



Forgotten Females of
Salt Spring Island

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Exhibition catalogue for *Forgotten Females of Salt Spring Island* held at the Salt Spring Island Public Library from February 6 to 28, 2018 in Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, as a part of the Salt Spring Arts Council's Artists in Residence program.



Salt Spring Arts Council
114 Rainbow Road
Salt Spring Island, BC
V8K 2V5

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Authors: Regan Shrumm and Wendy Judith Cutler
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INTRODUCTION

According to the Salt Spring Island Archives' website, "From the sixties, artists and craftspeople...began arriving on the island."¹ This belief that artists did not appear on Salt Spring until the 1960s has been reinforced in many books by local historians including Charles Kahn's *Salt Spring: The Story of an Island*² and Bea Hamilton's *Salt Spring Island*.³ However, this discredits many artists who were working on the island before the 1960s.

As Jennifer Mundy, head of collections research at the Tate Gallery in London, England, states in her book *Lost Art*, "Art history tends to be the history of what has survived."⁴ Long before the 1960s, the Indigenous nations had been inhabiting and creating art on Salt Spring for thousands of years, with the earliest known archaeology evidence dated between 1800 and 200 BCE.⁵ There were several nations that lived permanently as well as seasonally on the island, including the Tsawout, Songhees, T'Sou-ke, Cowichan, Snuneymuxw, Penelakut, Lyackson, Hwlitsum, and Stz'uminus First Nations.⁶ These nations would have been producing both ceremonial objects and everyday items like blankets and baskets. While these objects would be considered art by Westernized museums today, these objects were not necessarily deemed as art by the nations. As Gitksan artist Doreen Jensen states, "In my language, there is no word for art. This is not because we are devoid of art, but because art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life..."⁷ Because of the practical use of the objects, their age, as well as the systemic colonization that attempted to take away cultural traditions and knowledges, many of these items have not been preserved or were taken away from Salt Spring. With a lack of cultural objects, this helped perpetuate the myth that Indigenous peoples never lived on Salt Spring Island before the 1860s.⁸

Other cultural communities that arrived before and during white settler immigration to Salt Spring, like the former Black enslaved peoples, Indigenous Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese, also would have had a mixture of tangible and intangible art forms. The latter would include

Opposite: Figure 1: Gwen Ruckle (left) and her mother, Lotus Ruckle (right) spinning wool, c. 1970s. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Ruckle Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.

oral storytelling, music,⁹ ceremonies, and medicinal plant knowledge.¹⁰ However, intangible art forms are even harder for historians to find evidence of, especially when the Black, Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, and Indigenous communities were severely suppressed on the island by the 1880s. By this time, Kahn explains that minority communities became “increasingly dismissed by the dominant society with a sweep of a hand or wag of the tongue as ‘half breeds.’”¹¹ In fact, by 1901, due to the growing anxiety of minority communities, the federal government required its citizens to answer what “colour” they were on the census, resulting in many families hiding their family heritage.¹²

Though Salt Spring would have had artists identifying as LGBTQ2 before the 1960s, again these individuals might not either be recorded or their gender or non-gender might not be noted.¹³ Queer and trans archives have now been established over the past two decades, but previously historical collections have had an absence of queer content. Boston-based non-binary trans artist Ria Brodell depicts this absence with Brodell's series *Butch Heroes*. This series contains drawings and stories of queer historical figures in order to demonstrate that “queer people have always been there throughout history, just trying to get by.”¹⁴ Through *Butch Heroes*, Brodell creates an “alternative archive... that rebuke heteronormativity and gender binaries”¹⁵ as queer history is often “brushed off as illness, romantic friendship, cross-dressing, fraud, or rewritten or censored to suit the time period.”¹⁶

While little to no evidence survives of early Black, Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Indigenous, or LGBTQ2 art on Salt Spring, there is still some art and archives that survived for another minority group: women. As historian Sheila McManus states, history, especially history from the North American West “has long been coded as quintessentially and exclusively male.... Narratives of the past that have been written to appear smooth and linear look a lot bumpier, more colourful and complex, after women’s historians get their hands on them.”¹⁷

Just like other minorities, historical women’s lives are often not recorded in archives. Because women were viewed as only having a domestic role of mother and wife, their lives were not considered



Figure 2: Sophie King, c. 1900s. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Joan Ingram Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 3: Self-portrait carving, c. 1950s, by Sophie King held at the Akerman Museum. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Salt Spring Island Archives and the Akerman family..

worth remembering.¹⁸ When traditional archives were formed, it was the records of male accomplishments that were collected. However, by including individual women's stories, attention can be given to understand how women, regardless of their location in historical time, have acted in their own interests, outside of the domestic role.¹⁹ As educator Margaret Walsh states, "Women must be integrated with the older materials that claimed to be history but were actually HIS story."²⁰ By reflecting on just women's stories, we are not only teasing out women's histories, therefore making contemporary women's voices stronger,²¹ but also communicating information about whole communities.

Salt Spring most likely has a longer art history dating back before the traditional archives were even created, but this history is hard to research with accuracy. For example, though I could have photographs of paintings by an artist named Maude Bridgeman (Figure 6), I could find almost no information about her in the archives. Still, through researching, three female artists who produced works before the 1960s were found in the Salt Spring Island Archives.²² There were, of course, countless female artists represented during and after the 1960s in the archives. However, one artist was featured for her connections to past artists, as well as her untraditional, yet successful practices that led the way for other Salt Spring Island artists. All four artists, Florence Walter, Sophie Purser King, Jessie Beryl Weatherell, and Mary Gwendolyn Ruckle, were all self-taught, but worked with different mediums, from watercolours to sculptures, from knitting to installation art. The main connecting factor between all four women is that they all built communities on Salt Spring through their artistic practices.

However, the way that each individual woman built their community was very different from each other. Florence Walter built her community from a women's organization, the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (Figure 4), where the group sold their artworks to make money for the war effort. Gwen Ruckle (Figure 1) had a similar sort of community, where she created art installations for local parties and flower shows. However, Ruckle came from a time when art was becoming a bigger economic and cultural influence



Figure 4: The Dedication Ceremony of the Gulf Islands Honour Roll, 1920. The Honour Roll listed all Gulf Islanders who served in World War I. The IODE helped erect this monument as well as a cenotaph, dedicated to those who lost their lives in World War I. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Salt Spring Island Archives.

on the island, and therefore Ruckle was more supportive in trying to create viability in the arts as a culture, not as a “hobby.” Beryl Weatherell (Figure 5) recorded a community through her daily sketches of Salt Spring Island life, which she would later use to sentimentally recount the neighbourly days of the past. Sophie King (Figure 2) unknowingly built a community between the Indigenous peoples and settlers through her carvings, though Sophie preferred to build a community through her own family.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, women did not have time for artistic pursuits. They were in charge of all the domestic chores, carrying for their children, and assisted with farming duties; this hard work was made more time consuming due to rural life on Salt Spring. There were many dangerous elements on the island, including animals; there were many stories of women having to vigilantly watch their children from possible cougar attacks.²³ Modern conveniences like electricity and telephones came a lot later to the island compared to the Greater Victoria and Vancouver areas.²⁴ Those who created art had the privilege of time and money, which was often due to their high-society class or the fact that they did not have any children in their household. Etiquette books reinforced that particular arts, such as needlework, knitting, or painting, were suitable “accomplishments” for women, as they would prepare them for family life.²⁵

