



Revelstoke Senior Life

A monthly newsletter for Revelstoke seniors

January 2024



Caring for each other and the environment in life and beyond

Editor's note by Laura Stovel

I like January. The new year is a time when I give my life a mental tune-up. I set goals for the coming year, review my habits and make small resolutions, some of which have big impacts in my life.

At a time when the world can seem very hard and we worry about people at home and in other parts of the world, it's nice to think about the positive changes we can contribute to. Retired avalanche specialist Alan Dennis said "I think everyone should have a bit of an advocacy program. I like to try to have one global, regional and local goal. I've always been willing to write a letter if I thought it would be helpful to push something forward. I try to always write positive letters rather than negative letters." Alan decided to devote some of his positive energy on encouraging a natural burial cemetery in Revelstoke – see the article on natural burials in this issue.

Similarly, customers at Starbucks and young locals in their 20s and 30s, led by Kyra Sklar, decided to send Christmas cards with personal messages to seniors in Revelstoke through the Better at Home program. Kyra and her friends were missing their grandparents and decided to make a difference here. One senior who received a card had recently lost her beloved dog and coincidentally she received a card from a young person inviting her to go dog walking with her.

That's a great approach to setting goals and actions: choose something achievable that makes our community or the world a better place. It gives us a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

Alice Strong took an action by writing a poem about friendship and giving copies to her friends. We are printing that poem in this issue.



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What is the Community Response Network (CRN)?

The Revelstoke CRN is a committee of service providers, including the City, Interior Health, and several nonprofits that work together to prevent adult abuse and support vulnerable adults.

We are grateful for the support of our sponsors and contributors:

Sue Dulley, volunteer copy editor.



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Natural Burials in Revelstoke?

Climate Change is prompting many of us to consider how we live on this earth but many are also thinking about what happens to their body after they die. Natural burials – the practice of burying bodies without cremation and without adding chemicals to the body by embalming – are as old as humanity. A growing number of people in Revelstoke and beyond are taking note.

Speaking in her private capacity as a trained death doula, Katie O'Brien, executive director of the Revelstoke Hospice Society, notes that "Returning to a way of integrating nature into our lives and our deaths has been on the rise. People are recognizing that they have autonomy in life and can also have autonomy in their death. There has also been a consciousness shift to recognize that we are nature, not separate from it."



Revelstoke Mayor Gary Sulz looks out at the forest at the back of the Revelstoke cemetery where natural burials could take place if bylaws were changed to allow them.

Revelstoke mayor, Gary Sulz, is paying attention to this interest in natural burials. As a recently retired funeral director with 43 years of experience in the funeral services business, he expressed interest in changing bylaws to enable natural burials in Revelstoke – if the community wants it.

The infrastructure is already in place. "Part of the cemetery is surveyed. It's not reserved specifically for natural burial, but it lends itself well to exactly that. My intention is to put a proposal to council and to City staff to utilize this as a natural burial site where we keep many existing trees and bushes and do what some might consider a rustic cemetery," he said.

Natural burials differ somewhat from mainstream burials. In a natural burial, the body is dressed in an organic cloth like cotton – no synthetic fabrics that can't biodegrade. The body is buried in a biodegradable

casket made of pine or wicker "with no metal parts and a water-soluble glue." If bylaws allow, a cotton shroud could be used instead of a solid casket. Sulz points out that people of some faiths, such as Muslims, bury their dead in a shroud instead of a casket.

The actual burial is also different. Instead of digging the grave 'six feet under,' as in a conventional burial, natural graves are only four feet deep. Sulz explains, "A natural cemetery lends itself to the body breaking down naturally, and biologists told me that our body decomposes faster at a depth of about 44 to 48 inches." The shallower depth allows for more oxygen in the soil to support decomposition.

"Some natural cemeteries are manicured the same way as a traditional cemetery," Sulz said. Others are more like natural forests. "My thought is that we would take all the soil out of the grave, place the body, then return the soil." The resulting mound would be planted with "natural plantings, not green grass. Basically, it would look like we're going for a walk in the forest. Instead, we are walking where we've laid our loved ones to rest."

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In the months before he retired, Sulz was approached by several people regarding green burials, including Alan Dennis, a retired avalanche specialist. Dennis had long planned to be cremated but became aware of the fossil fuel or hydro electrical use involved. “Cremation uses a lot of energy in some form, whereas we could just go into the ground and there’s no energy involved at all,” he said. “As I learned about green burials available in other parts of B.C., I became interested. And it would be great if I don’t have to be put into a truck and sent some place where there are green burials. Shop local and die local.”

