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Tikeness

magazine

once upon a time

Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the sə́lilwətaʔt təməxʷ, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt and S'ólh Téméxw nations.

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About Low Entropy: Founded in 2015, the Low Entropy Foundation is home to free programs and events that focus on personal and community growth through empowerment, authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connections.

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foreword

It's the start of something. A yarn to be spun. We're probably not sure what is coming, but we follow that breadcrumb trail, or leave one behind us, as we forge ahead, lured in by the tantalizing intrigue of potential. What mysteries are there to uncover, characters to meet? What do the trees look like? The houses? Are they made of candy?

Of course, our creatives at *Likeness* have a challenge: life is often not segmented into clean, fast-paced, fairy-tale narratives. Things overlap, and there's a lot of vamping. Maybe we don't learn any lessons along the way. Sometimes there's only a beginning, with no specific end, or vice versa.

We are all, however, in some way, stuck in the present, examining the past to gather clues about the future. And in doing so we excavate pieces of memories that look like part of a whole, coherent sequence, full of plot twists and heartbreak and trolls under bridges asking riddles (or, you know, whatever)—we fuse them together and we think . . . that was probably important.

It was.

Once upon a time, something happened. And you were there to see it.



Editor, Low Entropy

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Untitled

Shayan Afkari

Once upon a time, a little girl loved to play in the snow. She would make snowmen, snow angels and snowballs, and have fun with her friends. One day, she found a magic snowflake that sparkled like a diamond. She picked it up and wished to see the northern lights. To her surprise, the snowflake flew out of her hand and led her to a sled with a friendly reindeer. She hopped on the sled and followed the snowflake, hoping to see the most beautiful sight in the world.



ROZALIND MACARANAS Rozalind Macaranas is an English and ESL tutor from Surrey, BC. She is a recent graduate from SFU, where she completed an honours thesis about spatiality, children's poetry, and cognitive poetics. Her non-academic writing transports these interests into the creative sphere—her personal narratives and poetry centre on memory, childhood and family. She is currently working on a memoir about her mother's immigration from the Philippines to Canada. Rozalind is passionate about the power of education and literature.

Snail Shells

Rozalind Macaranas



Photo by Joa Costa

T i k e n e s s

“it’s human nature to hold on to something”

I think we grow up relatively. As in, I only know I’m an adult because I have friends with full-time jobs; because I work with children (therefore I must not be one); because one sister’s moved out; because one sister is a mother; because the doors to their old bedrooms don’t feel right open (it’s disrespectful), but they don’t feel right closed, either (it implies they’re in there); because I buy toys for my nephew; because my mother’s white hair resists the hair dye; because my dad looks to me to carry the rice bag from the car when we grocery shop.

I go outside. I go to the gym. I make friends all by myself. I eat all the food groups. I can eat in front of people. I wonder when my dog will die. I file taxes.

I think about meaning and what that means.

One day the top of the tree in my front lawn fell over after a particularly harsh winter, the snow weighing the branches down until only the trunk stood upright. It looked confused at first, its head tilted to the side, and finally it grew so perplexed it became decapitated.

My cousins and I used to call it the snail tree because in the summers snails would sit and munch on the leaves, trailing slow snail goop behind them. The bravest of us could pick them up, learning to be gentle on the way, because we held them and their homes between index and thumb. The shy snails retracted, the outspoken ones lifted their antenna-eyes up to us—which we’d promptly poke with our fingers, making them do a little dance.

One summer we got an old shoe box and plotted to make these snails our pets. We extracted them carefully from the tree, plucking them like berries, and

set them inside. Still unacquainted with the internet, we assumed what snails liked based on experience and television. A few strands of grass, rocks and the leaves they seemed so fond of appeared sufficient.

By sundown the makeshift terrarium lost its allure and the snails each settled into their shells. We said goodnight to Snaily and Snailbert and whatever other names with which we knighted them, and went to sleep on the blankets we set on the ground of the living room, excited to meet our friends the next morning.

Predictably to an adult, and devastatingly to a child, the paradise we built was empty when we woke up. The box was wet with snail slime and morning dew, the grass withered and limp. Remnants of leaves and snail poop littered what we strove to be their home.

It was two decades later that the tree we named for our little friends collapsed. Its head lay beside the trunk for weeks, and after the slush subsided in the spring, my father hired a neighbour to chop it down to a stump. Long, spindly sprouts shoot up from the former snail tree in different directions, with small, pale leaves that look like their mother.