Living in a rural area led to a lot of isolation, loneliness, hard physical labour, and an abundance of medical complications for women.²⁶ World War I presented women on the island, as well as all over Canada, with new opportunities for education and employment.²⁷ Women on the home front assumed a primarily patriotic role, serving as the core of the nation’s identity who was supposed to uplift both the home front community and the men on the warfront.²⁸ Just before and after World War I, women’s organizations started to establish on the island including the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire in 1914 and the Women’s Institute in 1902. These organizations provided a time for socializing, educating, and helping to build community. However, not everyone liked these women’s organizations. During the first meeting of the Salt Spring Island Women’s Institute, the men were so



Figure 5: Beryl Weatherell (right) on a picnic with her friends B.M. Pemberton (left) and Kathleen (centre). Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Beryl Scott Diaries Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.

suspicious of their involvement that more men than women attended the first meeting.²⁹

Really, the title of this catalogue is a bit of a misnomer. Indeed, these artists are not really “forgotten” as many islanders still remember interacting with them, especially the more contemporary women. Even when their stories are gone from oral histories, their artworks and images will live on in personal collections and archives. Really the artists who are forgotten are the ones whose artworks and stories no longer remain, which is often due to their non-white or non-heterosexual status.

Still by bringing these four women’s histories into the public, I hope to introduce Salt Spring Islanders to a different view of their history and traditions. These individual stories can be easily swept aside by larger narratives, so by re-shaping these narratives in small, but critical ways, different realities can be reflected.³⁰ Allowing contemporary islanders a chance to see their ancestors and historic people as actors who engendered this region may encourage greater community building in the future. Usually, “community” is a nostalgic term that individuals wish to recreate in contemporary life.³¹ However, as Wendy Judith Cutler exemplifies in her personal essay, “The Intimacy of Community Arts Engagement,” women building communities on the island is a practice that continues today. As Christina Lanzl, director of the Urban Culture Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, states art is “a vehicle and centrepiece in connecting individuals to each other and to their localities....[It] has proven an excellent tool in invigorating neighbourhood activity and identity.”³²



Figure 6: *Trage Barn* by Maude Bridgman, c. 1910s. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.

1914

Minutes

At the meeting held in
the Mahon Hall on Sept
7th /14, it was decided
to form a chapter of
the "Daughters of the Em-
pire"

Moved by Mrs Scott

Seconded by Mrs C. Walter

Mrs F. Scott was elected

Regent by a standing vote

Moved by Mrs A. Walter

Seconded by Mrs Stevens

That Mr Halley should

be elected 1st Vice Regent

Moved by Mr D. Halley

Seconded by Mr Prentice

Mr Walcott elected 2nd

Vice Regent

Moved by Mrs Perkins

Florence S. M. Walter

(1859 – 1954)

Florence Walter (née Lowther) was born in Bristol, England on January 9, 1859.³³ Her biography is mostly a mystery, as like many women from her era, since the records mostly document Florence's husband, Edward Walter. It is unknown when Edward Walter arrived to Salt Spring from Bristol, England, but he most likely arrived with his older brother Arthur in the late 1880s to early 1890s. According to Rev. E. F. Wilson's monthly newsletter, *Salt Spring Island Parish and Home*, in June 1897, "Mr. Edward Walter...has done a wise act in taking to himself a wife. The lady arrived from England...and the marriage ceremony took place in Vancouver."³⁴ As both Florence and Edward came from Bristol, the couple may have known each other before Florence travelled to Canada.

Florence and Edward were quite community oriented and both joined several organizations on Salt Spring. Edward was at one time the treasurer of the St. Mark's Anglican Church,³⁵ the secretary of the Farmer's Institute,³⁶ the secretary of the Salt Spring Island Creamery Association,³⁷ the secretary of the Salt Spring Island Club,³⁸ and part of the building committee of Central Hall.³⁹ Meanwhile, Florence was the organist for the St. Mark's Anglican Church and St. Paul's Church,⁴⁰ a founding member and president of the St. Marks Ladies' Guild,⁴¹ and the secretary of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) (Figure 7).⁴²

The IODE is a national women's charitable organization that was founded in 1900 by Margaret Polson Murray in Montreal. Murray encouraged women to promote patriotism, loyalty, and service to others.⁴³ The Ganges chapter of the IODE started on September 7, 1914, and for the years that Florence was involved, the organization was mostly involved in supporting the efforts of World War I.⁴⁴ The women in the organization knitted socks and other clothing items to send to the Red Cross (Figure 8). The chapters of Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire alone knit more than two million items

Opposite: Figure 7: The H.M.S. Ganges IODE Chapter minute book between 1914-1918. This first page of the book was handwritten by Florence Walter on September 14, 1914 when she was the secretary of the chapter. Courtesy of Salt Spring Island Archives.

during World War I.⁴⁵ The Ganges chapter also raised money by orchestrating social events, such as fancy dress dances at Mahon Hall, pantomimes, and concerts. In addition, the women of IODE sold their arts, including handmade jewellery, knitted socks, and paintings, at a stall in Fulford Harbour during the winter holiday and summer seasons,⁴⁶ with the proceeds going to the Red Cross and YMCA. In many ways, this was a precursor to the Salt Spring Island Saturday Market, which did not begin until 1973.⁴⁷ Some of the paintings that were created by the IODE women were even donated to one of the local schools. In the minute books of the IODE from 1914 to 1918, Florence Walter is described as both the “undertaker of the knitting committee” and the “supporter of the painting project.”⁴⁸

The IODE would have allowed Florence an opportunity to meet like-minded women, but also exchange dress and knitting patterns, give household and artistic tips, and gossip over community news.⁴⁹ As historians Catherine C. Cole and Ann Milovic explain, “Working together for various community projects helped women to improve their skills and gave them more confidence in their own abilities.”⁵⁰ During her time at the IODE and the St. Marks Ladies' Guild, Florence may have taught other women how to paint and knit, and therefore spread an appreciation for the arts on Salt Spring. This was especially needed during a time when many women were sitting at home worrying over their enlisted sons and husbands. Having a creative outlet would have provided a means of stress reduction and self-expression; therefore, as historians Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A. Deacon explain, “As they had been doing for centuries, women used these mediums to make their own political statements.”⁵¹

As Florence and Edward had no children, Florence had lots of time to devote to the community compared to other women from the same era. This free time would have also allowed Florence to paint. The watercolours that remain of Florence Walter depict a different era than many contemporary Salt Springers are used to. Florence’s watercolours both demonstrate a natural wildness and the beginnings of settler cultivation. In the background of her painting of the log cabin, Florence paints an endlessly dense forest. However, in the foreground,



Figure 8: A Red Cross recruitment poster for knitted goods made by the American Lithographic Company between 1914-1918. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-7756.

the three stumps demonstrate that the land was beginning to be cleared to make way for new homes. For the most part, Florence's colour palette is a mixture of brown and green tones, but occasionally she places areas of yellow and red that enliven the painting. Though there are no people in her paintings, Florence adds small details that show that these homes and areas are not abandoned, such as the drawn curtains at the Ruckle farmhouse (Figure 10) or the patterned rugs on an ocean-view landscape (Figure 9). These paintings remind us that even in the early 20th century, settlers were still living very quaintly.



