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1 i k e n e s s

m a g a z i n e

beyond limits

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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Beyond Limits

Shayan Afkari

Beyond limits lies a realm unseen,

Where dreams take flight on serene winds.

Uncharted skies and boundless seas,

Where courage dares, and spirits seize.

In the expanse where stars entwine, endless horizons whisper, "Shine."

Beyond the edge, our hearts ascend; in infinite journeys, there's no end.

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Photo by Bence Halmosi

Foreword

It could be that we cross lines every day, whether they are drawn by others or ourselves, or just by reality. We might drift, ghostlike, through membranes without even realizing it, and maybe others see us, mouths agape, shocked that we might contravene their expectations. Still, we wind up on other sides, sometimes changed, sometimes not.

What can be inspired by a bursting balloon? An extended treatise on a fruit? A wooly best friend or defying the expectations of age? Are we not pushing beyond limits with every single step we take, every second that shifts our universe into immaterial memory?

We progress and we change, and perhaps boundaries are just phantoms, shifting and diffusing as we adapt and disappear.

This issue we pass by trees and kings, we give, we dance and we suffer. Through it all we love, and that feels unbreakable . . . was that, then, what we were looking for all this time?

Simon Cheung

Editor, Low Entropy

Anna writes from her love for the natural world, lessons from her journey through illness and trauma, and gratitude for the wisdom of the ancients. Her essays have appeared in literary magazines and eco-conscious journals. Originally from South India, she presently lives in Montreal (Tiohtià:ke), on the unceded lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka.

The Otherness of Awareness

Anna Mallikarjunan

Out of deep suffering—a paralyzing anguish in which we can no longer accept the answers of tradition and suggestions of the intellect—a state of *bhakti* is said to manifest. *Bhakti*, a Sanskrit word, translates as devotion and love for the divine. Coming into contact with complete helplessness brought it about in my life. I had been so steeped in my intellect, ideas and beliefs for so long that this undivided, uncaused feeling of devotion struck me like a jolt of reality. My spirit was shaken awake by the attitude of surrender, and something full of benevolence began to emerge from within. The ensuing persuasive, captivating wandering within myself intoxicated me with a completely familiar, yet entirely new love. And remarkably, though my body was racked with illness and debilitating pain at the time,

I overflowed with energy and life.

This love consumed me, and I felt no inner conflict. I knew, without a trace of doubt, that I had touched the source of compassion—or rather, that it had found me. I saw within myself that I was dependent on an immense, wise, unknowable power, and for the first time, I recognized the essence of the word reverence.

I believe we are never the same once we have had a glimpse of such otherness. But, as with countless others before me, the clarity and peace that came from such an awakening faded with time. Now, life's lessons, both pleasant and harsh, continue, often forcing me

to look at the deeper layers of my consciousness.

My self-centered thoughts and actions rumble on, often leaving me dithering. And yet, insights into my psyche and the resulting freedom, love and intelligence enrich me. Thoughts and emotions in themselves are harmless; they come and go. But when I hold onto them through memory, they cause pain and suffering. Only in the space of awareness can I release my hold on illusory ideas and painful emotional images. In the light of this state, I watch the patterns of my thinking and endure the stubborn habits of my mind. But I also find strength and rest; I discover remedies and solutions. In the otherness of awareness, I see existence as a serious responsibility, as a precious gift from the universe.

Boundless Ascends

Alex Andy Phuong

Striving to do more
Than just survive
While expressing gratitude
For being alive,
And through a hopeful attitude
Can people ascend
While trying the best
To make amends,
And by sending good fortune
All around,
An identity as a contributor
Can be found,
So give freely
And generously
Across time and space
To make the world a better place

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 become a poet. He now writes hoping to inspire dreamers everywhere.

"I failed to recognize the wisdom my parents had [...] and have paid dearly for it."

