

Not Everyone Likes Old People. Huh?

It is a joy this morning to sit back in weathered Adirondack chairs, leisurely sipping with my longtime friend, author and Manitoulin summer resident, Ann Elizabeth Carson. We're on a bluff, overlooking Lake Mindemoya, the sun glinting on small waves rolling in from the east. Ann Elizabeth is my elegant octogenarian, sitting straight, chatting and smiling with me, her short white hair freshly cut and wearing her stylish bright purple shorts and top.

We're celebrating the launch of her newest book, *We All Become Stories: Experiences of Age and Memory*, published by Blue Denim Press, out soon with a festive launch at the Gore Bay Museum on Aug. 21 at 7:30 p.m. In this, she captures the experiences of aging through the life stories of elders who made extraordinary changes in their lives. And how they find places for themselves in societies that seldom understands or welcomes being old.

In *We All Become Stories*, the 12 older people Ann Elizabeth talks with reveal how memory is not necessarily lost or in decline as we age, but changes to suit the special demands and opportunities of each stage of life.

She looks out over the water.



Bonnie Kogos
WINDOW SEAT

"A major theme in all of my work is to give a voice to people whose voices are seldom heard. This book is about people's experiences about aging, age and memory, a time of life that is usually neglected. What we have to offer, with our long years of experience, is so often ignored. People worry about wrinkle creams. I don't gloss over that old age can be really tough. But people focus on the difficulties, like the terrible things that are going to happen to our health and social systems when this tsunami of aged people clogs up the works. They wonder what to 'do' about old people as if they are things. While all around us, we have an amazing group of elders who are able to hold such wisdom and joy for us."

"I'm proud of you," I tell her. "Learning from you, giggling with you, summer after summer."

"Don't puff me up, Bonnie dear," she says, and laughs. "I like being old and I like being called an octogenarian. It's been an honour to get this far and have all this experience."



Photo submitted to The Sudbury Star

Ann Elizabeth Carson, author and Manitoulin summer resident, is a beautiful octogenarian, sharing her newest book, *We All Become Stories*, with her old friend Bonnie in this interview about her writing and her life.

"Your books share it." I raise my coffee cup to her, "I keep saying, 'I'm in the summer of my life.'"

"Honey," Ann Elizabeth says, drolly, "You're approaching the autumn, which is also a wonderful season. Aging is a lifelong evolution, not an event that just suddenly happens, and you are experiencing this."

I nod, agreeing: "And happily, with time on Manitoulin. You have listened and spoken with older people, learning, aging and growing along with them. And you've been able to capture the experiences of aging through the life stories of elders who made extraordinary changes in their lives. And further, to find places for themselves in societies that seldom understands or welcomes being old."

"You do this, too, Bonnie," Ann Elizabeth says. "We all do, through listening, storytelling, conversations, we begin to see that we can truly welcome old age when you're able to learn from people you know and

begin to value."

"OK, the biggie, how do you stay so stunning, so glamorous?"

"Me, are you kidding?" She puts down her coffee cup and shakes her head. "I've the usual aches and pains, who doesn't — at every age? In the book, I approach what is dire, serious and lacking in both our Canadian and American culture; what it really feels to be old. And what matters most to older people, not just collectively, but as individuals."

I nod, gratefully. Ann Elizabeth says, "To be sick, poor, alone and isolated threatens our physical existence, our sense of self — and our memory — at any age. Our society seldom values and respects the uniqueness of the old and a stage of life that has challenges and benefits not available to the young."

The book is rich with commentary about each elder's central stance toward aging, life, memory and wisdom. Her academic orientation comes through in her focus on the sensory aspects of memory. And

attentive listening, probing questions and ability to capture and describe her interviewee's experiences of aging is based in her years as a parent and as psychotherapist and family counsellor. And there's music, metaphor and a touch of mystery.

In 2008, she was honoured as one of Toronto's "Mille Femmes," women who have made significant contributions to the arts.

You are cordially invited, Wednesday, Aug. 21, at 7 p.m. attend the Gore Bay Museum book launch party, where Ann Elizabeth will talk about how she came to write the book and will read selected excerpts. Refreshments will be served. Please look for me in my cheerleader's costume, which I think will be purple.

This Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in Kagawong, you're invited to attend fascinating History Night at the Kagawong Museum. Host curator Rick Nelson will discuss, on this 75th anniversary, the mysterious death of scion Daniel Dodge and also the 50th anniversary of JFK's assassination. Rick and his museum board, since the inception of the museum, continually present a fabulous wide array of fascinating history about the Municipality of Billings Township. Rick will conduct a Trivia Contest with prizes. Go to www.KagawongMuseum.ca or call Rick at 705-282-1442.

I discovered a Manitoulin webcam on this website, if you want to see what breezy Kagawong looks like in summer from Mudge Bay, when you can't be there. Water, waves and people swimming... what flavour is that ice cream cone Unca Mudge is sitting and eating on the dock?

Why does my lovable, cranky Uncle Mudge keep telling me, "There is nothing on Manitoulin and no time to do it?"

Well, ha ha, isn't the August wrong?

Our tireless Bonnie loves reading, exploring and learning about Manitoulin, Sudbury and the North Shore. While she has travelled to 93 countries as a travel agent and travel writer, but it is Northern Ontario to which she comes home. Email her at BonniKogos@aol.com