

Over The Garden Fence

free newsletter of Sheila E. Tucker, author of *Rag Dolls and Rage*

Issue 1, 2020

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A message to you from the Editor-in-Chief

Hello! Welcome to the inaugural edition of my biannual newsletter. *Over The Garden Fence*. Think of it as an informal chat over the garden fence: a conversation that you are welcome to join in, simply by emailing your thoughts, as well as suggestions for future editions.

I'm starting *Over The Garden Fence* for several reasons. The first is I want a different way of communicating with my fellow humans beyond online chats and phone calls. Secondly, this newsletter is another way to keep in touch with readers of my memoir. Thirdly—and perhaps most importantly—this newsletter is meant to explore our better traits such as trust, compassion and understanding, as correctives to bullying, deceit, trauma and other societal challenges we face. For example, this edition contains an article explaining toxic positivity and suggesting strategies to avoid falling into this common behavior. Also, I profile SAVIS of Halton, an organization that supports survivors of abuse.

As well, *Over The Garden Fence* will contain humorous stories alongside puzzles, guest poets, artists and photographers. There are video clips—in lieu of live poetry readings and concerts—and regular columns such as “Ramblings”: my anecdotes and thoughts on life. “Memory Lane” will feature snippets of music and films certain to make you remember and smile.

Feel free to forward *Over The Garden Fence* to your family and friends. And if you received this copy from someone other than me, then you're welcome to sign up for future newsletters. Just say “Add me to your newsletter mail-out” and I'll be pleased to do so.

So, please meander through this edition of *Over The Garden Fence*. I hope you enjoy it and keep in touch. Stay well and safe.

Sincerely yours,
Sheila E. Tucker
Editor-in-Chief and Author
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In the 1970s, Gilbert O'Sullivan was one of the most admired pop-song artists in Ireland and Britain. In this stressful year of 2020, I believe his song "I'm Not Dreaming Of A White Christmas" is apt. I hope and think you'll agree.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI4e521HMr0>

"Peace on Earth/Little Drummer Boy"
Bing Crosby and David Bowie
in 1977

<https://bit.ly/3oLISie>

African Christmas traditions
plus beautiful scenes.

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=PSOuYLzCRKc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSOuYLzCRKc)

Although not a December
song, I can't resist posting
"Jerry Mouse and Gene Kelly
Dance - Anchors Aweigh"
(thank you fellow poet
Linda Cassidy for this one!)

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=2msq6H2HI-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2msq6H2HI-Y)

The folk group Peter,
Paul and Mary first
sang "Light One
Candle" in the 1980s.
It was written by
Peter Yarrow and
has enjoyed lasting
popularity.

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=h1cRXgDFiSs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1cRXgDFiSs)

Winter song for the
grandchildren: "Fun in
the Snow"

<https://bit.ly/3lhSv51>

This is an English translation of "Buddha
Song," an old favourite in the East.

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

Kveller has enjoyable Hanukkah songs, such as Michelle
Citrin's "Left to Right" and The LeeVees' "How Do You
Spell Channukkahh"

<https://www.kveller.com/article/top-ten-hanukkah-songs/>

Dancing in the dark (or should that be prancing?)

My childhood days in England included power cuts brought on either by (1) my family having forgotten to put change in the meter, or (2) regional power cuts due to rough weather or technical problems.

Reason #2, above, is common here in Canada too, of course.

Before I get to the point of this article, though, indulge me in a brief aside about #1. That meter—because younger people will be thinking “Eh?” Actually, some older, non-Brit folks might be thinking “Eh?” too.

We lived in my grandparents’ century-old, large rented house in Yorkshire. I know it’s still there, because a couple of relatives remain in the town, but I’m sure that indoor meter is long gone. (This was a metal box that measured our usage of electricity against how much money we put into it. Once the pre-paid energy was used up, it cut the power until we inserted more coins, unlike nowadays where we simply get a bill to pay.)

So. We’d all be watching the telly or listening to the wireless (what radios were called back then) and suddenly everything would go off: the lights and the TV screen. Actually, that’s all that would go off, because what else would be running on electric back then? Certainly not computers, because they didn’t exist. Not stoves, because most of us in England had gas cookers. Not heaters: we relied on coal fires. However, if someone had been reading the newspaper or a book, they’d be rather...um...annoyed, what with being suddenly blanketed in darkness.

