with permission.

books OF NOTE

SANTA SMOKE LETTERS

by Sandy Prentice

Building family traditions is usually something that happens when specific actions are passed from one generation to the next. However, beautiful family traditions can also evolve from an averted disaster. This is one such story: a frenzied working mother forgot to mail her precious children's Christmas letters to Santa Claus at the post office. The letters were discovered by her four-year-old son on Christmas Eve and disaster struck. He knew that Santa wouldn't be coming to their house because Santa had no way of knowing the content of her son's letter. There was no way this frenzied mother could allow her forgetfulness to ruin her young children's precious Christmas. So she dug down and figured out the best way to get Christmas messages to Santa. The result was the most magical Christmas ever.

Published by Tellwell Talent – available online





MY DADDY'S VOICE by Pauline Johansen

My Daddy's Voice explores issues of diversity through the perspective of a young boy, whose namelessness makes him universal. Using simple language and an open-hearted tone, the child ultimately expresses his love for his father and his voice. For him—and for most children—love is what matters most, and it bridges all differences. The book's beautiful illustrations by Dianne Elizabeth Nelson perfectly complement the story, inviting conversations about the many ways dads can be different and still deeply loved. More broadly, the book serves as a springboard for discussions about diversity in all its forms. Above all, it is a book to be read aloud for the sheer joy of language.

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PostScript

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VOLUNTEER

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For more information and to apply, visit us at www.theliteracycircle.ca

crossword

Let it Slip

By Lynn Hembree

Email: crossword@bcrrta.ca

ACROSS

1. Brief stage of sleep
4. Talkative
9. Exhale
13. Declare
15. Dig, so to speak
16. Queue
17. "Bye now" in Florence
18. Type of rug
19. Speck
20. Rocketman/Imagine blend? (3 wds)
23. Club fees
24. "That's ____, hmm ..."
25. Ability
28. Furry fruit
30. "60 Minutes" network
33. ____ Blyton, children's adventure writer
34. Insertion symbol
35. Hurry, to Shakespeare
36. With part of 37-across, Cleopatra
37. Eras Tour artist (2 wds)
40. Child of your unc (var.)
41. Bread dough that has ____ can be refrigerated
42. Perched, as a butterfly
43. Vancouver exhibited her artwork in 2021/22
44. ____ Club Theatre Company
45. Holy city?
47. ____ Master's Voice
48. ____ out (fall asleep)
49. Breaking Bad/Butch Cassidy blend? (3 wds)
57. Pole or Czech, perhaps
58. Some saxes
59. Ambience
60. Nudge
61. Cousin of a raccoon
62. Popular poses?
63. Clairvoyant
64. ____ alcohol
65. Persona ____ grata

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13			14		15					16			
17					18					19			
20				21						22			
			23					24					
25	26	27					28	29			30	31	32
33						34					35		
36				37	38					39			
40				41						42			
43				44					45	46			
			47					48					
49	50	51				52	53				54	55	56
57						58					59		
60						61					62		
63						64						65	

DOWN

1. Dash
2. "... there is no ____ angel but Love": Shakespeare
3. Alternative to a fence
4. Nozzle connected to a Bunsen burner (2 wds)
5. "Bye now" in Cancun
6. "Poppycock!"
7. Breakfast flakes
8. More cowardly
9. Sightless
10. MGM's mascot
11. Aware of
12. Withdraw gradually
14. Covered with trees
21. Blue ____, a German white?
22. Cleans up, in a way
25. Bell or Rogers, for short
26. Electrolysis particle
27. Rapper/singer of "About Damn Time"
28. Leafy cabbages
29. Smooth wrinkles?
30. Skinny country
31. Forked, in Botany
32. "All ____ go?" (2 wds)
34. Not a pimple
37. Coach
38. Flight zone
39. Pedestrian path
45. One of two often removed in childhood
46. "____ moment, please"
47. Type of craft
48. Polish currency
49. Venomous snakes
50. ____ vera
51. Autumn tool
52. "Thanks ____!" (2 wds)
53. Home of Bryce Canyon
54. Atomic particle
55. 2012 Best Picture with Alan Arkin
56. Flat bread

Sudoku

8	4		9	3				
		7	5	6			2	
	5							3
		5		9	4	3		6
6	9			1			8	7
3		1	6	7		9		
2							5	
	6			5	9	2		
				4	3		6	8

1					8		7	
		7	6	3	2			
			7			3		
	1	6	2					
	7	3		9		8	6	
					7	5	1	
		1			5			
			3	7	6	1		
	5		9					8

TO SOLVE SUDOKU PUZZLES:

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Congratulations to last issue's puzzle winners. Your cheques are in the mail!