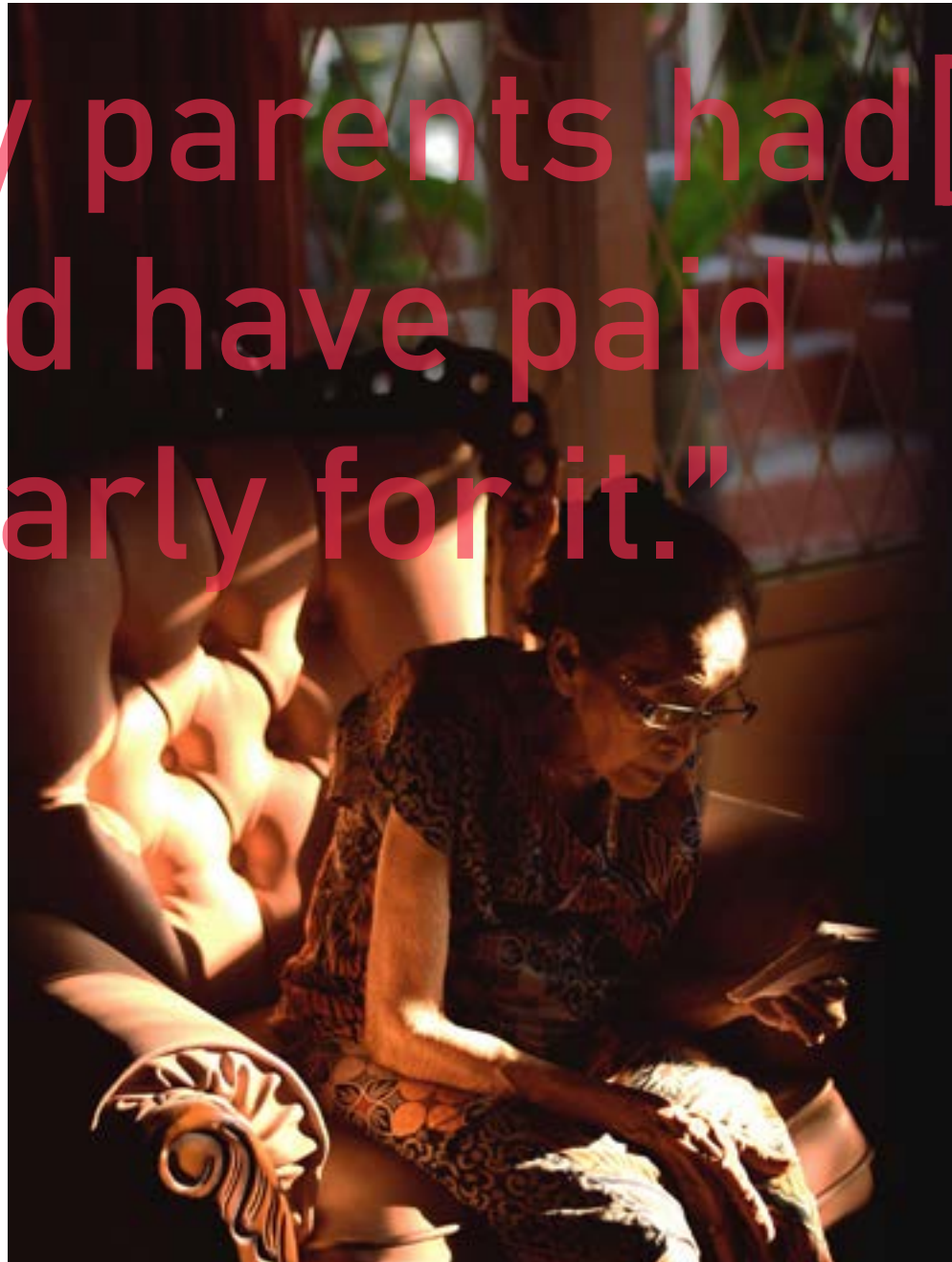


Photo by Yoshua Giri

KATHY WOUZDZIA

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.

Overaged: old is gold

Kathy Woudzia

How is it that many of us in our western culture are wasting our most valuable resource, a resource that has been increasingly underrated over the last 50 years, a resource that is paid forward and can improve your life immensely if you use it? Here's my perspective on the topic.

In the beginning, we are all dependent on our parents—they are our everything, the people we look up to and the first people to expose us to new experiences. Think Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. As we grow and begin school, sports, arts, our horizons are broadened and we are no longer as dependent on our parents. In fact, we often want to be as far away from them as possible. By the age of 18, we

don't "need" or want any more advice

and we certainly, by now, know more than our parents do.

In our 20s, we may still be self-centred enough to think that we know best, and that listening to old people for advice is just done to appease them—not to glean anything from the conversation itself. In some cultures, you are looked up to in old age; not so much in my culture. I am of European des-

cent and a first-generation Canadian. From what I have come to realize, elderly people are

mostly unseen and unheard.

It is likely that not all that much changes in our 30s, though if we have kids, we may begin to appreciate the amount of work our parents went through in raising us. It is at that point where a tiny window opens for the seniors in our life. We may then actually want to hear their advice and get their help with their grandchildren. However, be on notice that that window could close when they don't need you anymore.

In our 40s we're often way too busy working, running kids around and just trying to squeeze enough minutes out of the day to do something for ourselves. Seniors can be important here in helping with taking kids to sports/activities practices, and that time can be mutually beneficial.