Figure 9: Untitled watercolour painting by Florence Walter. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 10: Untitled watercolour painting of the Ruckle farmhouse by Florence Walter. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 11: Untitled watercolour painting by Florence Walter. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Sophie Purser King (1880 – 1975)

Sophie King (Figure 12) was born in 1880 at Beaver Point to Sara Fisher (a woman from the Cowichan Nation) and George Purser (an English magistrate). Sophie grew up with a large family that struggled to make ends meet. A teacher from the Burgoyne Bay school was distressed that the Purser children were “not very well provided with shoes & clothing...in this cold weather.”⁵² George Purser’s land was “too difficult to be cultivated,” while George himself was “almost helpless with paralysis,” and had to rely on his wife.⁵³ George was so dependent on Sara, that the couple was married in 1879. Though according to the 1881 census, 57 percent of children on Salt Spring were of mixed race, the ceremony of marriage often did not occur between settlers and Indigenous peoples during this time.⁵⁴

By around 1881, Sara Purser worked at a local Salt Spring inn and would occasionally travel to Victoria, where she completed odd jobs like washing clothes and nannying. While Sara was at work, Sophie was with her. Sophie’s daughter-in-law Gladys King explains how at the inn, patrons would spoil little Sophie; as Gladys describes, “So when she was around three, her [step] brother George realized that she was getting far too spoiled. Something would have to be done.”⁵⁵ George Fisher, a son from Sara’s previous marriage, went to the Sisters of St. Ann’s boarding school in Duncan, British Columbia, where some of Sara’s older daughters were attending. The Sisters of St. Ann was a Roman Catholic institution founded in Quebec to promote the education of rural children. The Sisters of St. Ann for Indian Girls in Duncan was for Indigenous and mixed-descent children. While the sisters did decide that Indigenous children should be given an elementary education, they felt it was more critical to civilize them through domestication and manual work.⁵⁶ George Fisher convinced the sisters to take Sophie, even at the early age of three. At the boarding school, Sophie would have learned embroidery, sewing, and knitting.⁵⁷

In 1897, at the age of 17, Sophie left the boarding school and moved to Victoria, Seattle, and then Tacoma, acting as a nanny and chambermaid for an inn. However, by 1900 Sophie moved back to Salt Spring, where she met a logger named Leon King. Later that same year, Sophie and Leon were married.

By marrying a non-Indigenous man, however, Sophie gave up her rights as an Indigenous woman. This was due to the 1869 Enfranchisement Act and was continued through a series of Indian Acts, where the federal Canadian government decreed that “an Indian woman who married a non-Indian man lost her status as a registered Indian, as did her children.”⁵⁸ This meant that a woman’s racial identity was followed by that of her husband, at least in the legal sense.⁵⁹ However, Sophie kept her Indigenous identity and culture with her and even shared it with her family. Sophie spent a lot of time with her half-brother’s wife, Maria Mahoi (Figure 13), a woman of Hawaiian and Canadian Indigenous heritage. Maria lived on Russell Island and would have her family’s mail delivered to Sophie’s house, which was just across the water on Beaver Point.⁶⁰ During Maria and Sophie’s time together, they might have each spoken their native language to each other.⁶¹ As historian Jean Barman explains, “For Maria, the heart of community lay not in the social pretensions coming to the fore on Salt Spring, but in family.”⁶² Maria apparently understood Indigenous foods and their utility and often told origin stories; Maria taught these skills to her family.⁶³ Sophie, who may not have known much of her Cowichan traditions due to growing up in a residential school, most likely had Maria rekindle some intangible Indigenous art forms for her.

From 1902 to 1914, Sophie gave birth to six children. Later in life, when the children had grown up, Leon became a boat builder, with Sophie working with him. While boatbuilding, Sophie learned how to carve and whittle. Without young children to take care of, Sophie began carving driftwood pieces that she found on the beach near her Beaver Point home. Sophie chose driftwood with natural curves so the artist could exaggerate the shape. In other occasions, Sophie would use scrap wood pieces from boats. Some of the pieces are minutely altered, such as the cougar, whose knotted lower body has been painted to



Figure 13: Portrait of Maria Mahoi, 1885. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of The Charles Kahn Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 14: Heron carved by Sophie King, unknown date. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of The Bob Akerman Museum Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives and the Akerman family..



Figure 15: Seal carved by Sophie King, unknown date. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of The Bob Akerman Museum Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives and the Akerman family.

enhance the driftwood burls. Sophie first carved the local animals that she was familiar with, such as a heron (Figure 14), a squirrel, and woodpecker, but then moved on to more unusual animals or mythical creatures like an Ogopogo, the lake monster who supposedly lives in Okanagan Lake.

Sophie displayed her carvings around the front and back yards of her house (Figure 16). Both Salt Spring Islanders and tourists travelled to see her artwork. However, Sophie did not sell any of her artwork until 1964, when she sold her home and carvings to Bob Akerman.⁶⁴ But by continuing to keep her artwork outside, Sophie must have enjoyed the attention that her art was bringing her.

Though Sophie often kept to her own family, the interest in her art was unusual for the time. Many people were interested in traditional Indigenous carvings since in the 1930s to 1940s, the style known as “primitive” was popular.⁶⁵ However, Sophie’s carvings are not typical of other Coast Salish carvers, such as her contemporary Kwakwaka’waka carver Ellen Neel, who played an active role in popularizing Indigenous art in British Columbia.⁶⁶ During a time when Salt Spring was still exhibiting prejudiced against non-white peoples, the fact that so many people were interested in having a conversation with Sophie shows the power in using art as a linkage to communities.

Sophie’s carvings are very reminiscent of New Mexico folk artist Felipe Archuleta, who also carved animals out of found objects. While Felipe’s work emphasizes the ferocious nature of animals (Figure 17), by providing irregularly carved teeth and exaggerated claws, Sophie’s focus is on the unique qualities of each animal, such as the wingspan of an eagle and the curving S-shape of a seahorse. While Sophie’s carvings are not realistic, she captures the essence of each animal, such as the alertness of a seal pup or the quiet stillness of a heron.



Figure 16: Sophie King, with her great-granddaughter, Tracey Myers, in Sophie's yard, unknown date. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of The Mildred Myers Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 17: *Squirrel* by Felipe Archuleta, 1974. Courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1997.124.46A-B. Photographer unknown. Gift of Chuck and Jan Rosenak and museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment.



Jessie Beryl Weatherell (1899 – 1985)

Jessie Beryl Weatherell (née Scott) (Figure 18) was born in 1899 in Ganges to Frank Scott (a farmer from Yorkshire) and Kathleen Wilson (one of the daughters of Reverend Edward Francis Wilson, an Anglican vicar on the island).

Beryl had an affluent childhood. She went to school in the Ganges Private School created to appeal to children of English heritage.⁶⁷ Beryl seems to have kept her heritage throughout her life; in 1965, when Beryl was interviewed for the CBC series *Living Memory*, she distinctly had a British accent, even though throughout her life she had never left Canada. Beryl grew up playing tennis and field hockey, and would even join her mother for IODE meetings, during the same time that Florence Walter would have been secretary of the IODE.

