

LOVING LARGE, living small – January 2018 – Seaside Magazine

“We’re all just walking each other home”

- Ram Dass

For some, starting fresh represents possibility; for change, for something better than before, a chance to begin again. For others, a new year is filled with trepidation and a renewed isolation. For all, January marks the progression of time, our own season of winter, bringing us closer to our journey’s end. We are all growing old.

For seniors, it may feel as though things are ending rather than beginning, a daunting thought especially if we are living alone or lonely, with reduced resources or limited health. In the 2016 census, Stats Canada revealed that seniors make up almost 17% of the country’s total population, and that we have more than 8,000 centenarians in Canada the fastest growing population for the past seven years.

For those of us standing at the threshold, there are many things to consider, not the least of which is how we intend or hope to live out our days, how we will afford the lifestyle we want, and who we will live with as we age, possibly as we become ill or less able. And, while some will spend their days and inheritance traveling far off lands, many others will be living alone, on less money than they imagined and navigating solo, the worlds of healthcare and homecare.

According to that same 2016 census, more than 28 per cent of Canadian adults are living alone– the highest proportion since Confederation. US researcher, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, finds that “social isolation contributes as strongly to mortality as does smoking 15 cigarettes a day.” A global problem, UK charity *Independent Age* shows that severe loneliness in England blights the lives of 700,000 men and 1.1 million women over 50. And while these studies may appear dark to an already greying population, there are solutions to the problem. The antidote to loneliness, is community.

When our family moved to Sidney over two decades ago, it was with the intention of living communally, of raising children and supporting elders to age in place and die at home. And while I recognize that not everyone can live together, and many are separated by miles or memories, I do know that we are all meant to be connected, and that if we are to grow old in the most beautiful and fulfilling way possible, it is essential that we lean into the idea of living with each other. We may need to revisit our ‘village culture’ and to

remember what it is to live with vulnerability and collaboration, to depend on and provide for one another, and to rediscover what it means to lift each other up, at a time in life, when we may no longer have the strength or are worn down by circumstance.

With my parents gone, our now grown family, looks to move forward to create yet another, intentional community. We are going to live together and support each other, share what we have, and take only what we need, while we are led back to the land and to each other. We intend to reduce expenses and our footprint and increase resources and our collective strength, all while we examine what a good life and a good death might look like.

** Join Linda bimonthly, as her family designs a plan to share a life which includes listening to their land and to each other, introducing themselves to the place and the people, and eventually living a communal future in Shirley, BC.*