Perhaps it’s human nature to hold on to something we find wonderful—to capture an image of the sun setting, to record a video of a concert,

to hold snails hostage.

To write in search of what we once knew. To look at the rungs of adulthood we’ve climbed so effortlessly in hindsight and see the ladder grow taller each day. To grow, accidentally, into the home we make for ourselves, the shells on our backs burdening and protecting us all the same.

T i k e n e s s

Vancouver

Amy Tobin

Vancouver
Seeing pride flags in storefront and building windows,
Tim's or Starbucks is the biggest question of the city,
Needles on the street make my heart stop,
I hope you are okay,
I feel helpless, so I turn away,
The guilt of that disconnection shames me for a moment
Until I see something ahead of me that distracts my thought spiral,
Families walking with "no pride in genocide" posters on their way to a protest
Smiling thinking of the different lives people live here, the different homes, races, cultures and jobs
I walk on the bike path and a bike flies past me, not with anger simply no expression changed
I smile as I see another volunteer from the writers festival with their red lanyard
A sense of community from a single smile with a single glance of eye contact with a single sign that we are connected,
through words,
through volunteering,
through being strangers in this city.

Fall is falling in reds and yellows
In this city,
In this chaos,
In this place,
I'm starting to call a home.

AMY
TOBIN

Wanderer. I'm an Australian from Wurundjeri country, currently travelling solo, walking on unceded lands of the First Nations people, in Turtle Island, Canada with a background in communications, writing and marketing for nonprofits, including animal welfare, conservation, Indigenous brands and environmental management. I share my travels as I aim to walk lightly, reduce my carbon footprint and connect to sacred land. I'm passionate about mindfulness, vegetarianism, Land Back, social justice, volunteering, conservation and giving back to community and the land on my travels.

What is personal development at age 60?

Brie Kalenith

What does personal development mean to me? At 55 years old, I was laid off as an entrepreneur and business instructor, as there was not enough interest in the program. I was living in a small community in Saskatchewan, and there were limited options for further employment. I felt sort of lost, not knowing what to do with my life. In the past I have struggled with depression, and I knew that I needed to have a purpose or the darkness would creep back in.

I knew that I was in a position of great privilege and did not have financial concerns because my husband had a good job. I needed to do something for others. I searched the community directory for possible volunteer opportunities. I settled on getting involved in literacy. I couldn't imagine a world where I couldn't read.

I was matched with a young Syrian fellow, Hani, who had moved to Canada with his family only four months before. I met with him weekly, and even though he was taking English lessons during the day,

that one-on-one time

seemed to really help. He was so grateful for my help that he walked several blocks in the snow to deliver some special treats made by his wife, Taghrid. I felt so moved by their gratitude that I wanted to do more.

I became very close to the family and helped both him and his wife to get their driver's licenses. I fell in love with their children. The more I offered of myself,

the more that they would do for me. They made me meals all the time. Hani came and shoveled our walk, mowed the grass and raked. He was so determined to help me in any way that he watched a YouTube video to figure out how to fix my leaky sink.

I ended up helping him run his own handyman business. He had lots of work for a while, until COVID hit. He painted my house inside and out, drove me to the doctor (several times) in Saskatoon, helped me clean the house when I got bed bugs and helped my daughters move (more than once).

Hani was the son I never had,

and Taghrid was my sweet third daughter. Their kids introduced me as their grandma. Yes, I did a lot for them, but they did so much for me. I had a purpose again. But then the business was not doing so well so I needed something else. Hani got a full-time job.

I took an anti-racism course with Selam Debs. I learned a little bit about the true nature of racism in Canada. It is insidious. Yes, we Canadians have a reputation for being polite, agreeable and open-minded. But the real Canadian history is much darker than we are led to believe. I thought that Canada was a safe place to live. It is for me . . . but I am a privileged white woman who has seen very little of the hardship that so many others face (Debs, 2021).

I assumed that the Black people that escaped slavery and came to Canada were finally free and were welcomed into the community. What actually happened was many became slaves or indentured ser-

vants when they came here. They had very few rights, weren't allowed to own land and were thought of as "less than" (McCullough & McRae, 2018). This was the first time I learned about slavery in Canada. I am sure I am not alone, especially in my generation.

I further learned the extent of the mistreatment of Indigenous people in Canada. There were over 55 million Indigenous people on Turtle Island (North America) before colonization; that number was reduced to less than 6 million today (Woodward, 2019).

