



# JOYFUL AGING ON AN ISLAND GETAWAY

by THELMA FAYLE

Rob Selmanovic may be a brilliant somatic yoga teacher, but when you hear the Hollyhock chef peel the breakfast gong, you drop your relaxation pose and dash like an upward facing dog to the dining hall.

The delicious, mostly-vegetarian food is legendary, but forewarning: getting to and from the remote Cortes Island lifelong learning centre founded in 1983 isn't easy. It's three ferry rides from Vancouver – off the west coast of Canada. But the food alone is worth all efforts.

In six visits to Hollyhock over the last two decades, I have made the most of the “clothing optional” beach. But since there was a photography course being offered during my August holiday, causing the beach to be thick with a photographer bloom; I decided to make my bathing suit my birthday suit on the morning of my 60th.

In the ocean just after 6 a.m. and exhilarated at beginning the new decade with a west coast swim; I walked out of the sea as the sun was coming up. My partner, Daryl, one of the student photographers, took an amazing photo.

Not many women my age will appreciate being pictured in a bathing suit, but the dawn lighting in silhouette can be generous. I recommend all who venture to try this shot: steer clear of side views.

Later, on my second morning swim, I tread water and chatted with Stacy, a hospice nurse of 35 years from Utah. The cold surrounding H2O makes for an instant bond and a

succinct chat between two chilling gals. As a hospice volunteer, I was able to share a few Canadian palliative tales about the progressive wonders of our hospice scene.

I headed to the outdoor hot tub to warm up, and met two young girls, 14 and 15, who told me about their hopes – one of becoming a psychiatrist and the other was thinking she might like to be a counsellor. Hollyhock is a friendly place where exchanging personal yarns is the norm. I suggested they may find some career hunting tips in the old standard *What Colour is Your Parachute* book that gets updated every year. Not sure, but I think they gave me the polite smile-for-the-old-fogey nod.

They did savvy me up on the latest island teenage trend of mid-night bioluminescence swims while enjoying their last work-free summer.

The evening of my 60th was capped with a three-hour kayak paddle to witness bioluminescence with a group of a dozen paddlers all wearing multi-coloured glo-in-the-dark halos. Two guides, wearing Rudolf-esque red headlamps, bracketed our group.

By 9 p.m. the water and the trees in front of us were raven-black with only a faintly discernable horizon of treetops against the slightly lighter sky. By the time we reached Big Rock Bay, the

ABOVE | The author takes a swim on the morning of her 60th birthday as her partner captures a sunrise silhouette. Photo: Daryl Jones

bioluminescence was thick in the wake of each kayak and paddle stroke. The swirl of brilliant sparkle reminded me of the stuff that shoots out of Tinkerbell's wand. Trailing a hand in the water aside the kayak ignited the plankton in the same way.

One of the paddlers, the younger of an aunt-and-niece team visiting from Thailand, wondered aloud if “humans had the capacity to shine in as exhilarated a fashion as the plankton does.” The translucent spark in the water damn near brought her to tears.

Lazing away on the beach the next morning, reading *The Cleft* by Doris Lessing, made me realize I really like being a slug on a holiday. After all these years, that was new information.

We had planned to go for a swim in Hague Lake, only because of the description given by a young “Cortezian” man (as he called himself): When I asked why anyone would swim in a lake with the ocean right there, he said: “because you feel so clean when you come out of that pristine water.”

But when we got there, a very long line of cars parked along the road discouraged us. We retreated to swim in the sea.

Aside from the photography class, there were two other courses being offered. I had a chance to chat with participants from both. The “Myth of Aging” participants were struck by their leader, Martha Peterson's discussion of pandiculation and sensory motor amnesia. I had to buy the book after chatting with one enthralled participant.

Tracy Themes presented an excellent evening to Hollyhock guests and the Cortes community members. Money, Mindfulness and Magic offered some insightful financial empowerment ideas about reducing the unproductive shame so many people connect with having too much money or not enough money. She was full of fresh takes about personal finances.

“Your financial situation should be as beautiful as the Hollyhock garden,” she says, “somewhat random and rambling, but more or less well-planned, well-ordered, and well-maintained.”

Another presenter-evening allowed Charles Steinberg, the photography instructor, to show some of the fine work of his nine students aged 14 to 70. The images looked like the product of a high-end LA photo shoot and hardly the work of beginners. Sunsets, beaches, birds, and skateboard park scenes communicated how students had worked hard to find fresh, passionate expression.

As a bonus, Steinberg showed the audience of 60 curious guests a few images from his work as a physician in Sierra Leone during the ebola epidemic. “I needed to go there,” he said as he began his presentation. The doctor, photography instructor, and one of the co-founders of Hollyhock was every bit the inspiring presenter Daryl had found in the classroom over the five-day course.

Sitting out front of our beach cottage on the last day, soaking in the scape of ocean, mountains and massive trees, I feel saturated with soothing holiday contentment. Being 60 feels exhilarating.

Just a few feet away, an apple falls from the tree beside me. With time to ponder, I wonder: whatever could that mean? The introduction to somatic yoga practice has me acutely aware and pondering more than usual. |

**Thelma Fayle** is a Canadian freelance writer. She was a paying guest of Hollyhock on Cortes Island, BC.

## Discover Your Travel Groove

by BARBARA RISTO, Publisher

### Dining in Dubai



At the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding in Dubai, our Emirate host demonstrated the dining etiquette of eating with one hand. Kneeling throughout the meal, portions of rice and steaming curried stew are scooped up with the right hand and kneaded into a ball that is then popped into the mouth. Our attempts to do the same resulted in most of us resort-

ing to knife and fork to finish our meal. Our host joked that kneeling can be an effective diet plan because you're inclined to stop eating when your knees start hurting. This experience was part of a Collette guided tour. (Read more online at [www.seniorlivingmag.com/dubai-cultural-centre](http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/dubai-cultural-centre))

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