Normally, the reason was #1. Nana would call me and I’d go over to where she was sitting in her usual corner surrounded by balls of wool and books. I’d be guided to her by glimmering moonlight coming through a window, perhaps, or by the glow of the coal fire. She’d give me a tanner, or a shilling or half a crown (yes, that was what we called our money then) because one of my favourite little jobs was to take the coin out to the hall near the front door and push it as far as

I could into the coin slot on the meter.

There’d always be a little bit that stuck out. This is where the hand crank came in. It was next to the slot. I’d give it a twist and in would go the remainder of the coin with a satisfying shove and clink, and bingo, we’d again be bathed in sound and light.

I would have exclaimed “son et lumiere!” at this point, but I didn’t know French then. Actually, I still don’t. As it was, I would skip back into the living room where Nana was once more crocheting a beret (an English one, not a French one), where Grandad was again cutting up a bowl of runner beans grown on his allotment whilst watching the news, and where other family members were continuing their board game at the dining table or else reading. I’d kneel in front of the fireplace and finish my drawing of stick-figures and spiky yellow suns.

Just in case nobody actually had any money; i.e., not the right change, or were “skint” (for non-Brits, that means “broke”), then we’d use candles for the evening. We always had a supply of candles for such emergencies. We could light them via a box of matches or from a flame in the fireplace. In candlestick holders, they could help us see our way into the kitchen or upstairs to bed.

I was remembering it all fondly, this last Halloween, after seeing a golden oldie in which someone is carrying a candlestick. And if you watch “A Christmas Carol” starring Alistair Sim this December, look for Scrooge carrying one. Ah, yes! That was us!

Want to know how life-changing revelations happen? Keep reading.

I arrived in Canada in 1985 and lived in several places in Vancouver, Toronto and now Oakville. I always maintained a store of candles “just in case the lights go out.” Something I always did without even thinking, after all, we always had done so, right?



When my husband and I moved into our first house (which we're still in), I mentioned something about making sure we had candles in case the power ever went off in a storm. David looked puzzled and asked why our flashlights weren't good enough.

"Ahem, 'torches' thank you very much, but I'll humour you," I said. "With a flashlight you can only shine it in one direction at a time. With candles, you can see 360 degrees." I sniffed in disdain.

"Well, er, sweetheart, do remember that we have a gas furnace here," he responded. "Our radiators and water are heated by gas."

"Your point is?"

"If there are ever hurricane winds like we sometimes get here now, in these climate-change times, an object may fly towards our house and crack the gas pipes. You know, a big branch or something. And if you happen to then light a candle, well...not a good idea, Sheila, really dangerous, actually. You could blow the house up under those circumstances. Let's stick with flashlights for power outages, okay? We can use candles for nice dinners."

As I listened to him, my eyes became rounder and rounder. I could actually feel them doing so. I think my mouth became rounder and rounder too. Because, something right then occurred to me that I hadn't thought of before, about my time in the century-old house. I guess no one else in my family thought of it either. It was to do with our fairly frequent use of candles.

What if there'd ever been a gas leak? From our gas stove or the pipe that ran through the back of the house? And then, in the dark and carrying that candle, one of us had opened the kitchen door? Yeah, exactly.

It's so natural for we humans to follow family traditions. All cultures have them: habits or rituals performed without question. If a thing made sense 80 years ago, or 125 years ago, why not continue it?

Fact is, in previous generations we often had no other option. We didn't have the choices open to us now.

A case in point. I heard about a woman who always placed her Sunday roast into an enamel pan with the bone part sticking out of the aluminum foil by about an inch. She put the pot into the oven for a slow cook for five hours, and it would come out so very tender. Everyone loved her Sunday dinners, be it a leg of lamb, a beef joint or pork with crackling. One day, someone at the table asked her if the secret was the bone being made to stick out from the foil.

"Don't actually know," she replied, and turned to her 95-year-old grandmother. "Gramma, you always cooked it this way. So, why must the bone be made to stand up, at the side of the pot?"