“**Long before the arrival of the Europeans, Indigenous peoples lived as distinct societies. Each had their own territorial boundaries[,] teachings on how to live in harmony with the land they inhabited, language, customs and belief systems, educational system, governance, and common identity (Manitowabi, 2018).**”

Not only did the White colonizers steal the lands of Indigenous people, they imprisoned their children, cut off their livelihoods and purposely infected them with smallpox (Sterrit, 2023). Some argue that this type of oppression is on par with what Hitler did to the Jewish people, but so many of us (White Canadians) don't understand the long-term generational trauma that has been inflicted upon the Indigenous community (Debs, 2021).

“A little-known story among Canadians is Canada's role in helping set the cornerstone of South Africa's notorious system of apartheid. In the 1940s, when South Africa's National Party Government was crafting that abominable racist scheme, Canada hosted a delegation of South Africans interested in how it – Canada – had contrived its own segregationist reserve system to deal with its 'Indian problem'” (Kenny, 2019). Apparently this was taught in South African schools (told to me by someone who went to school in South Africa). How many Canadian children know of this dubious distinction?

The ongoing issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women (Sterrit, 2023), and police violence against Indigenous peoples (Morin, 2021) show that race issues in Canada are a long way from being solved. **Who is to blame?**

As Nikki Sanchez said, “This history is not your fault, but it is absolutely your responsibility” (Sanchez, 2019). White people need to educate themselves

on what oppression means and learn about the lived experiences of the oppressed. It is not up to non-Whites to teach you why asking “Where are you from?” treats people like they are “other.” Unless you are Indigenous, you have an immigration story (Debs, 2021).

It is my responsibility to speak up when I hear a racist remark; yet I haven't always done so. If I don't, am I any better than the speaker? Can I call myself an ally?

The anti-racism course opened my 58-year-old White person eyes to the tip of the iceberg. I was motivated to volunteer in this area. I knew I had so much more to learn, and I have made a commitment to lifelong learning in order to obtain an understanding of what it is like to be Black, Indigenous, Asian, Muslim or part of any other racialized group in Canada. I made a point to read books written by Black, Indigenous or People of Colour (BIPOC) authors, both fiction and non-fiction. I watched videos and movies highlighting the lived experiences of the oppressed. It further expanded my worldview.

I also learned that the term BIPOC does not sit well with everyone (Heath, 2021). In fact, non-White people are the Global Majority, a more accepted term (Lim, 2020). I continued my learning working with the non-profit organization **Canada Confesses**. I assisted with gathering over 1200 resources in 30 different categories, including anti-racism, Indigenous communities, homelessness, immigrants, addictions, environmental justice, 2SLGBTQ+ issues and allyship (Canada Confesses, 2023).

We created an A-Z activism guide with over 60 terms relating to activism with definitions, examples and resources demonstrating what the term means. Some key terms were cultural appropriation, intersectionality, Islamophobia, systemic racism and White centering. I read countless articles and watched videos to gain an understanding of the terms. This is an excellent starting point for anyone who wants to get involved in activism. To me, personal development starts here.

“While many people (of all racial backgrounds) are quite well-intentioned when they assert the familiar ‘I don't see color; let's be race-neutral[,] refrain[:] the simple truth is that[,] for many Black and Brown people, those words are like nails on a chalkboard—flashing red lights that evoke a visceral feeling of angst, disappointment and frustration” (Brownlee, 2022).

If you have ever said this, I invite you to re-frame your thinking.

Many common systems were designed to stack the deck in favour of White people. Systemic racism exists in education, healthcare, justice, housing, employment and even the basic human right of having clean water (UBC, 2021).

What is personal development? It is my hope that at least one White person, after reading this article, **will take it upon themselves** to learn more about real Canadian history and work towards dismantling systems of privilege.

The basic premise of Alcoholics Anonymous is one alcoholic helping another (AA, 2023). Incredibly simple, but so very powerful. By helping someone else, you are better off. It gives you a sense of purpose. If you don't believe me, ask my grandchildren (Hani and Taghrid's children). They almost knocked me over in the driveway when they ran out to hug me when I visited after moving to another province. I am by the far the greatest beneficiary of that relationship. That's the value of personal development.