Now in our 50s, we may be too busy worrying about becoming middle-aged to listen to people who we now see as seniors and, in our opinion, still have no contributions left to give. We are, in that respect, worrying about becoming those very people—seniors.

In our 60s, where I'm at now, we begin to experience ageism. In the workforce, people tend to see through you or don't listen to you, and you don't get hired or promoted because you're considered to be too old. When I tell people I have grandchildren, even though I can run 5K in 30 min, play tennis regularly, look fit and still be active in the workforce, "gramma" immediately comes across as 'old'. Imagine how my mom must feel.

She turned 90 this year, and is the most underrated person I have ever met. She is perfectly healthy, mentally and physically. She is unassuming and self-deprecating. She puts herself down all the time, but then comes up with very insightful comments. She continues to amaze me with her breadth of wisdom and her physical abilities. Simply put, she's 90 going on 65. You're about to find out how that is, and why we should appreciate and try to learn from people like her for our

own good and the good of society.

Mom was born in rural Slovenia, back when it was communist Yugoslavia, and only attained a grade 6 education. She lived through the Great Depression and WWII on a farm with no electricity or running water. For my mom, a perfect Christmas Day was having a turkey, and that's it—no presents and no day off from farm work either, but she remembers it as the best day of the year and filled with nothing but joy. Hardship.

When mom was in her early 20s, she and her sister escaped through the mountain ranges of Yugoslavia to Austria, where they worked odd jobs for a pittance and ate out of garbage cans for six months to earn enough money to travel from Germany to Canada. There, employers tried to take advantage of the sisters. On the boat, mom got so sick that they were going to throw her overboard at one point. Patience and resilience.

She officially immigrated to Canada in 1958 and married my dad in 1960, another Slovenian who had escaped from rural Yugoslavia. When they married, they had not a penny in their pocket. They settled in Osoyoos, BC and had two kids.

One of the first things my mom did when she arrived in Canada was to learn English, not so easy with only a grade 6 education. But she did it. She worked in labour jobs till she was 65 years old. During that time there were many trials and tribulations, including the death of their son, granddaugh-

ter and daughter-in-law. Then in 2021, after 61 years of marriage, my dad, her soulmate, passed away.

He and my mom made a perfect couple—they each had their own responsibilities. My mom's was to keep the house and my dad's was everything else—bills, repairs, income taxes, etc. . . . When dad died, my mom had to learn to do what he did, and she did. Necessity is the mother of invention. She learned to look after herself. What makes her special? Her average life.

Resourcefulness

"Hard childhood, easy life; easy childhood, hard life." Mom gets through the tough stuff because she has endured hardship and has learned how to manage her problems effectively.

She takes ownership of problems when they arise and, if she can't manage them, she uses her resources to solve them. In other words, she looks to others to teach her when she's unable to perform the task at hand.

Food

My mom eats to live, she does not live to eat. She eats to prevent hunger and stops when she's full. She does not follow any special diet, but she eats whole foods in moderation and shops along the outside isles, so no packaged foods. She doesn't eat in restaurants or fast food places, and cooks all of her own food. She also cooks for her granddaughter and for friends.

Attitude

My mom always puts others ahead of herself, and that makes her feel good. She is happier to give than she is to receive. She is also grateful for what she has and looks at life as a glass half-full.

Wisdom

I failed to recognize the wisdom my parents had when I was in my younger years and have paid dearly because of it. I now welcome, appreciate and, yes, ask for it. Why? Because my mom's got 90 years of life experience and she's been through a lot. She can empathize. Most elderly people have this capacity, and it is

highly underutilized.

Meditation

My mom prays daily and goes to church several times per week. Even if you don't believe prayer works, what has been proven is that prayer works wonders for the person who is doing the praying, because it is a lot like meditating. We have all heard about the benefits of daily meditation, and that means mom's going to be around a lot longer.

Social Connections

Whether you believe in God or not, church can be a social gathering, and it is for my mom. After church, the attendees are invited for coffee and snacks, where they mingle and eat. In addition, my mom belongs to a seniors group that meets four times per week. Some good friendships have been forged there.

Exercise

My mom has been practicing yoga since her 60s and at 90 has not slowed down. Even though she can still do yoga on the ground, she mainly does chair yoga now, but is known to be the best in her group. My mom also walks wherever she can, and so she barely ever drives anywhere, and that adds up to a few km of walking per day. She doesn't let weather stop her and she still shovels snow off of her large parking lot. Mom also moves around all of the time because she can't sit still. This problem is a good one to have.