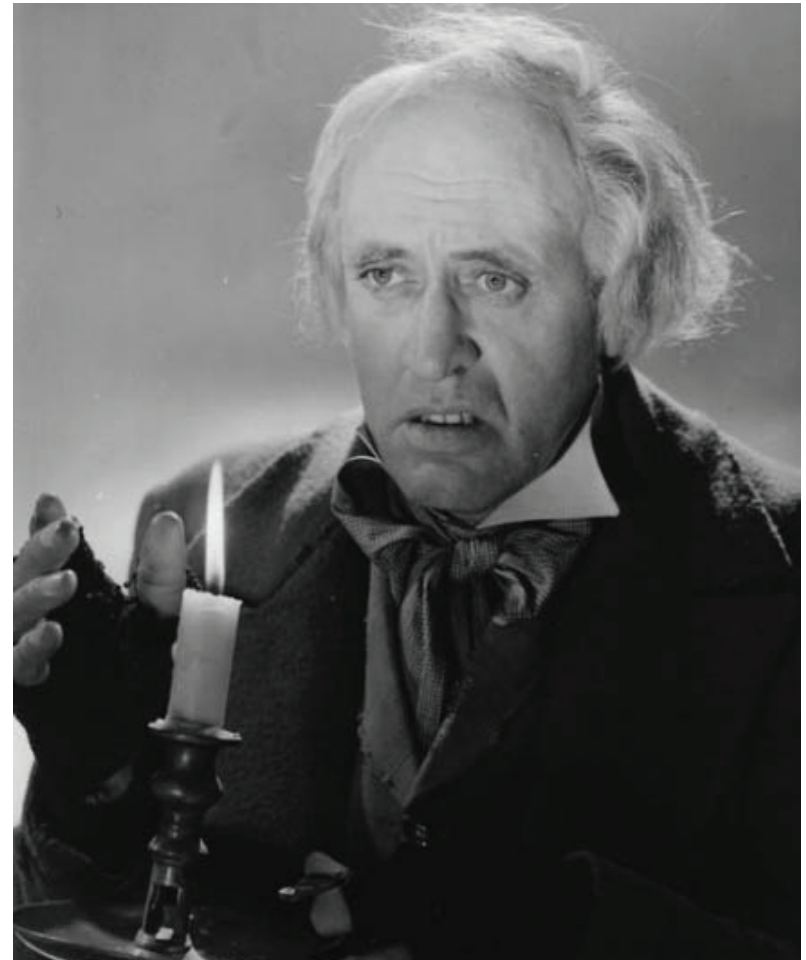
"I never told you to do that," Gramma said. "The reason I did that was because I only had a small roasting pot. Joints of meat never fit properly, which is why some of it stuck out."

The moral of the story is to question things. The granddaughter had a larger pot, but followed her grandmother unquestioningly for years. Until this conversation when she was 45 years old. It turns out it was the slow cooking that made the joint tender!

Okay, the point of my rambling—finally?! Don't always accept what you are told or handed, simply because it's always been that way. Question it. This applies as much to values and norms and politics as it does to candles. It might even lead to positive change.

I still don't like flashlights, because they only point in one direction and you have to hold them constantly. So recently, I paid a visit to an outdoors/camping/hiking store. I bought myself two tent lamps that shine in all directions and that can be hung or placed anywhere. They run on batteries, and when our next power cut happens, I'll be prepared. Safely!

Yikes, do I see a candlestick?

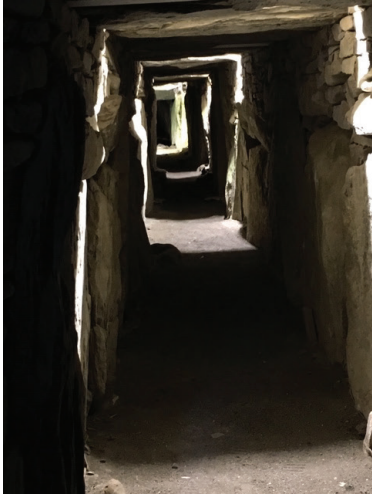


Alistair Sim in the starring role of 1951's *Scrooge*.

The film was an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843. This class movie was directed by Brian Desmond Hurst.

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My photos before 2020, chosen at random for you!



Ah, the galleries, ancient sites, jazz clubs: how we miss you. But we can still walk, and view rivers, farms and outside installments. Let's do that!



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Positivity is a thing
—and it shouldn't be

To deal with reality you must first recognize it as such.

~ Laurence Gonzalez

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Even at the best of times, appearing cheerful all day, every day, is difficult for us to pull off, and can be irritating or hurtful to others.

As an example, here's a story.