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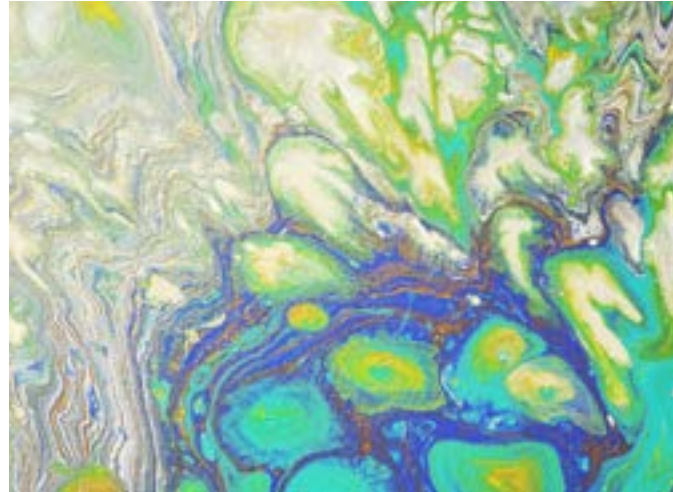
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Brie Kalenith Brie Kalenith is a retired college instructor in business, entrepreneurship, communications and marketing. She graduated from the University of Saskatchewan's college of commerce in 1985. She enjoys family, crafts, volunteering, learning, advocacy and creating social media content.

Control is an Illu- sion

Trying to do good while staying well
Ness Gale



Pur- pose

Amy Tobin

Once upon a time,
There was a woman,
Who knew herself from an early age,
But it took travelling across seas
To be that person she always knew she was.
She would sit with the trees,
Ask mother for healing and answers.
She would be guided in her day
By the birds' song,
The sun's rays,
And the ocean's waves.
She would think of animals as one
With humans,
And know there was more to life
Than material possessions and superficial conversations.
She had a mild childhood,
But carried her traumas like a weight in her backpack
From place to place.
Her purpose was a double mission,
In this world,
To connect deeper to herself,
And help others do the same,
Through the lens of the divine,
The ultimate, the healer, the transformative,
Mother Earth.

Lynlee
Tabia

In elementary school, I stumbled into the fascinating realm of writing, which kindled a passion that has lasted a lifetime. Writing down my ideas has always brought me happiness and contentment, from my first compositions to my college essays. I continue to delve into the depths of narrative and use language to create rich, emotional and imaginative environments.

Once upon a time

Lynlee Tabia

Once upon a time, in a quaint little town nestled between rolling hills and lush meadows, lived a young person named Alex. Their days were filled with the simple joys of life, but there was one source of boundless happiness that stood out among the rest—a magnificent Labrador named Sultan.

Sultan was no ordinary dog; he was a majestic creature with a sleek golden coat that shimmered in the sunlight. His eyes, as deep and warm as the sun setting over the horizon, held a loyalty that knew no bounds. From the very first moment Alex laid eyes on Sultan at the local animal shelter, a connection was forged that transcended the ordinary. Sultan's playful antics and gentle demeanor stole Alex's heart, and the decision to bring him home was an easy one.

As the days turned into weeks, Sultan became an integral part of Alex's life. Their bond strengthened with each passing moment, and the love they shared was a beacon of warmth in their cozy home. Sultan, with his sturdy build and strong physique, proved to be a loyal companion and a pillar of support in times of trouble.

Every morning, Alex and Sultan embarked on adventures that led them through the enchanting landscapes surrounding their home. The duo explored the woods, crossed babbling brooks and basked in the beauty of nature. Sultan's boundless energy mirrored Alex's zest for life, creating an unbreakable bond between them.

Despite his imposing stature, Sultan had a heart that melted at the mere sight of his owner. His tail wagged enthusiastically and his expressive eyes lit up with joy whenever Alex approached. Whether it was a simple game of fetch in the backyard or a quiet evening spent curled up on the couch, Sultan's presence brought

comfort and joy to Alex's life.

One stormy night, as rain pounded against the windows and thunder roared in the distance, Alex found solace in the warmth of Sultan's company. The air crackled with tension, and the flickering candles cast dancing shadows across the walls. In that moment, Sultan rose from his cozy spot and positioned himself protectively by Alex's side.



Photo by
Kasia Derenda

As the storm raged on, Sultan's steadfast presence became a source of strength. His reassuring presence and the rhythmic beat of his tail against the floor created a calming cadence that drowned out the chaos outside. In the darkness, Sultan's loyalty

shone like a beacon, dispelling fear and replacing it with a sense of security.

Days turned into months, and Sultan's devotion remained unwavering. His strong physique and alert nature made him a formidable guardian, ready to defend Alex in times of trouble. Whether it was a suspicious sound in the dead of night or a stranger approaching, Sultan stood vigilant, ready to protect his beloved owner.