Beryl started to keep journals in 1911 at the age of 12. Through her journal, Beryl recorded her daily activities, as well as drew doodles and sketches of Salt Spring Islanders (Figure 19). In her journals throughout the year, Beryl fluctuates between drawing faces, small scenes of island life, and complicated scenes, where the figures speak or Beryl comments on what is occurring. These later drawings are more reminiscent of Emily Carr's sketches. Housed at the BC Archives, Carr has a mixture of doodles, humorous observations (Figure 20), and even a graphic calendar, where the artist creates a written and drawn summary for each month in 1909. For both women, these sketches allowed them to flex their creative muscles through quick drawings, as well as look at comical everyday occurrences.

Beryl reflects in her journal that she wrote and drew every night before she went to bed, most likely in the privacy of her bedroom.⁶⁸ This could mean that Beryl was recording Salt Spring life without the others' knowledge.



Figure 19: *Victoria January 21, 1916* by Beryl Weatherell, 1916. Courtesy of the Beryl Scott Diaries Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 20: *The Intelligent Way in Which He Drinks Milk...* by Emily Carr, unknown date, PDP06089. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Beryl kept her journal going until 1937, but in 1939, Beryl's oldest child, David, started a journal at the age of 10.⁶⁹ David's journal combines notes and drawings by both David and Beryl (Figure 22). In David's journal, Beryl uses a lot more colour than in her own notebooks, making her drawings a bit more whimsical, yet lively. Perhaps this style change is due to the fact that she wanted to inspire her young son.

Beryl came from a line of observers of the Salt Spring Island community. Beryl's grandfather Reverend E.F. Wilson created an illustrated family journal in 1908 (Figure 23). In the journal, Wilson includes drawings from when he was 11 years old, as well as watercolours throughout his life. His subjects include several trips to England and the reverend's time running a residential school in Ontario with the Garden River First Nations. Wilson's watercolours are a bit less whimsical and more realistic than Beryl's drawings. However, this different artistic style could be explained by his personality, as Beryl called her grandfather "a very strict clergyman" who was sober and serious.⁷⁰

Beryl spends a lot of detail in her drawings on the hair and fashion (Figure 21) of the Salt Spring population. She was a socialite throughout the 1920s, as Beryl kept all the newspaper clippings of parties and dance programs that she attended. In 1922, Beryl's birthday⁷¹ was reported to be one of the "most successful" New Year's Eve parties on the island. Apparently, Beryl was also a fan of costume designing, and even won ladies' most original costume on a number of community parties.⁷²

By the early 1960s, Beryl moved from Salt Spring to Galiano Island, but she continued to be involved with the Salt Spring community. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, both Beryl's diary entries and drawings were reported on in the *Driftwood* to explain the early life of Salt Spring Island.⁷³ Beryl also wrote several letters to the editor, using her diary entries to explain past occurrences in weather and events.⁷⁴ In this way, Beryl was a keeper of Salt Spring Island knowledge that she shared through a public forum.



Figure 21: Untitled by Beryl Weatherell, 1919. Courtesy of the Beryl Scott Diaries Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.

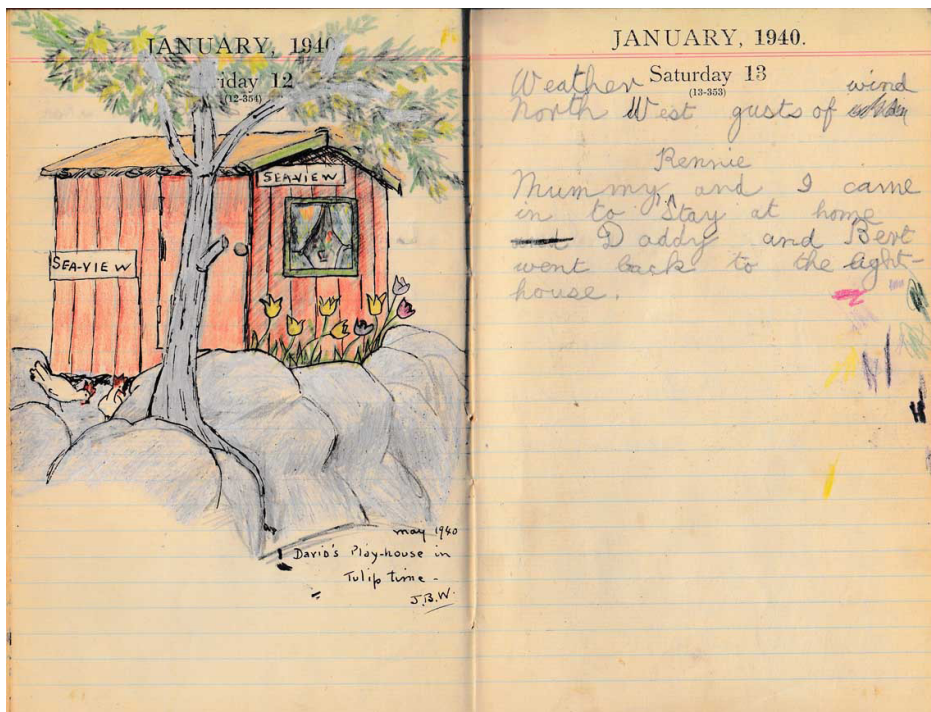


Figure 22: *David's Playhouse in Tulip Time* by Beryl Weatherell, 1940. Courtesy of the David Weatherell Diaries Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 23: *Reverend Wilson's Illustrated Family Journal* by E. F. Wilson, 1908. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Mary Gwendolyn Ruckle (1936 – 2006)

Gwen Ruckle (Figure 24) was born in 1932 at Beaver Point to Henry Gordon and Lotus Ruckle, two farmers who came from farming families. Just two years before Gwen was born, Henry and Lotus had moved into the old Ruckle farmhouse, which was built in 1876 by Gwen's grandfather Henry Ruckle.⁷⁵ However, Gwen spent much of her time at and even later moved into the Ruckle family's three-story Victorian farmhouse (Figure 26) that was built by Gwen's grandfather's half-brother Alfred Ruckle in 1906 on Beaver Point.

Just as Beryl Weatherall grew up surrounded by an artistic family, so did Gwen (Figure 25). The Victorian farmhouse that Gwen lived in was furnished by hand-crafted furniture made by Alfred Ruckle. The house also included many handwoven rugs that were created by Alfred's wife, Helen; these were crafted from wool from their own sheep.⁷⁶ Gwen's great aunt Agnes was a painter before she tragically died in a swimming accident in 1905.⁷⁷ Gwen's great-grandfather was John A. Fraser, a British/Canadian watercolourist who was involved in the formation of a number of art societies in Montreal and Toronto.⁷⁸ Indeed, the Ruckle family had quite the arts community contained just amongst family members in Beaver Point, just as Sophie King had her family community.

Throughout her life, Gwen worked on the family farm, where she learned about sheep, farming, nature, and her own family history on Beaver Point. When not helping with the farm, entrepreneurial Gwen established a couple side businesses through the arts. For over twenty-five years, Gwen and her mother Lotus cleaned, washed, and spun the family's sheep's fleece to create wool, which was used to knit Cowichan-like sweaters. The sweater business must have been booming for the women, as Lotus stated in an interview, "Sweater orders may take several years to fill. Sometimes the days aren't long enough. It doesn't look like we're ever going to catch up."⁷⁹



Figure 25: Ruckle Family with friends sitting on the original Ruckle farmhouse. Photo includes Alfred Ruckle on the right in the back row and Agnes Ruckle in the front on the right, ca. 1890s. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Ruckle Family Photographic Collection, the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 26: Alfred Ruckle's 1906 house, 1995. Photographer: Jonathan Yardley. Courtesy of the Jonathan Yardley Collection, Salt Spring Island Archives.