Self-reliance

She has only one family member living nearby and that's her granddaughter, whom my mother cares for, not the other way around. Mom also has a cat she cares for. Those responsibilities give her purpose. My mom also does her own house cleaning and cooking, and she looks after the bills, which works her brain and body.

Life-long Learning

My mom has had to learn—

and she is not the most ambitious learner

—to use a computer, deal with service providers over the phone, learn to troubleshoot the tv set and troubleshoot other problems that arise. If she can't do it, she asks for help and tries to learn along the way.

I don't know about you, but I think my mom's average life is actually extraordinary, because she is 90 and completely functional, living life to the fullest. She can still help her great grandchildren! Along that vein, do I think the underrated elderly still have something left to offer? You bet I do, and the proof is my mom, Mary Zelko.

"Agatha thought of a long-ago summer day.

With apples, laugh



ter, her brother, and a sweet kind boy with a gentle smile."

**GURLEEN
KAUR
BAJWA**

Both a prolific reader and writer, Gurleen likes living inside exciting stories. She's working on making her own the most exciting of all.

THE TIES THAT BIND

Gurleen Kaur Bajwa

Photo by
Liana Mikah

Agatha perched precariously on the garden wall, straining as her hands reached out for the dangling fruit. Just as her fingertips brushed against it, it swung out of reach, and then she was falling. It was a rather quick, as far as falls went, but painful, as her knees scraped against tree roots and dress tore against wayward rocks, lost in the tall grass. She curled up, letting out a pitiful squeal.

"Are you alright?"

A shadow fell over her undignified form. Looking up, Agatha found a small boy, no older than herself, peering down curiously. A handsome boy. Agatha stared back for a moment, before she scrambled in mortification to assemble herself.

"Lady Agatha?"

She nodded, quick and embarrassed.

"Oh—" He looked somewhere over her shoulder before reaching down for a bright red fruit and offering it to her. "Is this what you were looking for?"

She hesitated before reaching out one (dignified) hand to accept the gift. After an awkward moment of silence, she managed a small curtsy.

"Henry!" a voice called from behind them.

Lisa's elder brother Edward bound up to them, energetic as always.

"There you are."

Agatha looked back at her brother questioningly. He had recently turned ten, and held all the answers now.

"Prince Henry," he explained with a slight pout. "I told you he was coming. We are starting at the Academy together next month."

Now that he mentioned it, she did have a vague recollection of such a discussion.

"Come on," Edward said, gesturing for his friend to follow. "Father said Sir Miguel will take us into town if we hurry."

Henry cast her one last glance, giving her a shy smile, before running off after Edward.

She hardly saw Henry during the years at the Academy, which ran a rigorous military program for the offspring of nobility and royalty, one that involved no

warmth, no home and no women. Edward, of course, carried occasional updates, regaling her with boastful stories and adventures, while she politely embroidered a colorful family tapestry. Sometimes she would prick her finger and watch the blood spread on the thread between her and Edward's likeness, staring and staring until Edward snapped her out of it with a particularly loud, excited proclamation.

They didn't see Henry at all until the jousting tournament.

Edward, of course, was the belle of the ball, Sir Quinton's eldest son, closest friend of the Fourth Prince Henry, and a remarkable swordsman. Henry was not nearly as remarkable—

not comparable to Edward

—and not even to his three elder brothers, whom Agatha watched win bout after bout. Henry, on the other hand, was too graceful, too kind, too unwilling to engage. It left him a laughingstock, to his brothers, to the crowd and to his father, the king, who stood staring down disapprovingly at his youngest son.

As his uncle consoled him with a firm but gentle hand on his shoulder, Henry met Agatha's eyes, and she could see him grow shameful, until she smiled. In the aftermath, under the excuse of Edward gifting her a bright sapphire-gemmed hairpin, Henry brought her a hairpin with red stones, saying it reminded him of the apples that day. Unfortunately for Agatha, Edward stood very close by during the whole exchange and went on to recount the exchange in detail to anyone who would listen over the next few weeks. Agatha and Henry were engaged half a year later, on the Fourth Prince's 18th birthday.

On his 25th, he stood at the head of the throne room, sword dripping with blood and his brother's corpses around him. His uncle stood just behind with a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"The general has arrived, your Majesty."

Agatha shot up in her seat, the embroidery falling to her feet.

"Where is he!?"

"He is in the throne room."

Agatha ran, through the empty endless halls and the steep staircases—it was undignified and unbecoming, and she would worry about that later—even daring to hitch up her skirt just slightly. She heard the whispers as they engulfed her, maids and servants excited about the return of a man more well-liked throughout the empire than the young King. She didn't dare enter the large throne room and interrupt the address, and instead consoled herself to watch between the secret cracks and crevices.