One sunny afternoon, as Alex and Sultan strolled through the town's lively market square, a commotion erupted. A stray dog, frightened and disoriented, had wandered into the midst of the bustling crowd. Sensing the distress, Sultan's protective instincts kicked in. With a low growl and a determined stance, he approached the scared stray, offering reassurance in the only language dogs understand.

In that moment, the crowd fell silent as they witnessed Sultan's gentle, yet powerful demeanor.

With a wag of his tail and a nuzzle, Sultan managed to calm the stray dog, earning the admiration of everyone present. It was a testament to Sultan's strength, not just in physical prowess but also in his compassionate heart.

As the years passed, Sultan and Alex continued to share a life filled with love, laughter and countless memories. Sultan, the once-exuberant puppy, had grown into a wise and dignified elder, but his spirit remained as vibrant as ever. Together, they faced life's challenges, celebrated its victories and forged a bond that transcended the ordinary.

And so, in the heart of that quaint little town, the tale of Alex and Sultan became a legend—

a testament to the unbreakable bond between a person and their loyal companion.

For in the story of Sultan, the Labrador with a heart as golden as his coat, the magic of friendship and unwavering loyalty echoed through the ages, reminding all who heard it that, sometimes, the most extraordinary tales are woven from the threads of ordinary moments.

NAVEED
A. SID-
DIQUI

Before immigrating to Canada, Naveed Siddiqui ran his own family law firm back home in Karachi, Pakistan. A former third-generation lawyer, he has a passion for writing and presently runs his own business management firm, SNCO Business Consulting, in Mississauga, Ontario, and is also a director of a fast food franchise, Paradise Chicken, in Ontario.

THE STRUGGLE

Naveed A. Siddiqui

May the sight in-front,
obscure me to view deep
Look O' stars! I stand,
I do not call my surrender . . .

I struggle to let open doors
that'r sealed for long, it pretend
Come O' Lord! for the broken
open my eyes, and transcend . . .

She raised my heart, far above
the clouds, held it, till is frozen
Come O' friend, assist me to sink
deep down in the darkest ocean . . .

Lift my thoughts and convey her . . .
I, clench the fear from loosing,
Listen O' soul! Here I stand
to conquer her the unknown!

Volunteering: from home to the world

Daniela Silva

What was supposed to just be lunch with a friend became a turning point in my life. A coworker of my husband's phoned him asking for a favor. He had finally gotten a new job, and he needed help transporting some books to his new place of work. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, the sun shining brightly in the sky. As we made the move, he excitedly commented on his new projects and how they had brought him a new lease on life. As a scientist and science textbook editor, he yearned to pass on his laboratory knowledge to new generations. While I listened to his story, I couldn't stop thinking about myself, and how lost I was in my academic and professional life. I had just finished a postgraduate degree in people management, and I hadn't felt well in any job interviews.

After we finished moving the books, we invited our friend, *Mark, to have lunch at a steakhouse. Noticing (from my face) that I was not well, this dear friend asked me what was going on, and I replied, "*Mark, I've been trying to jumpstart my career since I moved to this city.

But it hasn't been easy.

Whenever I'm called to do job interviews, I start the selection process confident and full of enthusiasm. However, whenever I get to the last stage, I end up sabotaging myself. Deep down, I know that my attitude has to do with the fact that I don't identify with any of the opportunities I apply for."



As I aired my complaint, I couldn't help but notice how much *Mark empathized with me. It was clear how much he analyzed and thought about every word I said. At the end of my comment, he asked, "Have you ever thought about doing volunteer work? There are people, for example, who call asking for donations for campaigns. I think this is very important because it adds value to the lives of both those who donate and those who receive the donations."

"Volunteer work!?" I said, surprised. "Wow, that's a good idea I hadn't thought of! But as for calling people's houses, I don't think I can do that (since I'm very shy)."

"I understand. But did you know that nowadays there are even opportunities to volunteer from

Photo by
Justin
Aikin

home? I'm talking about online volunteering!" Mark said enthusiastically.

"Online volunteering? Do you mean working virtually, as in the home office?" I replied curiously.

"Yes, that's right. Some websites offer volunteering opportunities both in the country where you live and abroad. I know people, for example, who have had the opportunity to learn other languages, thanks to the virtual work they did in other parts of the world. Some worked teaching languages, others translating documents or raising funds for social projects. The transformative power that volunteering has brought to these people's lives has been fantastic."

Upon hearing these words my heart was filled with hope and joy.

What if my purpose was to support a cause I cared about? What if I could convert my skills into something passionate, and still help those who needed it?