Years ago, I lived alone in north Toronto. Sometimes, I chatted with neighbours and friends about what I'd done on weekends or the hobbies I was involved in. One day, I mentioned to a man across the street that I was taking a meditation course. I described how the class instructor led us through guided meditations, as we sat on yoga mats. CDs sometimes played in the background, featuring birdsong mixed with cello music. Each session would end with the instructor gently describing images that we'd picture in our minds: a quiet beach, for instance, or a lush garden. She would finish with words of wisdom for us to take away. You get the idea.

A few weeks after talking about this new class, I was called back to England due to the death of my mother. After the turmoil of those next two weeks, I was back in my apartment, still dealing with the shock.

Most people were empathetic, giving me space when I needed it. However, when the man across the street bumped into me in the grocery store, he mentioned he'd heard about it, and then said: "Oh well, keep going to those meditation classes, they'll make you feel better." Then promptly walked away.

This is what toxic positivity is.

I've never forgotten his response: not only did he assume a newly bereaved person was capable of meditating, but that it would resolve my loss. (Which may be true for highly experienced meditators, but I was a beginner.) Don't get me wrong; I understand that it's sometimes hard to know what to say to people who are suffering heartbreak. But personally, I'd recommend words such as "I'm so sorry," and "I'm a phone call away anytime you want to talk," or else sending a card with a written message along these lines.

Toxic positivity defined

Dr. Jaime Zuckerman, an American psychologist specializing in (among other things) anxiety disorders and self-esteem, says: "Toxic positivity is the assumption, either by one's self or others, that despite a person's emotional pain or difficult situation, they should only have a positive mindset or—my pet peeve term—'positive vibes.'"

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/10/06/it-is-okay-not-to-be-okay/>

That neighbour's behavior is an example of toxic positivity, but even if it isn't about bereavement, it's still insensitive for people to expect us to be positive all the time.

When we are stressed out because a pet is sick, someone at work is gossiping about us, or our car requires an expensive repair, we shouldn't feel guilty for not putting on a happy face.

We are in the middle of a very dangerous and destructive pandemic, COVID-19. Many people are stressed and negatively impacted in some way. I feel that gives us the right to not pretend everything is okay or feel obliged to chat to friends and co-workers as if life is a cabaret.

We are all human. Sometimes we need to vent or feel sad. Of course, we need to laugh and joke too, exchange ideas or relate the garden squirrel's latest antics. But not at the expense of our authentic selves.

How to lend an ear to a friend

Constantly pretending that everything's okay is a good way to get sick, in my opinion.

I try to avoid telling friends to stay positive, remain focused, it could be worse, etc. All that does is imply "You ought to be grateful for what you do have. Move on." I mean, yes, it's true most of us live in safe countries and have good folks

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Continued from page 7. This is an opinion essay. I do not speak from a viewpoint of a psychotherapist or other such professional. There are many therapists and social workers easily found online for those who need one, or else look at my Helplines page.

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around us—many people around the world are suffering in ways we can't even comprehend. However, this doesn't mean we don't have the right to feel the hurt of a personal betrayal or the pain of learning a loved one has developed a neurological disorder and so on. Life sucks sometimes. And when it does, it is natural and healthy to have negative feelings.

When someone needs to talk, I consider it a gift of trust. That person is laying themselves open because they need emotional support. I believe it is an act of loving care to listen, really listen, ask questions, help validate their feelings. And not impose my own experiences. Often, just listening is enough.

Mirroring

Dr. Daria Kuss is a German psychologist and chartered scientist currently residing in England. She explains limbic resonance as the ability to mirror feelings of another in order to deepen our connection. "Mirroring sadness with our own unhappiness helps people to feel understood and supported," she says. "If you're trying to help someone, the most important thing is not problem solving but listening attentively and mirroring."

She goes on to explain that many of us utter positivity phrases and platitudes due to our own fear of negativity, and because it's an easy way out, allowing us to induce a state of happiness in ourselves rather than feel what a distressed friend is feeling.

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/what-is-toxic-positivity>

Our credibility

I once knew a person whose life was supposedly perfect. Nothing was ever out of place or ever went wrong.