Edward was on one knee as he recited war conquests as if they were poetry, stringing together the syllables—humble, not boastful. Henry gazed down at him solemnly, nodding along as his uncle listened intently.

And then it ended, and Henry came down the steps and they embraced with smiles. Only then did Agatha dare enter. The lack of strangers allowed her to dash to her brother. His long period of absences had made her more fond of him than she'd ever previously been. Henry watched Edward as he turned away, and Agatha thought she saw something dark pass over his face, but then he was grinning and laughing. As the doors shut behind her and her brother, Agatha saw Henry's uncle lean to whisper in his ear.

"Admit it!" Henry screamed, throwing the contents of the vanity across the floor. "You want to get rid of me!"

"Your Grace," Agatha said, formal and polite, as she had learned to be when Henry behaved like this, which he did more and more often recently. "I want no such thing."

"You and that scheming brother of yours! Do you think I don't know!"

His eyes bulged out of his eyes in his frantic panic as he paced the room, hand itching for something to throw before he found it in the corner armchair, which thundered onto its side. "You both are trying to kill me!"

"You are deceived."

"YOU DARE!" he shouted, advancing, as Agatha stood steadfast. "I WILL KILL YOU BOTH AND HANG YOUR HEADS IN THE SQUARE!"

Agatha did not flinch.

"Your Grace," she said, calm and complacent—all the things her mother had been. "The reports you hear of the general staging an uprising are false, and spread by those who want you weakened. He is faithful to you."

"STOP LYING TO ME."

He yanked on the strands of his hair. "I hear the way people talk about me! You think I'm stupid?!? A kin-killer who murdered his entire family! Oh, what is he in the face of the great, noble and oh-so-brave general!"

Agatha did not move, as Henry moved and turned her entire room—or whatever was left of it—upside-down before storming off. Amid the rubble, and under the setting sun through the windows, she did not move.

On his return from the Southern Rebellions, General Edward was met with a clustered throne-room.

Agatha wondered if he'd received news from anyone, anywhere, of what awaited him at home while he was fighting wars for someone else.

His gaze went over the faces of noblemen and royals and everyone in between, all gazing onwards, and the archers that stood between him and the king.

"Your Majesty," he said, his voice heavy, and Agatha, hands curling into fists, as she stood a step down from Henry, knew he'd heard.

Why would you return? She thought. Why would you come back? Why didn't you flee?

"General Edward."

Henry did not speak; his uncle did, heightening his voice the way he did when he thought he had something important to say.

"You have been found guilty of treason and conspiracy to commit regicide against his Majesty. How do you plead?"

Agatha wondered if anyone believed it. Anyone other than Henry.

"I deny the charges," Edward said, impassive, as he looked directly at the king, whose expression was set and angry.

"You traitor." Henry sneered, his teeth grit together. "Admit it, and you may yet live."

"I am innocent, your Majesty," Henry reiterated. "I have never once, betrayed you."

"A liar," Henry whispered. "To the very end."

The archers took aim, more than 50 of them. No one moved.

Into that breathless silence, Agatha stepped forward. Past the king, who stared at her incredulously, past the noblemen and past the archers, who did not know how to stop her—or even if they could. She walked, seemingly forever, until she stood in front of her brother, the sapphiric hairpin in her hair. Her brother seemed stunned for a moment, and then he smiled.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Agatha shook her head and took his hand.

"Kill them!" Henry screamed behind her—but she paid him no mind, gazing up at Edward, whose jaw was set in the face of the inevitable. "Kill them both!"

When they fell onto the cold marble, their hands still intertwined, Agatha thought of a long-ago summer day. With apples, laughter, her brother and a sweet kind boy with a gentle smile.

Dr. Jayne Seagrave is a British Columbian best-selling author. The ninth edition of her book *Camping in British Columbia* was published by Heritage House Publishing in April 2023. She also writes fiction, non-fiction and freelance articles, and occasionally teaches writing and publishing. Recently retired, she spends her free time travelling internationally and in the province she adores, learning the French language, exercising and writing.

THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A DANCING QUEEN

Jayne Seagrave

Photo by
Tim Moss-
holder

A few months ago, I went to The Tango Capital of the World—Buenos Aires. I adore dancing, whether that be alone in my house to old Abba songs, at friend’s weddings to awful disco music determined by others or in my beloved community centre Zumba classes. While in the Argentinian capital, I had thought I would pay to see a tango performance, and maybe even take lessons while on my holiday . . . I soon learned I did not need to pay to see tango, it was everywhere.