After that conversation, I confess that even the food gained more flavor as we ate at that steakhouse. It was like I'd taken a weight off my back, after trying so hard to chase down job vacancies that didn't fill the void I'd felt for a long time.

I would never have imagined that my life would not be the same after that lunch. How could simple words be able to impact so much a person's life, and everyone around her?

My husband and I said goodbye to *Mark, and we wished him all the best in his life and career. I thanked him for the meaningful advice that had brought so much light and hope to my journey. I couldn't wait to get started!

I graduated in 2006 with a degree in business pedagogy, and I had always enjoyed researching and writing about teacher training. Even working in the classroom as a kindergarten teacher, I was constantly asked by the board to write teacher training manuals at the school where I taught. Writing had always been my passion; it had always been in my DNA, especially when the themes I had to write about were education and emotional health in the classroom.

With that in mind, it was time to put my passion into practice. So I looked for online volunteer organizations where I could contribute to research and writing on causes about children's education, literacy and

mental health. Imagine my surprise when I realized how great the demand for this type of service was!

I didn't think twice, and soon I applied to some NGOs that needed writers to produce articles and learning materials for students and teachers. A few weeks passed, and I received feedback from an educational group that provided a variety of educational support services for families and children with special needs. My role at the institution would be to develop and research educational content for the website, blog and teaching materials.

Excited with the organization's proposal, I accepted the job and started to work as an online educational writer, working from my home office in Brazil, for the institution located in Ohio. I worked with this educational Group for nine years, and it was a watershed period in my life. I grew a lot as a professional and even had the opportunity to fulfill my dream of writing a book on literacy and learning disabilities. This experience opened up opportunities for me to work with other institutions focused on homeschooling and mental health care. After all, there is no learning when there is pain and emotional suffering. And I say this from experience, having suffered from depression and anxiety during childhood and adolescence.

The most valuable lesson I carry with me as an educational writer has been to shed light on the biggest learning difficulties faced by children and their families and show people how to provide a healthy learning environment. I say this because when I was a child, I was also helped with my educational difficulties by a volunteer teacher, and this changed my life for good.

Working in this institution allowed me to **reunite with my inner child.**

The truth is that I brought back what was already dormant inside me for years. Those who were once helped know the delight of helping someone in difficulty. It has no price; it has value. A value that shines, a value that transforms, a value that reveals someone's brightness.

What about you? Have you shined today? In a world of constellations, we are all stars. Think about it (but don't think too much; put it into practice and go for it)!

Thank you, *Mark. Your advice was gold!

A Glimpse Of

ALEX ANDY
PHUONG

Alex Andy Phuong earned his Bachelor of Arts in English from California State University, Los Angeles in 2015. Emma Stone inspired Alex to write passionately after he heard the Oscar-nominated song, "Audition (The Fools Who Dream)" from *La La Land*. He writes to inspire dreamers everywhere.

Flow to Know

Alex Andy Phuong

Go with the flow
As a way to know
That life on Earth
Is not even a show,
But more like a play,
And when people perform,
Being willing to defy the norm
Celebrates individuality
While simultaneously
Provides a sense
Of authenticity,
And even creates
A personal identity,
So be oneself,
And practice humility,
And know that there
Is actually no need
To be ostentatious,
But instead,
Simply be,
And learn along the way
To make the most of every day
While marveling at
Fleeting moments of beauty
Full of ethereal elegance

There
We Go

“The weather was improving, and the evening was stunning.”