"Sandra" always had a fantastic weekend, her husband's job was highly successful, his staff loved him, and her children got the highest marks in school. She had vacations in upscale hotels, the service always excellent, local beaches were spotless. It's not that I was jealous of someone having a perfect vacation. I've had

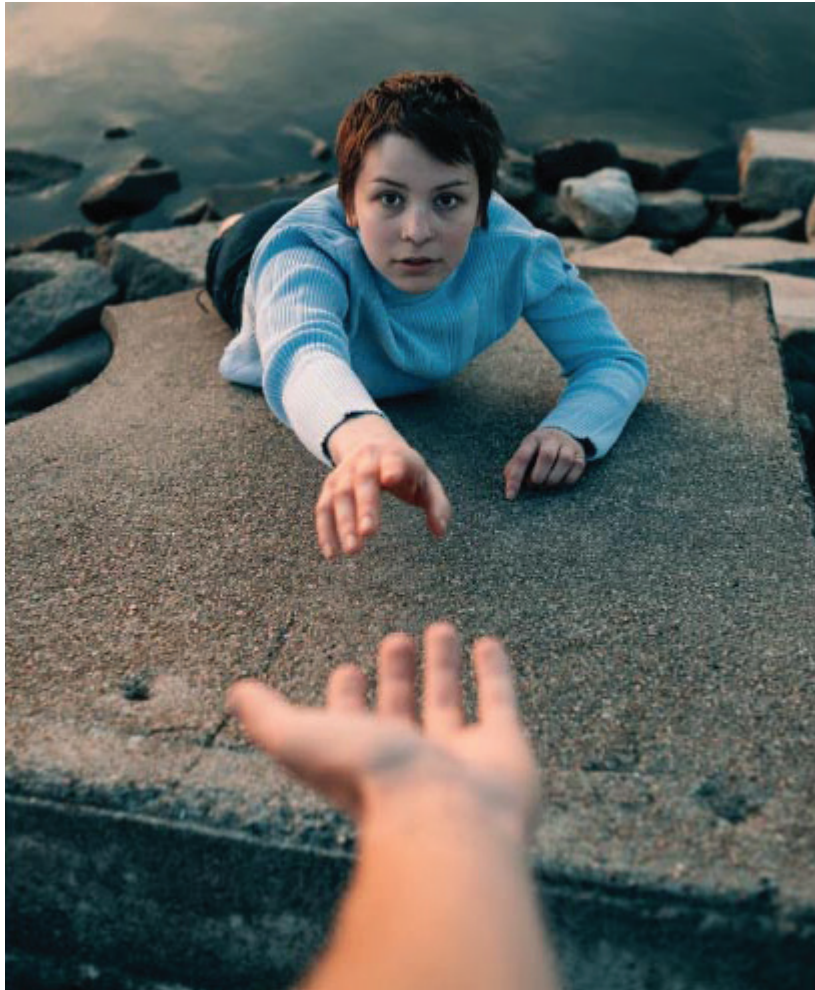


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some wonderful ones myself. What bothered me was the superficiality of our conversations. I never felt comfortable occasionally mentioning something that upset me. I felt she wouldn't relate or even want to hear it. In fact, on the rare occasion that I did mention something not perfect, the conversation was quickly changed.

What hindered a closer friendship, for me, was that I simply didn't believe her. No one's life is problem-free one hundred percent of the time. After a decade of going out for coffee or for walks, one would expect a more meaningful relationship.

I remember this when someone wants to open up to me about a problem. I try to be a good listener. I make sure the person knows I truly get what they're saying. Many times, that person will later ask about my related experiences. That's because they got to tell their story and now were ready to listen to mine. The simple act of listening deepens relationships and helps everyone to feel comfortable being their authentic self.

My suggestions, in short

- **Don't** tell people to just change their outlook to be happy
- **Do** show empathy for someone who's expressing frustration
- **Don't** talk incessantly about how productive you're being
- **Do** remind people that continually suppressing fear and sadness contributes to more psychological stress
- **Don't** judge yourself for dwelling on feelings of sadness, anxiety or loneliness every once in a while—it's a natural way of processing things
- **Do** give space for self-compassion, which is vital to mental health
- **Don't** spend a lot of time with people who judge you for having unavoidable negative emotions
- **Do** give others a smile ... it's okay to fake it occasionally, if it's in the cause of love and charity

With millions presently infected with COVID-19, reality is painful. Our roller-coaster responses are normal, but we can support each other. We're all part of the human tribe. We can reach out and help one another. So, lend an ear. And find someone who'll wholeheartedly lend you theirs. It will make a difference. And that's a positive thing!

If you know of anyone becoming more-than-usually distressed during these days of world crises, pass on these listings for Canada, Britain, Australia and the United States.