Gwen was also an oil and watercolour painter, who was inspired by the nature around her. Her work is influenced by Emily Carr (Figure 27), in terms of bold colours, broad brushstrokes, and an attempt to capture the liveliness of nature. In fact, Gwen would often paint on her journeys around the island and set up a tent in order to paint *en plein air*, or outdoors, just as Carr once did. During the summers throughout the 1960s, Gwen even taught classes on outdoor painting to young children once a week.⁸⁰ From this special experience, new budding artists could have been encouraged to continue developing their creative skills.

Just like Florence Walter, Gwen was very involved in many community organizations. But just like Sophie King, some of Gwen's art was ahead of its time. By choosing unconventional art mediums, Gwen could be creative and side step the politics of the art world. As artist Pamela Allara states, "Beginning in the 1960s, the burgeoning realm of art offered women artists inspired by feminism an arena that... circumvent[ed] the predominantly male-controlled museum-gallery system."⁸¹

A *Driftwood* article by Bea Hamilton from April 4, 1963, explains Gwen's contribution to the 10th annual Bean Supper at the Beaver Point Community Hall: "The decorations look like Gwen Ruckle's work—and there is a clever bit over the stage—a painted woodland scene and in front a window-box with real live skunk lilies among ferns, moss, etc."⁸² From this description, it sounds as though Ruckle created an art installation, which is a type of artistic genre where three-dimensional work is designed to transform a space. Often, installation art has many different individual pieces, but it is supposed to be seen as a completely unified experience. Though there were important influences starting in the 1930s, installation art did not become standard until the late 1960s.⁸³

Gwen Ruckle's combination of paintings and real flowers is not a common combination that an artist would have made during this period. Instead, the description might be more reminiscent of contemporary Minnesota artist Gregory Euclide (Figure 30), who

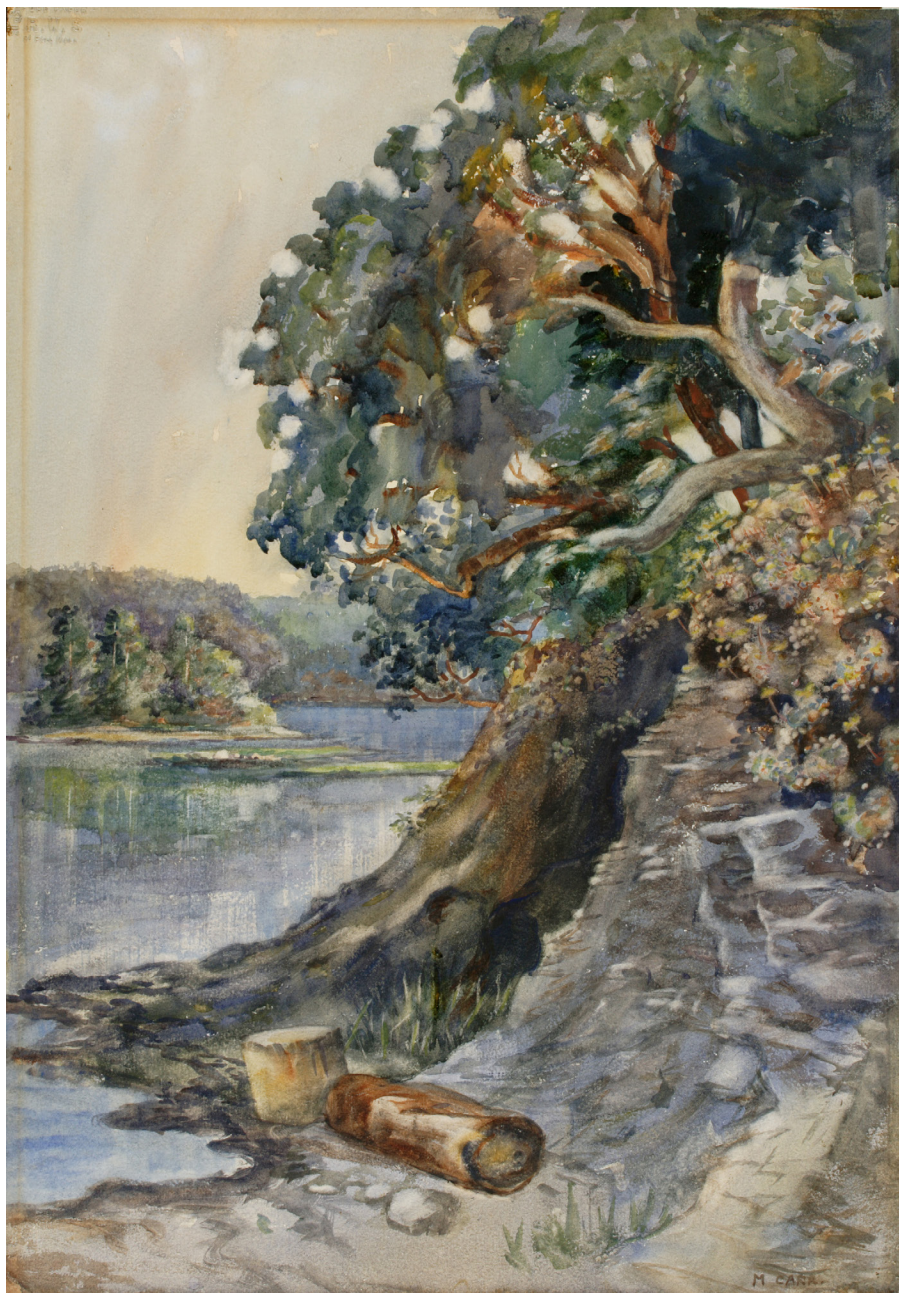


Figure 27: *Arbutus Tree* by Emily Carr, c.1909, 2005.025.001. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. In memory of Jennet and Louis Davies, Edith and Oswald Parker and James R. Davies, with thanks to Emily Carr, these works are donated by N.E. Davies, Brian, Bruce and Kevin Davies.



Figure 28: *Untitled* by Gwen Ruckle, unknown date. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.



Figure 29: *Untitled* by Gwen Ruckle, unknown date. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Salt Spring Island Archives.

combines two-dimensional paintings with flowers, firs, and sculptural objects to confuse the visual space and question what is human-made and what is natural.⁸⁴

Gwen also seemed a revolutionary when it came to other forms of art practices. During the 1966 Salt Spring Island Chrysanthemum Society and Garden Club Spring Flower Show held at Fulford Hall, Ruckle curated an exhibition: “The stage was an added centre of interest where paintings of our talented local artists were exhibited. The painting and ceramic exhibit was staged by Miss Gwen Ruckle of Beaver Point, assisted by Mrs. R. G. Crosby of St. Mary Lake.”⁸⁵ Looking at previous Chrysanthemum Society shows, this appears to be the first exhibition that let in mediums other than flowers.⁸⁶ But unlike the flowers, the paintings and ceramics were not juried for a prize; instead, they were selected to create a welcoming and appealing space, just as a curator would do.