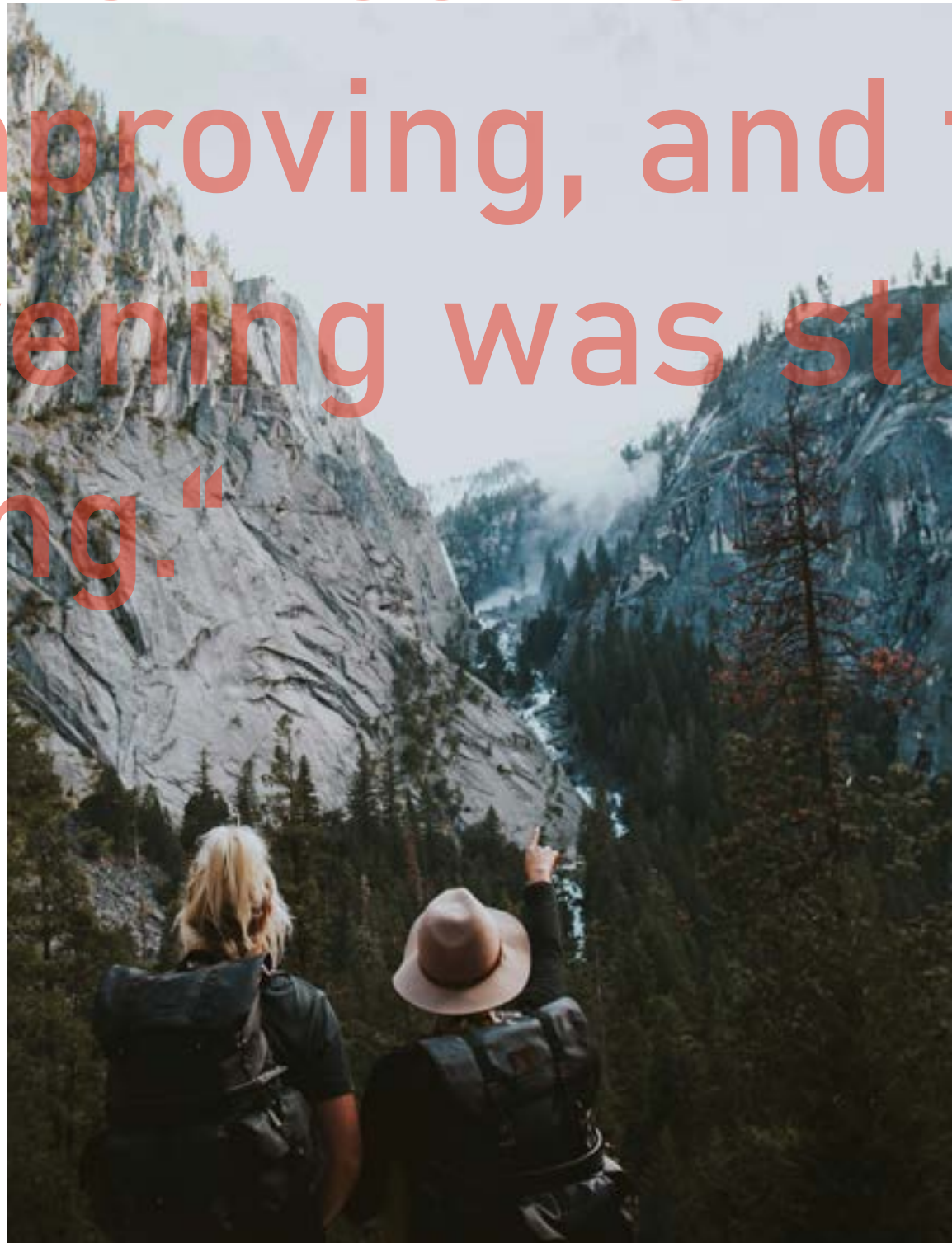


Photo by Ivana Cajina

LIFE OF THE ALTERNATIVE TRAVEL WRITER

Jayne Seagrave

When asked to define the perfect job, many cite that of the travel writer. What could be better than being paid to stay at the latest designer hotels, check out gourmet restaurants, partake in lengthy spa treatments, review new museums and travel to foreign countries? Add to this the bonus of seeing your articulate, well-worded accounts appearing in weekend editions of prestigious national newspapers and within the pages of glossy magazines, and it is not difficult to see why this career is sought after.

While making for fascinating reading material, I would suggest the majority of these accounts do not address the vacationing needs of the majority. Most of us do not have the time or finances to consider spending our holidays in these designer environments. Most of us have mortgages, lines of credit, kids, aging parents, limited vacation time and pressing day-to-day commitments that negate the recommendations these travel writers endorse. While, in a perfect world, blowing \$2,000 a night on a spa hotel in Bali would be nice, for now and the foreseeable future, our vacation budgets usually must bend to more practical alternatives.

This is where I come in. Open the door to the world of the “alternative” travel writer.

I write books about camping in British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon. For 25 years I have been checking out provincial and national park campgrounds and offering advice to individuals like me, who have limited finances so go camping. I give practical information on such things as the quantity of goose poop found on campground beaches, the dryness of the firewood, the bear/cougar/skunk/mosquito population and the smelliness and cleanliness of the pit toilets. As an alternative travel writer,

I am at the bottom of the travel writer food chain.

I have never had to write “The writer was the guest of the campground. The campground operator did not review this article,” because I have never had a campground offer to pay the \$20-\$35 fee, nor have I ever asked to be compensated.