The tango originated in Buenos Aires in the 1880s when large numbers of working-class men arrived from Europe to seek their fortunes. They sought out bars and women, engaged with waitresses and prostitutes, and subsequently developed a way of flirting through dance. This involved machismoism, passion and a suppressed sexual aggression, all accompanied with Spanish/Italian music. Thus, the tango was created.

Every day, while walking the busy Buenos Aires streets,

I encountered a form of tango:

from little seven-year-old children in a park, hopping around each other to music blasting from an iPad; to skinny, homosexual men wearing shiny, patent leather shoes, black tight suits, white shirts, thin ties and very serious expressions, moving as if one outside dance studios; to teenagers, trying to keep a straight face and serious expression as their contemporaries offered encouragement; to established serious dance professionals, the women with black stockings, split skirts and painted lips, and their partners with detached mannerisms, each reading the other perfectly, moving in unison, apparently oblivious to the crowd gathering around them, with an

undeniable sexual energy.

Dancing the tango was everywhere in Buenos Aires, and this got me thinking about the benefits of dance. Not necessarily the amazingly sexually provocative tango, which when performed correctly is very sensual and highly seductive, but all dancing—the sort everyone can enjoy and become involved with at a small cost that is immensely sociable and great fun.

Cards on the table now. I am a dedicated, addicted Zumba gal and spend at least five hours a week practicing my art. I can not begin to describe the fantastic



buzz this activity generates. I adore it. The highlight of my week is at 9.30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, when I join in excess of 70 (primarily women) in a community centre gym and for an hour we move in unison to Latin tunes. I leave the class ecstatic, full of energy and so very happy—the best hour of my week, and all for under \$10.00.

Dance is an art, a sport and a cathartic activity. A brief Internet search reveals it has been shown to have significant health benefits: it reduces stress, improves flexibility, lowers depression, can lead to weight loss, increases energy, improves cardiovascular functionality, improves coordination and balance and memory, and generates a higher state of self-esteem and confidence. It is not hard to learn, and you can do it at any age. Is any more persuasion needed to give it a try?

Community centres across British Columbia offer a range of dance classes, including Zumba, Zumba Gold (a less demanding form of Zumba), line dancing, ballet, tap, classical Indian, Chinese folk dan-

cing, dance fusion and ballroom. One of the advantages is that signing up for these classes does not require a partner—it is easy to register as a single person and be welcomed. A friend of mine became so involved with line dancing she now attends line dancing holidays all over the world. I have another Zumba mate who looks for cruises that have at least three hours of line dancing a day, illustrating just how addictive dancing can become.

So if you want to improve your emotional well-being, motivation, friendship circle and fitness level, look no further than enrolling in your local community centre’s dance classes. If they do not offer tango classes yet, I think it may only be a matter of time, and when they do, I will be the first to register.

“all dancing - the sort everyone can enjoy and become involved with”

Okra

Alexis King

Okra found me, I didn't find okra. I don't remember where I was when I was introduced to my first okra dish (with the slime, of course), but I remember the core taste that filled my head, and that was happiness. I remember saying to myself, *this is just right*.

Okra fills memories in my head that have never formed, taking me to places that I've never been and encouraging me to continue to think outside the box. Food has become so important to me nowadays, when I was younger I never thought about food the way I think about it now. I believe that if you let it, food can change the way you think and the way you move, and teach you things about yourself and others that you may have misunderstood. That's what okra has done for me.

Okra has many benefits. It is rich in vitamins A and C, as well as antioxidants that help reduce the spread of very serious health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Okra is also a good source of magnesium. If you have stomach issues like me, it can also do wonders for your digestive system. Okra has to be one of my top favorite foods that I have ever eaten. Some people don't like the slime, but I

do because it makes it different from anything else and it also just makes it fun to eat and fun to prepare.

Before trying okra I had never seen anything like it. I want to go back to the core memories that okra has given me, even though I didn't grow up eating it, and moreover I didn't even know that something like it even existed. It has given me the core memory of family, how cooking brings family together and how stories come out when people share their favorite foods. While tasting okra for the first time I felt like I knew the person that introduced me to it more, like I knew all his hardships and joyful moments just from him sharing his okra recipe with me. I was shocked and stunned. I kept saying, "But food can't make me think like this."

Turns out it did and it always does.

Did I mention that it makes me happy? Yes, okra makes me happy. I'll eat it whenever I'm having a bad day, a good day, an okay day or just about any day. I know you think I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. Have you tried it? If not, you should, you won't forget it. Oh, let me just mention that I'm talking about cooked okra. There's all kinds of ways you can eat it, you can eat okra fried, it can be eaten raw, pickled, in a succotash, roasted and grilled.