Figure 30: Installation shot from the exhibition *Otherworldly: Optical Delusions and Small Realities* by Gregory Euclide at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, NY, 2011. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the artist.

Conclusion

Salt Spring artists building communities did not end when an immigration of artists came to the island in the late 1960s. If anything, Salt Spring Island flourished even more due to the flood of creativity. For example, in 1967, Juanita Brown, the adult education coordinator for the Gulf Islands School District started the Gulf Islands Community Arts Council, which held workshops on a variety of artistic mediums.⁸⁷ By 1968, the council had begun Artcraft, an annual exhibition that invited professional and emerging artists to display their art at Mahon Hall.⁸⁸ Starting in the late 1960s, artist guilds started to form, including the Salt Spring Potters Guild in 1969, the Salt Spring Painters Guild in 1972, the Salt Spring Island Weavers and Spinners Guild in 1972, and the Salt Spring Island Basketry Guild in 1997. These guilds were formed to share techniques, promote their arts, bring outside artists into the community, and even challenge the status quo of the mediums. Beginning in 1989, the Salt Spring community, thanks to the efforts of Lawrie Neish, April Curtis, and Bob Hassell, fundraised to build ArtSpring, the nearly 12,000 square foot building complete with theatre and visual-arts wing.⁸⁹ The list of accomplishments of artistic achievement for Salt Spring could go on.

However, the community must not just dwell on the past, but instead invest in the future. One way to do this is to build on the knowledge and traditions of a cultural past, and infuse this with the present to create a community for the future.⁹⁰ By telling these four historic narratives, I hope that Salt Spring Islanders are encouraged to work from this knowledge to adapt, critique, and apply to their own practice in order to better the community. Even as I write this, I have been inundated by stories about all four women and how they connect to present Salt Spring families and neighbours. As community consultant Peter Block explains, “The arts are an essential part of the story of what it means to be a human being...”⁹¹ and therefore the arts are a necessary part of building communities. The arts can help expand a shared sense of belonging which is needed to establish the social fabric of communities.⁹² By demonstrating the value of art as a practice that can promote new ways of thinking, critique status quos, teach new skills, and identify who we are, perhaps then more communities will be nurtured.

Notes

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- 3 Bea Hamilton, *Salt Spring* (Burnaby, BC: Mitchell Press, 1969), 175.
- 4 Jennifer Mundy, *Lost Art: Missing Artwork of the Twentieth Century* (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2014), 10.
- 5 Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 17.
- 6 Ibid, 16 and Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram, "Solidarity with indigenous communities engaged in their territories on Salt Spring Island," KEXMIN field station, <http://gordonbrentingram.ca/KEXMINfieldstation/2017/06/12/salt-spring-island-solidarity-with-the-indigenous-communities-already-active/>
- 7 Viviane Gray, "A Culture of Art: Profiles of Contemporary First Nations Women Artists," in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, edited by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Madeleine Dion Stout, and Eric Guimond, 267-281 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 268.
- 8 Chris Arnett, "Indigenous History of Salt Spring Island," Local News, <https://saltspringexchange.com/2016/02/03/indigenous-history-of-salt-spring-island/>
- 9 Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 109.
- 10 Jean Barman, *Maria Maboi of the Islands, Revised Second Edition* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2017), 78.
- 11 Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 132.
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- 13 For example, according to a personal conversation with Gillian Watson, one of the four women in this book, Gwen Ruckle, is thought to be possibly identifying as either lesbian or asexual. However, as Gwen did not talk about her sexuality/non-sexuality in public, it is hard to tell Gwen's sexuality/non-sexuality in the archives.
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- 18 Jean Barman, "Writing Women into the History of the North American West, One Woman at a Time," in *One Step Over the Line, Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Shelia McManus, 99-127 (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 99.
- 19 Barman, "Writing Women into the History of the North American West, One Woman at a Time," 100.
- 20 Margaret Walsh, "Gendered Steps Across the Border: Teaching the History of Women in the American and Canadian Wests," in *One Step Over the Line, Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Shelia McManus 385-409 (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 386.
- 21 Jennifer Colby, "Artist as Scholar: Scholar as Artist," in *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism*, edited by Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka, 293-302 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 298.
- 22 Male Salt Spring artist pre-1960s were also few and far between when researching. There is Reverend E.F. Wilson, who is mentioned in this essay as an influence for his granddaughter, Jessie Beryl Weatherell. In the 1891 census, there are two men, F.L. Lakin and Sherman White, who marked themselves as painters for their occupation. "Census of Canada," Salt Spring Island Archives, <https://saltspringarchives.com/census/1891.pdf>. However, nothing more could be found on these two individuals.
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- 26 Mary Murphy, "Latitudes and Longitudes: Teaching the History of Women in the US and Canadian Wests," in *One Step Over the Line, Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Shelia McManus, 411-425 (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 417.
- 27 Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identity at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 2.
- 28 Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A. Deacon, *American Women Artists in Wartime, 1776-2010* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 5.
- 29 Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 231.
- 30 Elizabeth Jameson and Shelia McManus, "Section Three: People, Places, and Stores," in *One Step Over the Line, Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Shelia McManus, 95-98 (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 95.
- 31 Pamela Allara, with Ellen Driscoll and Mags Harries, "Conversations: The Parallel Universe of Public Art," in *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism*, edited by Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka, 303-313 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars

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- 32 Christina Lanzl, "Defining Place: Building Communities Through Public Art," in *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism*, edited by Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka, 239-250 (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 239.
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- 51 Calvin and Deacon, *American Women Artists in Wartime*, 93.
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Figure 31: The author (right), Wendy Judith Cutler, with her life partner Corrie Hope Furst, at the Salt Spring Island Pride Festival. Photographer: Jen MacLellan. Courtesy of the author.

The Intimacy of Community Arts Engagement

WENDY JUDITH CUTLER

COMMUNITY COMMUNING COLLABORATING CONNECTION
COMING TOGETHER CIRCLES CREATIVITY COMPASSION

“When we plant, when we weave, when we write, when we give birth, when we organize, when we heal, when we run through the park while the redwoods sweat mist, when we do what we’re afraid to do, we are not separate. We are of the world and of each other, and the power within us is a great, if not invincible power. Though we can be hurt, we can heal; though each one of us can be destroyed, within us is the power of renewal. And there is still time to choose that power.”

—Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*

Circles of Women

Bringing women together to write their lives is my passion and, for me, a necessity.

I have been writing my life since starting to write in a journal when I was nineteen, inspired by reading the diaries of Anais Nin and the memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir. The tumultuous 1970s transformed my life, as I was radically guided by the “personal is political” and entered into a lifetime of radical politics, feminism, writing, teaching and activism.

Since arriving on this magical Salt Spring Island, the traditional and unceded territories of the Coast Salish First Nation Peoples, I have been able to manifest my intention to create a sacred space for women to feel safe, supported and nourished. We can only be open, honest and vulnerable with ourselves when we feel safe and trusting.

These circles give me a sense of intimacy that I so crave.