Roberta Ripplinger, the new funeral director of Brandon-Bowers Funeral Home in Revelstoke, is supportive of natural burials if individuals and their families choose that. As a certified end-of-life doula with 26 years of experience in the funeral business, she said that natural burials can lend themselves to families and friends being more involved in the care of the body.

Natural burial “ceremonies can be really very amazing,” she said. “People have a tendency to get more involved with a natural burial, when the body is shrouded. One of the most important things is for family to create a memory” around the burial to support healing.



What are the concerns about cremation and embalming?

According to the B.C. Funeral Association, cremation dates back to 3,000 B.C. in Europe and the Near East. The first crematorium in Canada became operational in 1901 but cremation was still rare in 1950. Since then, the practice has grown steadily, especially in B.C. where, by 2019, 89.2% of all burials involved cremation – the highest rate in Canada.

While cremation has its benefits, including reducing the volume of remains and allowing families to keep or scatter the ashes of their loved ones, the practice also has negative environmental impacts. According to the Cremation Association of North America, “the typical cremation consumes the same amount of energy as a journey by automobile of around 500 kilometers.”

Cremation also emits air pollutants, according to the Cremation Society of Milwaukee (CSM), including “nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, (mercury from tooth fillings) and particulate matter. These pollutants are known to have adverse health impacts on both humans and the environment.” Cremation also releases carbon dioxide, which contributes to climate change.

Similarly, embalming a body has the benefit of preserving the body for transportation or for viewing, which may help grieving loved ones heal. However, the practice introduces toxic chemicals to the body, and thus the environment, after a person has been buried. According to [M. Stajic in Pathobiology of Human Disease](#), “Embalming is a process of chemically preserving tissues with chemical fixatives such as formalin... Common ingredients of embalming fluids are formaldehyde, methanol, sodium borate, sodium nitrate, glycerin, coloring agents, and water.”

Is a natural burial cemetery possible in Revelstoke?

According to Mayor Sulz, the choice to create a natural cemetery is a municipal decision and depends on community feedback. “I’ll be blunt, it will come down to what the community wants. And if the community says we’re open to it then let’s see what we can do to put that in place.”

“I don’t think it’s a difficult thing,” he said. “We have part of the cemetery that would lend itself well. It’s not going to cost the City any more to implement this. So I just need to put this proposal forward and explain how it works and if we need to alter a bylaw, then we alter the bylaw and away we go.”

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A natural cemetery is “not going to be cut and dried like in a traditional one and the graves may not be exactly square the way we’d like it,” he said. “It doesn’t matter. The point of the whole process is to get that loved one into the ground in a natural way and go from there. And then how we decide to mark that grave, whether it’s a stone with a plaque on it, GPS coordinates or whatever. This would be something that we as a community can give some thought to and weigh in on.”

He invited those interested in having a natural burial area in the Revelstoke cemetery to e-mail him at gsulz@revelstoke.ca.

* * *

Inspiring Senior: Alice Strong

If you ask 78-year-old Alice Strong what her proudest accomplishment in life has been, she answers quickly: her friends. To me, Alice is inspiring because she has found happiness where she is at and enjoys the simple, yet most fundamental things around her: friendship and kindness.

Alice was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan and grew up on a farm near the hamlet of Robinhood. As all farm children do, Alice did her share of farm work, including gathering eggs and hauling firewood.

In her late 20s, Alice took the bus to Revelstoke to look after her sister’s children. She eventually got a job as a dishwasher at Smitty’s Pancake House where her sister worked as a waitress. Alice continued to work as a dishwasher throughout her career, first at Smitty’s and later at the Sandman Restaurant (now Denny’s). She said she liked to work in the kitchen because people were nice.

Today, Alice enjoys the company of friends at Soup and a Smile on Mondays at the Revelstoke United Church and at Moberly Manor where she attends some programs.

A Friend

By Alice Strong

A friend is someone who goes out of their way to make you feel happy from day to day.

A friend enjoys just being with you, for they bring happiness no matter what we do.

When we have problems or when we are in doubt, they’re there to help straighten things out.

A friend takes us for just what we are, not just for our money or a fancy car.

They don’t care how we are dressed or whether we have more than them or less.

But they do care about how we feel. When they make us happy it means a great deal.