A few years ago my publisher suggested I look at expanding my camping experience and writing a book about the best family campgrounds in BC and Alberta. I had extensive knowledge of BC, but had not camped in Alberta for a number of years, and to

Photo by
Le Tan



undertake this task I would have to travel and if not camp, then at least revisit a number of the Albertan campgrounds I knew. I chose the second week of September to undertake this research.

It was minus two degrees and snowing when my plane landed at 9 a.m. at Edmonton International Airport. I collected the rental car and headed to Elk Island National Park, a mere 45-minute drive. There were no staff when I arrived at this park. The visitor centre car park, adorned with a thin layer of snow, was devoid of cars. The hanging baskets were still on display, as were the information leaflets, but the “largest concentration of hooved mammals outside the Serengeti,” for which the park is famous, were nowhere to be seen.

For almost three hours I drove around the park looking for staff and bison as the snow turned to sleet.

I found neither. A sign on the notice board stated alcohol was prohibited in the campground, as a result of previous rowdy behaviour. This information meant Elk Island might not have been suitable for the guide, and I decided to move on.

After driving for another three hours, I found the wonderful Whitney Lakes Provincial Park and spent from 3:30 p.m.–6:30 p.m. exploring this campground, all by myself, trying to ignore the “beware of bears” signs as I accessed trails by climbing over the yellow gate barriers that indicated that the campground was actually closed for the season. The weather was improving, and the evening was stunning.

At 8 p.m., just as it was getting dark, I pulled into Wainwright, which the Alberta accommodation guide informed me had 10 motels. I tried the first commercial chain motel only to be told by an individual named Dawn that the RCMP Musical Ride had been in town, and consequently there was not a room to be had. Dawn telephoned her friends in other reputable establishments, and other than the spa suite at a brand new hotel (\$375 a night plus tax), nothing was available.

I left and cruised slowly out of town, calling at every motel. The quality of the establishments, along with the street lighting, declined the further I drove. I eventually found a motel on the edge of town. Mine was the only car in the car park, all the other guests had large, dirt-encrusted trucks. An empty coffee tin was placed outside each motel room for cigarette butts and the owner, after telling me I was his only female guest, presumed I was a geologist, as the only women who stayed there were geologists.

I left as my fellow guests did, before 6 a.m. after collecting breakfast, like they did, from Tim Hortons. The moose and foxes were crossing Highway 41 as dawn broke and I headed south, lifting my spirits. It did not start to snow again until 10:30 a.m. Day two as the alternative travel writer started very similarly to the first.

The freak snowy weather persisted, so photographs of campgrounds had to be supplemented by internal shots of visitor centres. Signs telling me to beware of bears were replaced with warnings about

cougars, and then rattlesnakes, as I explored lonely paths and deserted campgrounds, many miles from the main highway and cell phone service. During my week of research, I drove 3,500 kilometres, pulling into Tim Hortons for coffee and Wi-Fi, staying in motels in small Alberta towns I never knew existed, talking to enthusiastic park staff who, as I was their only visitor, gave me undivided attention and far more first-hand information than I could cram into the proposed guide book. Without exception, they were delighted that a book including what they loved about their campground was being written.

During my travels many things were discovered: the awesome Highway 11, every bit as spectacular as the Icefields Parkway but without the tour buses; Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, with its Hoodoo Trail and tipi-shaped visitor centre; William A. Switzer Provincial Park, a stone’s throw from Jasper but

without the crowds; and the crystal waters of Aspen Beach. My experience as an alternative travel writer showed me that it is always the unanticipated that proves the most rewarding. The task was to do justice to these provincial parks in 1,000 words and document my research in a guidebook that would be used by regular people who needed an affordable family vacation. This audience no doubt reads about the spa hotels in Bali and dreams of a time when our lives will be different and this exotic holiday will be on our agendas, but for now we can look to the alternative travel writer for practical guidance.

JAYNE SEAGRAVE

Jayne Seagrave is a BC bestselling author. The ninth edition of her book *Camping British Columbia, the Rockies and the Yukon* was published by Heritage House in April 2023. Over 60,000 of her camping books have been sold.

KATHY
WOUDZIA

Kathy Woudzia is a mother of four children (one deceased) and three grandchildren, the loves of her life. She is passionate about her family, activities with her dog, fitness, reading, drawing and, most of all, writing poetry and short stories. Kathy has a profound interest in mental health and the destigmatization of it.

SnowCat

Kathy Woudzia



a million snowflakes
bring me to life
as I sit perched on the railing
beauty of calm in the distance of the Fraser
bringing joy to those who find me
not for long