Canada	Canada Mental Health Support https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html Provincial toll-free phones listed in link above
	Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers https://teenhealthandwellness.com/static/hotlines 1 800 668 6868
U.K.	MIND for better mental health https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/using-this-tool Infoline: 0300 123 3393 Text: 86463 Email: info@mind.org.uk
Australia	Lifeline https://www.lifeline.org.au Text: 0477 13 11 14
	MIND: Help, hope and purpose https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/about-mind Telephone: 1300 286 463
U.S.	SAMHSA for mental health https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline 1 800 662 4357
	Mental Health America https://www.mhanational.org/get-involved/contact-us 1 800 273 8255 Text: 741741
	Teen line https://teenlineonline.org 1 800 852 8336 Text: 839863

December holidays: find the words

S D G E B W Z C E I U L I G
 C N U Q H C E W U K S H U K
 H V O E C N G I O M T B V L
 R P S W K D H C L O R A C O
 I K G C S L E I G H Y U L E
 S B G V P H O C A N D L E S
 T W U I B D O L H E B M O H
 M P E S F L S E Q S U H K A
 A I K G E T I S E L P C L K
 S T A R X S W N V Q I D O K
 O P W O B V Z R U E G U K U
 E B K M E N O R A H B K U N
 W Y A D I H D O B P O S D A
 E N L I G H T E N M E N T H

BODHI DAY
 CANDLES
 CAROL
 CHRISTMAS
 ENLIGHTENMENT
 GIFTWRAP
 HANUKKAH
 ICICLES
 LATKE
 MENORAH
 SLEIGH
 SNOWSHOE
 STAR
 YULE

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus in Nazareth, Israel
 Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, Israel
 Bodhi Day celebrates Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bihar, India



Trivia Q&A

"Good King Wenceslas" is a popular Christmas carol, but who was he?

A 10th-century Duke of Bohemia, he built churches and was known for helping the poor.

In his late 20s, Wenceslas was assassinated by his brother. After his death he was revered as a saint and much was written about him.

Since 2000, Wenceslas' Saint's Day has been a national holiday in the Czech Republic.

The words of the carol "Good King Wenceslas" were written by Anglican priest John Mason Neale in the mid-1800s.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4MWOPEX5w>

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

THERE ARE TEN DIFFERENCES IN THE RIGHT PICTURE: CAN YOU FIND THEM?



*The left-hand graphic
will appear in a children's Christmas book I'm creating
for publication in 2021.*

Spot the Difference:
1. knob on sleigh's rail missing 2. extra line in Santa's hair
3. smaller musical note 4. one extra musical note
5. left-hand tree - top branch higher 6. far tree - shorter trunk
7. parcel missing one stripe 8. sleigh's back seat - side a little higher
9. Santa's nose different 10. extra rock at bottom of picture

Poems

Little hands

Murky clouds
Hovered over us
Fear scattered
Of the deadly virus

Go away
Go away
Corona Virus
You scare us

The little sprouts
Spread their tiny palms up
To collect the blessings
Keep the world safe and sound

We want to grow with leadership
With the smiling face of our ancestors
Keep healthy our elders
They are the treasures of the universe

Keep our garden full of fragrance
With tulips, daffodils and sunflowers
Tiny hands are up
Go away Corona Virus

We want to save our Universe
With love, peace, health and unity
We will keep our hands up

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All That Glitters

All that glitters
Calls me to itself.

Incessant is the lure of sparkles
On frozen January roads
Beaming their frost
In the morning sun
Like teeth
In the mouth of the world.

I am a crow
Stirred by tinsel
And city lights
Ringing their chimes
Of false happiness
Like aircraft
I mistook for stars
On dark, lonely nights.

I have been searching
For the flame that pulls me.
Sun, moon, starlight.
Crumbs of comforting bread
To guide my lost heart
Home.

Copyright© Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews 2016

Shoreline

The lake rumples and dimples
rolls in its saucer cup of granite.
Weeping willow on the shoreline,
weep no more.

Little girl in red runs past
not a shred of dread.
Her father calls her back,
holds her tight within his arms.

Tender father, exploring daughter
a churning lake and a weeping willow
all rooted here on the shoreline.