Crossword:

Leona Skovgaard, Quathiaski Cove
Arlene Churchill, Surrey
Barbara Zang, Fraser Lake

Sudoku:

Rosalie Potter, Sunshine Coast
Victoria Uberall, Vancouver
Rita Spearman, Chilliwack

SUMMER 2024 CROSSWORD SOLUTION

1	C	2	O	3	C	4	A		5	P	6	I	7	L	8	E	9	D		10	Y	11	E	12	T	13	I
14	U	P	O	N					15	T	W	I	C	E						16	A	M	E	N			
17	B	A	C	K		18	G	A	M	M	O	N								19	M	I	S	T			
20	A	L	O	H	A					21	A	T	O		22	A	S	T	T	O							
						23	G		24	L	25	A		26	A	M	P										
						27	B	28	R	A	I	N	E	X	E	R		30	C	31	I	32	S	33	E		
34	S	35	L	O	E				36	F	O	X				37	I	L	L	E	R						
38	L	O	U	D					39	T	A	C	I	T			42	A	L	L	O						
43	A	T	R	I	A				44					45	E	T	H		46	N	B	A	S				
47	M	I	N	D	C		48	H	49	A	L	L	E	N	50	G	E										
									51	M	A	R			52	L	E	I									
53	L	54	I	55	S	56	T	E	R	57	I	A			58	S	59	A	60	G	61	A	62	S			
63	I	D	E	A					64	A	S	C	E	T	I	C	I	S	M								
67	F	L	A	B					68	S	T	E	E	R		69	T	R	I	O							
70	E	E	L	S					71	S	O	R	R	Y		72	S	L	A	G							

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Obituaries

Location listed is the area given as "last taught"



Ashwell, William H.	Victoria	Gilbert, Donna	Quesnel
Augustinson, Helen	Powell River	Heinrichs, John	Coquitlam
Bansgrove, Eric A.	Nisga'a	Ip, Maggie M K	Richmond
Berndl, Margaret Lois	Courtenay	Jenkins, Linda Gail	Coast Mountain
Boynton, P. Layne	Vancouver	Johnson, Darrel Bert	Gold Trail
Brett, Barbara	South Peace River	Johnston, Joyce E	Prince George
Burden, George William	Delta	Keis, Dennis T.	Mission
Chitty, Donald	West Vancouver	Kelly, Barbara Allison	Prince George
Cobham, Aubrey Eugene	Greater Victoria	Korven, Garry Melvin	Alberni
Collins, Edward Arthur	Burnaby	Lactin, Audrey Beth	Coquitlam
Corbett, Dolores Anne	Nelson	McDonald, Isobel	Coquitlam
Covey, E. Jack	Chilliwack	Mclaughlin, R. Anne	Victoria
Dhillon, Brajinder	Delta	McGuinness, Robert M.	Vancouver
Dodds, Celia Mary	Vancouver	McCormack, Norma	Coquitlam
Drossos, John	Keremeos	McMullen, Kathleen	Courtenay
Drummond, Glenna	Victoria	Melul, Anne Ruth	Vancouver
Filan, Patricia Lee	Vancouver	Messer, Joan Marlene	Vancouver

Moffatt, Thomas	Surrey	Simpson, Harold G.	Burnaby
Moorby, Maureen Dawn	Sunshine Coast	Smeeth , Barry H.	Mission
Morrison, Hilary Ann	North Vancouver	Strilesky, James Michael	Richmond
Oliver, Giovanna Rosie	Maple Ridge	Stringer, Judith A	Shuswap
Payne, Lorne David	Abbotsford	Stubbs, Geoffrey D.	Alberni
Pedersen, Roy A.	Richmond	Trunkfield, Geoffrey M.	Vancouver
Pettit, Robert G. W.	Vernon	Van Kessel, Joe L. A.	Prince George
Posnikoff, Mike	Vancouver	Vogt, Barbara	Prince George
Robinson, Stanley C.	Burnaby	Vogt, Henry	Prince George
Rooney, Pat	Coquitlam	Wade, Lionel	Vancouver
Roulette, Julius	Vancouver	Warn, Ronald	Burnaby
Rudolph, Shirley Lorraine	Vancouver	Whitehead, Sonja Jean Ann	Surrey
Sandoe, Julia Ellen	Coquitlam	Woolcombe, Barbara Mae	Surrey
Saprunoff, Jack R J	Courtenay		
Schmid, Richard Frank	Abbotsford		
Scott, Betty D.	Vancouver		
Skipsey, J. Les	Nanaimo-Ladysmith		

Photo File



DENNY WAAG is member of the Cowichan Valley Retired Teachers Association. He lives in Duncan.