I find that something magical occurs as women are drawn to these circles. The invitation to join other women to write, read aloud, share and witness their writings inevitably leads to a kind of intimacy that deepens as we continue to meet together. It always feels like a gift, offering these workshops and circles, encouraging, enticing women to write about and from their lives.

The intimacy that is generated within these circles is profound and moving. Coming together regularly—being in one another's presence—creates the potential for authentic sharing, dialogue and vulnerability that is so necessary to individual and collective growth. As we share our words, our thoughts, our lives, we see one another in our fullness. This inspires ever-deepening connections and a sense of community through sharing our words, our hearts and our lives.

We gather together in each other's living rooms, bringing treats to share, our journals, a pen (or a laptop) and a precious invisible collection of stories. During the next three hours, we alternate between writing, reading what we've written and sharing. We allow our writings and our creative selves to come forth. It's a process of deep listening, vulnerability and active trust-building. Sometimes we pull tarot or other divinatory cards to stir the creative embers. Other times we hear passages from recent or long ago memoirists, essayists or novelists (mostly always women) to inspire our own inner rumblings. Then, the room grows quiet and we write and write. Through the ritual of sitting and quietly writing together (and alone), the stories within us take flight, drawn from the well of our unconscious minds to be birthed on the living page.

To further ensure the continuity of the connections that we are creating, I have created monthly women's writing circles, composed of women who have taken a previous workshop. One of these circles has met for almost a decade and another for close to eight years. There has been some fluidity of participation, and two other circles have not, yet, materialized into monthly gatherings. Our ages range from late twenties through eighties. We have recently been collecting our stories about how we each came to live on Salt Spring Island. We are hopeful

to create a book, give readings and continue to share our writings and our lives with one another.

“Thank you for bringing together women of such diversity of age, background, and life experiences. It is through your love and skillful guidance that we prosper in our writing and the confidence to share our stories. What a wonderful experience it was, women celebrating our stories as we move out of darkness into the light. I brought home with me the warmth, the joy, and the stories of phenomenal women joining in circles to write, to share, to inspire, and to grow as far as our wings of creation will expand and soar.”

—Premilla Pillay, member of Circles of Women writing group

Our Island Communities

I am passionate about community.

I crave communing and gathering with others. It is an ardent need of mine. From the time I moved here with Corrie, my lovergirl-life partner, I have been engaged in community and the arts.

Communities are living, changing entities reliant upon the energetic and intentional commitment to be of service to others. Much as with our friendships and even our relationship with ourselves, communities require continued engagement, practice and renewed commitment.

The increasing anonymity of living in a city was becoming a regrettable feature of urban living. This became more apparent when we were visiting Salt Spring Island and returning to our lives in Portland, Oregon.

Moving to Salt Spring Island has opened up avenues that never would have existed had I remained living in the city. I have been offered opportunities to be part of the cultural, theatrical, musical, artistic life, not only as a participant but also as an organizer.

Being surrounded by water is also a naturally creative element to island life, inspiring, and supporting creativity and expressions of all kinds. Living on an island, even one of the size of Salt Spring, facilitates a kind of intimacy simply from interactions that come as you go about your life. Whether you want to or not, you are bound to pass someone you know, even if briefly or superficially. This, by its very nature, creates the potential for connections and friendship.

Creativity and Collaboration

“Part memoir, part writing practice, part inspiration, this book is a multi-voiced creation of three passionate and committed journal writers...reveals the depth and complexity that emerges from going to the blank page, transforming the act of writing into a catalyst for meaningful conversation, storytelling, mindfulness, personal growth, creative self-expression and mutual support.”

—Wendy Judith Cutler, Lynda Monk, and Ahava Shira,
Writing Alone Together

It is still quite amazing to me that I co-authored a book on journaling since I have lived here. After seven years of collaboration with two other island women, Lynda Monk and Ahava Shira, we birthed *Writing Alone Together: Journaling in a Circle of Women for Creativity, Compassion and Connection*.

We first met to journal together and then, intuitively, decided that we were writing a book that could be a resource to other women who wanted to write “alone and together.” I don’t feel that I could have created anything like this unless I was living here and connected with these two other writing sisters. All three of us continue to implement the practices in the diverse creative and community projects we’re involved with.

“When we feel that we are part of the world, we feel empowered and more hopeful. We are able to connect with others and feel part of a community. Acknowledging these connections creates the energies

that move us towards living more conscious lives.”

—Wendy Judith Cutler, *Writing Alone Together*

The Creative Arts

Salt Spring Island embodies a vibrant arts community, perhaps due to its size (larger than some islands and much smaller than most cities) but also through the vital contributions of artists and creators. Practically each week, rehearsals and performances are occurring, art exhibits and shows are mounted, readings, meetings and gatherings of all kinds are occurring. The main venues are well used, including community halls, schools, churches and homes.

“Corrie brought me to this magical island the year after we became lovers. We camped at the most beautiful campground in the world, overlooking the shimmering ocean as seals, herons, orcas and graceful ferries passed by. We returned nearly every summer after that, in early September, after the tourists and students left.... We both felt energetically pulled—to the beauty, the elements, the intimacy of living on an island, and fantasized living here.”

—Wendy Judith Cutler, "Crossing Boundaries"

When we were still visitors, I remember stepping into Salt Spring Books. On one row to the left of the entrance were books published by writers living here. This single row of books has expanded into an entire bookshelf of offerings. *Writing Alone Together* has a place on this shelf. The anthology from a small Vancouver Island press, Rebel Mountain Press, *Breaking Boundaries: LGBTQ2 Writers on Coming Out and Into Canada*, with Corrie and my co-written story, “Crossing Borders: A Lesbian Immigration Story in Two Voices,” was recently delivered to the store. It sits on the bookshelf across the aisle along with the Vancouver Island literary journal's *Island Writer Magazine*, which has a poem of mine in it titled, “We Wise Writing Sisters Gather Together”

Since 2010, through the “Artist in the Class” Program, funded by Salt Spring Arts Council, I have been bringing Creative Journalling



Figure 32: A Salt Spring Island women's writing circle from 2017 led by Wendy Judith Cutler. Photographer: Wendy Judith Cutler. Courtesy of the author.



Figure 33: Cast of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, 2018. Photographer: Metta Rose Photography. Courtesy of the artist.

into high school classrooms and mentoring girls and queer students in small workshops. Journalling unleashes and cultivates creativity of all kinds and the skills of self-awareness, reflection and courage. It encourages students to pay attention to the moment-at-hand, release anxieties, fears and worries. What is most important is that this is writing for themselves, not others.

“Journalling with other people is such a freeing, honest experience. It’s given me freedom to express and share my thoughts and feelings through writing. There’s a peaceful harmony that fills the room when we can listen and share with one another. Journalling has helped me grow as a person. It’s there for me when no one else is.”

—Melanie Gregory-Worsell, former GISS Student

My passion for intimacy and connection inspires me to participate in and create community, in all its various forms. Living on this island, I am able to merge many of my deep passions, dreams and concerns.

Theatre and Performance Arts

The magic of performance never fails to excite me, since my first ballet performance in *The Nutcracker* as an eight year-old with the Los Angeles Junior Ballet Company so many years ago. When we made Salt Spring Island our permanent home, I knew I would be offering women’s writing workshops. Little did I know that I would become part of the theatre community through performing, assisting and even organizing events and performances.