Copyright© Linda Cassidy 2016

My Poetry

My poetry is the echoing song
Of a smiling youth
Who is madly in love
And the mirrored image
Of an old warrior
Whose face is filled with
Battle scars
My poetry is the haunting howl
Of a wolf
And the intoxicating perfume
Of a violet
My poetry is the oceanic view
And the desolate desert
Of my soul
My poetry is a platform
To inspire people
Who are not truly living
And lift them up
Higher than feathers
Beyond the stars
My poetry is an instrument
To praise the Lord

Copyright© Masayuki Tanabe 2020



Copyright© James Curley 2017: Stormy Shore

James Curley is an avid photographer who resides in the Clarkson area of Mississauga. He has been enamored with photography since he was an 8-year-old stalking the family's cat in the backyard with his grandfather's old Brownie...<https://jamescurley.viewbug.com/>

Memories of Footsteps

I dreamt of your footsteps.
Not that day we walked together,
But you walking alone
far away from me.

*Outside: people at a distance.
Eyes fearing eyes.
Everyone becomes a stranger.*

Each in our own houses,
which have become like cages.
Not places of sharing,
as we intended.

*There are no houseguests anymore,
only deliveries.*

Isolated, apart;
is that a new shared experience.
Each separated from the other,
and everyone from the all.

Memories can trigger responses;
both healthy and not.

They can motivate actions,
causing reactions.
A cascade of reconnecting,
and also connecting.

*Why these memories?
Why these people?
Happy times in the world that was before.*

Old circles reformed,
and new ones created.

*Social landscape remade
and in some ways renewed.*

A shared return,
to a hoped for familiar:
that is healing.

The candle in the next room.

Each of us separated,
transformed, evolved.
Changed by events,
both public and private, and
needing to return
to the shared conversation.

*The memories of your footsteps
are in both the past
and the future.*

There is sunlight behind the clouds,
and the waters will recede.
Perhaps our footsteps will rejoin,
as we walk together again

Copyright© Derik Hawley 2020

Longtime Oakville resident **Derik Hawley** explores visual art, writing, theatre and music in his various activities. derikhawley.com

This collaborative work is a shared project by James Curley and Derik Hawley. The work was done for, and accepted in, the Joshua Creek "Artists of Halton & Peel Juried Exhibition." The goal was to explore some of people's shared experience through the COVID-19 outbreak.

I leave you with this final page detailing both the charity I support, and my book. I know some of you bought it already but may like to learn more about SAVIS and organizations like it.

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. ~ Maya Angelou

SAVIS

SAVIS of Halton was founded in 1985. The acronym stands for Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services. This is an organization that offers free, confidential services to survivors. These supports can be short or long term in nature and are available to individuals over the age of twelve.

SAVIS does not discriminate when it comes to race, colour, disability, age, national origin, gender or gender identity. It serves the Halton region; however, they provide information on similar services operating out of different regions of Canada. <https://www.savisofhalton.org>

The pandemic has presented new obstacles. SAVIS needs support more than ever due to additional expenses such as Zoom and phone counselling sessions, as well as a new web-chat tool, and food and supplies being delivered to survivors who have moved into new, safer quarters. SAVIS has continued helping throughout,

I'm proud to be supporter of this caring and dedicated group.

Sales from my memoir are being donated to SAVIS of Halton. Scroll down <https://ragdollsandrage.com/> to see December's blog post.

Buying my book for yourself or as a gift = increased donation amounts.

SAVIS
of Halton

RAG DOLLS AND RAGE

Rag Dolls and Rage is the account of a sensitive, loving child (me) growing up in a tough-as-nails English town. It chronicles a traumatized childhood and the affect this had on my self-esteem. In the end, I survive and eventually leaving England to start over.

Many readers have said they strongly related to my story. Some have called the memoir poignant and powerful, while others said they simply couldn't put it down. A collection of these comments can be found at ragdollsandrage.com/category/news-and-reviews/

Many issues are covered in this book: matters that still plague society today such as lack of opportunity due to poverty and abuse/school bullying. My story demonstrates that there can be healing, and a moving forward to contentment and peace. It is my hope that both my experiences, and the insights of my therapist in *Rag Dolls and Rage*, can help others as they did me.

HOW TO OBTAIN THE BOOK:

In Canada:

Purchase from me directly, via info@ragdollsandrage.com by e-transfer, or email me to send a cheque for a mailed copy.

The UK, Australia, the US:

You can order via Booktopia, Waterstones, Amazon and other online sites.