Camas in the Cowichan Valley

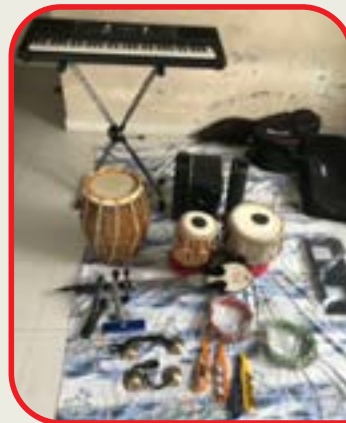


Fawn lilies and shooting stars
in the Cowichan Valley



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The R.R. Smith Memorial Foundation Fund dispenses funds to Canadian-registered charitable groups operating in BC and in developing countries. One of the recent recipients was the Families for Children group. They purchased instruments for their children in care, to learn to play. The faces on these children tell the story of how much they appreciate the funding!



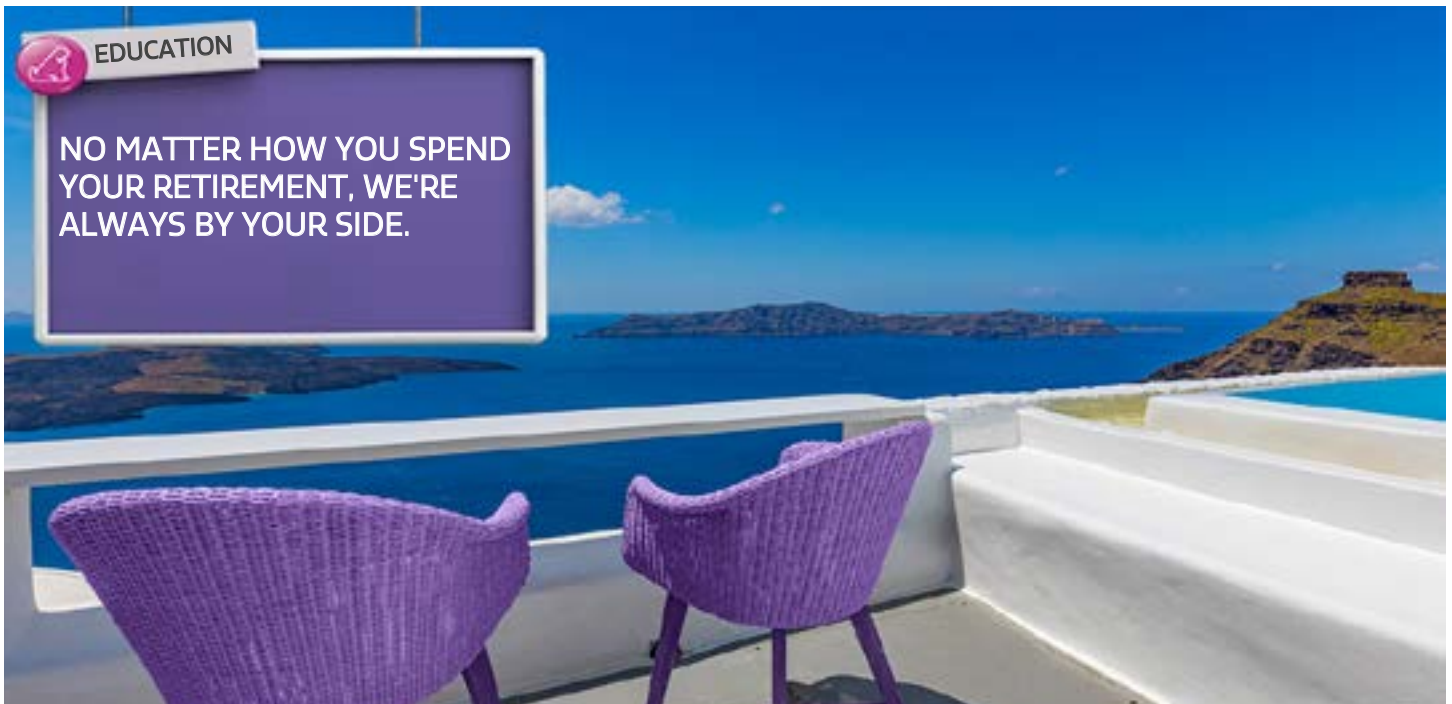
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