Performing and dancing in several theatre productions has been something that would never have happened if I had continued to live in a city. I have been in the casts of local productions of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Cabaret*. Corrie and I were also a couple in a production of *The Hard Times Hit Parade*, a re-creation of the dance marathons of the 1930s, an exciting venture with a Vancouver-based company, Dusty Flowerpot, directed by Kat Single-Dain.

As I am writing this, Corrie and I are performing as “Ball Dancers” in the revival of a Salt Spring Island classic, *Christmas with Scrooge*, an original creation of Ray and Virginia Newman, first performed in 1971. It is lovingly directed

and divined by their multi-talented and open-hearted daughter, Sue Newman, whose parents' integration of social justice and theatre arts live on within Sue.

“In the words of the Ghost of Christmas Past, ‘What power we have to make others happy or unhappy!’ It’s so simple, eh? We all have that power! That’s what social justice is all about and Dickens beautifully spells it out for us.”

—Sue Newman, program notes for *Christmas with Scrooge*

Being part of this production created a widening of my sense of “community” and a gratefulness for experiences like this to bring out the true spirit of “Christmas” for these two Jewish lesbian feminists, who usually feel somewhat depressed during this time of year.

The Queer Community

Knowing there was a substantial “out” queer community on this island was an important factor in us choosing to move here. We have been involved in various ways throughout our years living here. Showing up for LGBTQ Pride events has certainly been a priority. We’ve helped plan and participated in many of these and were part of a small group that conceived of and organized the island’s first Pride Parade in 2008. Our LGBTQ organization recently transitioned from GLOSSI (Gay and Lesbians of Salt Spring Island) to DAISSI (Diverse and Inclusive Salt Spring Island), reflecting the need to be more inclusive, diverse, intersectional and political in opposing and educating against oppressions of all kinds.

Just after Corrie and I arrived on the island, we participated in a staged reading of *The Laramie Project* about a town’s reactions to the homophobic murder of a young gay man in Laramie, Wyoming. It was a unique collaboration between high school theatre students, the queer and theatre communities. As I write this, we are in rehearsals for another staged reading of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, which I am organizing and is directed once again by the high school drama teacher, Jason Donaldson. Collaborations such as these are fruitful models for future events.

Arts Accessibility and Accountability

Community and local projects must be enthusiastically supported by Salt Spring Islanders and resources must be made available. Our theatre and community halls must be accessible and affordable so that artistic, cultural, political, social, educational and spiritually inclined artists are able to share their creativity and creations. Many cannot afford the financial cost of renting venues and producing events. The Salt Spring Arts Council offers grants and professional development funds, but these funds are limited. Much more needs to be available to nurture and support arts projects. It is incumbent upon the organizations and structures that highlight the arts to support as many community arts projects as possible.

Many of us take pride in all that Salt Spring has to offer us, but scores of us are unable to benefit. Those of us with the time and skills must willingly offer these precious commodities to those most in need of support and resources. Many on this island have unmet and unrecognized needs, often living in marginal or non-existent housing, forced to move when homeowners evict them to make room for higher paying guests or seasonal visitations. Some have to choose between rent, food, gas or other essentials, trying to make a living, relying on low wages and often unstable employment.

The “we” of us must include the most vulnerable and unsettled of us. In this exceedingly technologized society that seems to privilege speed and efficiency over traditional wisdom and practices, meeting face-to-face is one of the most important things we can do. Face-to-face, direct contact is what feeds me. On-line communication does not allow one to perceive and receive the more subtle nuances, engage our senses and exchange energies.

Coming Together

The more we come together, honour one another’s pursuits and physically show up and support the various events occurring daily and weekly, monthly and annually, the more enlightened, informed and compassionate we will be, individually and collectively. The combination of politics and the arts are an essential feature on this island. Nothing takes the place of this.

We need to listen to, honour and support the voices and experiences of those whose lives have been marginalized and, even worse, silenced. There is so much richness to draw from and yet in many ways a dearth of concrete mentorship and sharing of resources. This must also extend to the youth in our midst. Support of all kinds must be extended out to them so that they can feel acknowledged, respected and seen as an essential part of our communities.

As a lesbian feminist and social justice educator and activist, I have a commitment to collaboration, critical thinking and social justice. When I arrived as a permanent resident, with my lovergirl-life partner, I knew we would be laying down roots and connecting with others. That is a huge part of the reason we moved to this precious island. We feel that we are, finally, home and are so grateful to be living the lives we are living. I hope to continue to inspire others to honour the wisdom, power and potency of their words, creations and hearts.

The fact that “feminism” has been named “word of the year” by the American Merriam-Webster Dictionary hopefully indicates that more and more of us (of all genders and preferences) will identify as feminists. It is my fervent hope that our island, our communities, our collaborations, our creativities, our lives will be moving towards honouring this earth and all of its inhabitants.

Contributors

Iris McBride is a painter and retired nurse living in Duncan, BC, who formerly lived on Salt Spring Island. Between 1964-1967, she was a registered nurse at Toronto Western Hospital, and later worked Lady Minto Hospital on Salt Spring Island. From 1986 to 1989, Iris attended the Victoria School of Art in Victoria, BC. Under Salt Spring artist Kathy Venter, Iris studied clay sculpture from 1990-1993, and then later took workshops in 2004 at Emily Carr School of Art and Design in Vancouver, BC. Her work is available on Salt Spring Island at Rhubarb Design.

Regan Shrumm is an independent curator who is currently an uninvited guest on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen peoples. She received a master of arts in art history and visual studies from the University of Victoria. She is currently an assistant curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. She has previously held curatorial positions with Open Space and Legacy Art Gallery in Victoria, British Columbia, the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner, Washington, and the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. Her essays have been published in academic journals and exhibition catalogues such as *The Art of A. Banana Unpeeled* (Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and Open Space, 2017) and *Indigenous Influences* (Museum of Northwest Art, 2017).

Wendy Judith Cutler is a longtime radical teacher, writer and Jewish lesbian feminist activist who has taught women's studies and writing for more than thirty years. She was a contributor to *The Coming Out Stories* (Persephone Press, 1980), the first lesbian anthology of coming-out stories. She has been involved in grassroots lesbian feminist and queer politics, community-building and culture for several decades. She is co-author (with Lynda Monk and Ahava Shira) of *Writing Alone Together: Journaling in a Circle of Women for Creativity, Compassion and Connection* (Butterfly Press, 2014). Her poems have been published in *We'Moon 2011* and *the Island Writer Magazine*. Her essay (co-written with Corrie Hope Furst), "Crossing Borders: A Lesbian Immigration Story in 'Two Voices'" is published in the anthology, *Breaking Boundaries:*

LGBTQ2 Writers Coming Out and Into Canada (Rebel Mountain Press, 2017). She was a Lambda Literary Fellow in 2017 and her essay, “Hello Dear Ones,” is in the upcoming *Emerge: 2017 Lambda Literary Fellows Anthology (Volume 3)*, 2018. Through WomenWriting, she facilitates women’s journalling and memoir workshops and creates sacred circles of women writing together. Her work-in-progress is *Memoir of an Undutiful Daughter: Lesbian Feminist Transformation in the 1970s*. She lives on magical Salt Spring Island, the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, where she resides with her lovgirl-life partner of 31 years, Corrie, and their constellation of intimates.

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