A true friend is worth more than gold. A friendship cannot be bought or sold.



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Upcoming events and activities

Thursday, January 4

- Art opening, Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, Antonia Otoya, Axel Morrison, Andrea Simmonds & Charise Folnovic. Viewing: 2-5 pm; Social: 5-8 pm. \$5 suggested.

Sunday, January 7

- Workshop: Make your own Zine (small magazine), Beginner friendly, no drawing skills required, Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 7-9 pm, \$33.

Tuesday, January 9

- Poetry night, Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 7-8:30 pm. Drop in.

Thursday, January 11

- Winter Market, Revelstoke Community Centre, 11 am - 3:30 pm.

Friday, January 12

- Bill Usher & the Space Heaters – Good Getting Older, Revelstoke Performing Arts Centre, 7:30 pm, \$30.
- Paint pouring, Materials incl. Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 7-9 pm, \$55.

Sundays, January 14, 21 & 28

- Café sketching, Materials incl., 3 wks. Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 4-6 pm, \$65.

Wednesday, January 17

- Brown Bag History: Cathy's 40 years at the Museum, Revelstoke Museum & Archives, noon, \$8.
- Seniors' Centre Birthday Party, Revelstoke Seniors' Centre, 2 pm.

Saturday, January 20

- The Last Stop: Canada's Lost Locomotive, Railway Museum, 7:30 pm, \$20.

Tuesday, January 23

- Linocut workshop, Materials included. Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 7-9 pm, \$50.

Wednesday, January 24

- Seniors' dinner, Revelstoke Seniors' Centre. Book by January 17. 5:30 pm. (Cost and dish TBA).

Thursday, January 25

- Winter Market, Revelstoke Community Centre, 11 am - 3:30 pm.

Saturday/Sunday January 27- 28

- Sewing group weekend, Revelstoke Seniors' Centre, 9-5 pm, October 21 and 22.

Wednesday, January 31

- Snotty Nose Rez Kids – Hot Planet Tour, Revelstoke Performing Arts Centre, 7:30 pm, \$30.
- Brown Bag History: Collapse of Surprise Creek Bridge, Revelstoke Museum & Archives, noon, \$8.

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Regular activities

Mondays

- Soup and a Smile, United Church, 11:30-1 pm, by donation.
- Bingo – Seniors' Centre, 1 pm.
- Bridge and darts – Seniors' Centre, 7 pm.
- Life drawing, Nude and mostly semi-draped, Basic materials provided. Revelstoke Visual Arts Centre, 6-8 pm, Drop in \$15.

Tuesdays

- Carpet Bowling – Seniors' Centre, 9 am.
- Chair yoga, Seniors' Centre, 1 pm.
- Craft Connections: Okanagan Regional Library, 6:30 pm.
- Indoor Walking Club, Revelstoke Community Centre, 11 am – noon, Age 55+, Free.

Wednesdays

- Exercise – Seniors' Centre, 10 am.
- Knit Wits (knitting, crocheting, etc.), Okanagan Regional Library, 1-2:30 pm, free.
- Drop-in Tech Learning – Community Connections Outreach Building, 3-6 pm.
- Spanish Conversation, Okanagan Regional Library, 6-8 p.m., free.

Thursdays

- Carpet Bowling – Seniors' Centre, 9 am.
- Coffee Drop-In – Seniors' Centre, 9:30-11 am. Proceeds to medical transportation.
- Coffee Drop-In – Better at Home, Community Connections 2nd St. E., 10-11 am.
- Hot lunch – Food Bank – nutritious and delicious hot lunch, 11:30-1 pm, \$10.

Fridays

- Exercise – Seniors' Centre, 10 am.

Sundays

- Genealogy Society, Seniors' Centre, 1 pm.

Service providers

Community Connections Outreach, 416 Second Street West, 250-837-2920;

- Better at Home (Support for seniors)
- Food bank
- Social Justice support, counselling and more.

Emergency Support Services, 250-814-9547.

RCMP Victim Services, 250-837-1201

Revelstoke Community Centre, 600 Campbell Avenue, 250-837-9351

Revelstoke Hospice Society, 250-837-5523

Revelstoke Seniors' Centre, 603 Connaught Avenue, 250-837-9456

Revelstoke Women's Shelter, Business: 250-837-4382; Emergency: 250-837-1111

- Moving Forward Program (Outreach support and workshops) 250-814-8387
- Community Response Network, revycrn@gmail.com, 250-814-8971

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