By now I know you have heard about okra water. It has been all over TikTok lately, and that in itself has multiple benefits. It has the same benefits as above, but also has some added ones, such as weight management, skin health and blood sugar regulation. I might have to try drinking okra water, since I've been reading that it helps with skin and I can use the help in that area.

It has opened up my taste buds to a whole different world.

This world is always positive, a place where I'm always ready to get going in the morning. Okra makes me more energized no matter what time of day I eat it.

Some unique facts about okra:

1. Okra is also known as lady fingers.
2. It is part of the hibiscus family and is native to Africa, but okra is grown all over the world.
3. Technically, it's a fruit.
4. Okra isn't just green: it can be a variety of colours, including purple, burgundy, orange, red and white.
5. The gel in the okra is called mucilage.
6. It is considered a superfood.

I like the common color of okra, which is green. It reminds me of green grass, money and health. Anything that's green screams good to me, which also screams healthy for you. I try to always make sure I add green to my plate, along with other colors like yellow, orange, purple and white. To be fair, I have only eaten the green okra, but I am willing to see what kind of effects the other colors of okra have on my mind and how they can make me feel.

Okra is not the only food that has done this for me, plenty of food has, and I'll just name a few: fufu soup, acuma and bomba leaves. West African food has basically changed my life in all beautiful ways. One thing that bothers me is that where I currently live there is only one place that serves it, which is okay, but I wish that they had more options and there more places to go.

A goal of mine is to be able to 100% prepare okra it on my own in all ways. I love boiling water and adding meats or just veggies. Okra pairs well with meats like chicken, shrimp, fish and, my favorite, turkey tails. Turkey tails are the perfect combination for it because it gives okra that rich taste, especially with a lot of other flavours and spices. Can't forget the spice. The spice is like the nightlife and the okra is like the day party. Either way, you get the best of

both worlds by adding what you like to an okra dish. It brings out more flavor and more authenticity to the meal.

My life without okra would be down and gray. It has easily become one of my favorite foods to eat. I would be sad if I had to travel to another state just to get some. I can't help but to wonder how rich it would be to eat it where it is organically grown. During some research this is what I found on the okra grown in Africa:

It likely originated in West Africa over 1,000 years ago.

It's related to cotton, hollyhock and the rose of Sharon.

It is still found growing wild in some parts of Africa. The word okra comes from the corruption of the West African name for the plant, nkruma.

There's a debate over the term okra or gumbo and I'll always choose okra, but recently I have learned that in southern states they debate over which one is better. I'm always interested in learning why people choose one food over the other, but that ties in to different cultures and background experiences. When I talked about how food helps you get to know people, that's exactly what I meant, asking the right questions and figuring out why people like one food over another can tell you everything you need to know about a person without getting too deep or keeping it just on the surface level. I think food is a beautiful way to open up people's minds to different conversations and topics to get to know them better. After I taste something that I have never eaten before, it always sparks a conversation between me and the other people around me, and the stories are

always great to listen to.

I think food is love, and once you dive deep into it, you find yourself in love with many different kinds of foods, and maybe even choosing a soulmate. Okra has brought great gratitude to my life and I am very appreciative of it. The positive effects it has stamped on my brain and on my heart are things that I will cherish forever, in addition to how delicious it is. My only hope in the future is that people take the time out to try different foods and expand their minds to something different, letting it take you on a journey that you've never before embarked on. Opening up your life to these opportunities can lead you on a beautiful path.

Finding Magic in Everyday

Shorya Goyal

As a child, I never understood why my grandfather was so obsessed with our old oak tree in the backyard. To me it was just a tree, not moving from its place, covering the lawn with its shadow. But for him it meant stories, memories; it was his refuge. “Here we go,” he would say whenever he reached out to hold my hand and pull me towards its knotty roots.

Years later, I found myself thousands of miles away from that oak tree in a city that was full of hustle and bustle. It was a job that forced me to look closer, to find beauty in the mundane. And it was in this pursuit that I stumbled upon a small, hidden park nestled between two towering buildings. The park was unremarkable by any standard—a few benches, a modest fountain, and a scattering of trees. However, as I sat on an old bench, I watched people of all walks pass through. A couple stood under a cherry blossom tree silently while a young boy laughed, trying to catch pigeons, and another old man read the newspaper very peacefully.

“There we go” were my words when I realized this small space’s significance for me personally, as well as for other people who visited it sometimes. It turned out to be an oasis amid chaos where stories were told and lives intertwined. Just like grandpa’s oak, this park had no outward distinction, but held moments.

Returning home that evening, I penned my story with a newfound appreciation for the seemingly insignificant places that shape our lives. I finally understood my grandfather’s love for that old oak tree. It wasn’t just a tree; it was a repository of memories, a place where the world slowed down just enough to let the magic in.

In our hurried lives, it’s easy to overlook the beauty around us. But sometimes, if we take a moment to pause and say, “There we go,” we might just discover the extraordinary in the everyday.

SHORYA
GOYAL

Shorya is a person who values the importance of both acquiring knowledge and wisdom. He believes that, while studying is important in order to gain knowledge, it is also essential to observe and learn from life experiences in order to gain wisdom. He takes this belief to heart, and strives to not only improve himself but also to hold and lift others up along the way.

SUE
TURI

Sue Turi is a writer, illustrator and painter living in Montréal, Canada with a degree in fine arts. She began her career as a production artist for design studios and ad agencies, before deciding to devote herself purely to self-expression through writing and painting.

Mandy and the Sheep

Sue Turi

Mandy was extremely freckly.

She had been blessed with freckles from head to toe. But a lesser blessing was where she lived—on Devil’s Peak. Despite its name, the view from Devil’s Peak was picturesque—Table Mountain to the left, the Cape Flats to the right, and the vastness of Table Bay glittering at its center. Facing northwest, Devil’s Peak basks in sunshine for most of the day until sunset, or until it borrows a cloud or two from its partner, Table Mountain, which is often topped with fluffy white cumuli from the southeasterly wind originating from the Antarctic. But 40 years ago, living below Devil’s Peak in Cape Town, South Africa in the vicinity of District Six was something you kept quiet about.

Mandy had invited me to her house, finally. I had been hoping she would so I could see the new pet sheep she had been talking about at school, adding to her family of five dogs and two cats.

I expected to arrive at a farm for a long weekend, but instead I found myself outside a tiny, paint-chipped two-bedroom house surrounded by others perched at different angles on a steep city slope. She had kept it a secret—

where she lived

—and now I knew why. Mandy lived in a ghetto, essentially. The dogs were all at the gate wagging their greetings when we arrived, but Mandy’s new addition was nowhere in sight in the dirt yard. “She’s



inside,” I was told—“She doesn’t get along with the dogs.”

Then began the longest three nights of my life. Mandy’s sheep bleated and relieved itself throughout the night in her bedroom while I tossed and turned in her sister’s bed with each bleat. I had never had a pet sheep and wondered whether this was normal. Technically, sheep has no singular form, which was appropriate, as this one made up for an entire herd. I found out quickly that, unsurprisingly, farm animals kept indoors are very vocal, complaining and evacuating as pets who respond neither to their name nor to the prompt of potty time.

After two sleepless nights, Mandy’s mother appeared out of nowhere. Mandy told me that she had been dating a rich guy with a Jaguar, but now it appeared they had since broken up. Mandy’s mom had a weathered face that had seen many hardships and was framed by a dyed crimson mullet. She had a



raspy voice and a gruff personality to match, though I was relieved she had arrived to take care of the distraught sheep. But to my surprise, she proposed for us all, including the sheep, to visit a friend's place out in the countryside. I thought this was odd but ultimately a good idea, as we'd get the poor animal closer to its appropriate home: a pasture.

I wondered whether the friend in the countryside knew that a sheep would be tagging along.

Mandy's mom suggested I invite my mom to come along for the trip—a sort of girls-only getaway. *The more the merrier*, she was thinking. My mom had seen many weird sights in her life, but even so, I thought she would still need to consider whether she wanted to share the back seat of a car with an evacuating ewe on a long drive. But always one for a party, my mom accepted. I don't think she fully understood what she was getting into.

On the way there, we made a few stops at the side of the highway to allow the sheep out, but I don't know why. Without potty or leash training, it had to

be corralled every time back into the car after futile attempts to get it to do its business on command.

We eventually arrived at our destination, though I can't recall how, and were introduced to some strangers. Mandy and I, being 12-year-olds, were more interested in a large trampoline they had in their fenceless backyard. We jumped on it till the sun sank over the distant mountains and the mosquitoes came out, then we went inside. We never saw the sheep again, and I wonder now what happened to it—mutton chops were never served for dinner.

This story languished at the back of my mind for 30 dusty years until my mom came to visit me from the UK one time, and in the middle of a conversation blurted out: "Sue, do you remember that friend of yours who lived on Devil's Peak and invited us on a weekend getaway with a sheep?"

