

Mary Anne Pare



Retirement to 'Re-firement'

Tell us about your work



For most of my professional life, I worked as a child and family therapist, retiring at 77. These days, I spend a lot of time in my off the grid home and garden, which I've designed to be as sustainable as possible. I'm very active in climate and reconciliation work on S, DÁ, YES/(Pender) Island in the Salish Sea. As part of Pender Earth, we run monthly Climate Cafes and Community Conversations with invited speakers. I'm also a member of POD (Pender Ocean Defenders) which is in its 10th year.

We have huge plywood Orcas, as well as salmon, and herring that we use to promote defending the ocean. I was also delivered equipment and food and helped rebuild camps destroyed by the RCMP during the occupation at Fairy Creek. I find great joy in making films about reconciliation and climate action. I'm part of a group collaborating with original WSÁNEĆ inhabitants of S, DÁ, YES to reconnect them to their homelands. We do SENĆOŦEN LANGUAGE training, invasive plant removal, and ran three week intensive TETÁĆES (Relatives of the Deep) workshops, weaving together Indigenous knowledge with climate science.

How did you get into this work?

My consciousness was formed around social, political, and environmental issues. I grew up in Quebec, second oldest in a family of nine. This instilled a sense of responsibility and awareness of the needs of others which has shaped my career choices. Looking back now, I see my parents as “radical Catholics.” They were involved in caring for the homeless. They had a close friendship with the American Jesuit priest and poet Father Daniel Berrigan, who was imprisoned numerous times for his anti war and anti nuclear activities.

I came of age in the midst of social protests, the natural food movement, the back to the land and the women’s movement. That and subsequent awareness of the devastating consequences of colonialism have directed much of my adult thinking and my transition from retirement to “refirement.”



The social climate of the 60's and 70's inspired me to live rurally, sustainably, and to put down deep roots in community. As a child and family therapist, I recognized the necessity to address the needs of all family members and developed a model of talking and playing with families which I've taught internationally.

Becoming aware of the dark side of Canadian history led me to co-produce SEARCHING FOR SŁEWÁL NONĘT*(peace of mind at last*), about Indigenous and settler descendants who are grappling with reconciliation and climate action and finding new ways to be in relationship with one another and with the land.



What makes your work hard?



I face the same challenges we all deal with, especially the fear that we won't respond adequately to the existential crisis of our time. I think people go numb and choose—consciously or subconsciously—to disengage, distract, deny, dissociate and compartmentalize rather than face our reality.

We're called to be courageous, to be prepared, to be inconvenienced, to let go of some of our everyday privileges and work together to find solutions.

This work entails many problems. What makes for a good day?

A good day is one with community engagement, shared food and fun, and especially laughter. Though climate issues are overwhelming, being engaged and creative are my best antidotes. I channel my fears into various forms of activism, especially local groups and projects.

I'm a storyteller and I believe in the power of stories to reshape the narratives we live by. My years of witnessing children's play inspired my own creativity. I write and perform spoken word poetry and skits, do creative art, and have run a storytelling retreat for women for 25 years.



What gives you hope?

Hope isn't what we have, it's what we do. Being a support to future generations motivates me. The science is dire, but I hold onto the spiritual part of the planetary crisis, the mystery of it all. The company of loved ones and being in nature are my biggest solace.

I've witnessed our innate capacity to heal, especially in Indigenous people. Knowing we can access this capacity in ourselves comforts me.

What keeps you up at night?

I often get a sense of dread just as I fall asleep when the veil is thinnest, and my defenses are least effective. I have had a fulfilling life so I think more about the chaos ahead and my grandchildren, young people, in general, and future generations.



What would you say to younger readers?



My generation made choices that ignored the consequences to the natural world. Don't repeat our mistakes. We have an utterly beautiful Mother which is our planet. Take care of her.

What would you say to older readers?

Engage with the people around you about the impact of the climate crisis on their lives. Find your own creative expression and ways of being active. My experiences have taught me the power of creativity for well being and for making change when times are hard. Connect with youth and engage in reciprocal learning. We have something to learn from each other. Intergenerational learning and action support us to face our challenges.



Mary Anne Pare lives on Pender Island, British Columbia



SPEC Elders Circle
Legacy-making as Elder-making

About Elders in our Midst

The Elders in our Midst project celebrates seniors across British Columbia and Canada who have contributed meaningfully to climate action in their communities. Through youth-led interviews and Joy Hanser's hand-painted portraits, it highlights their unique efforts and inspires all generations to foster community-driven climate action.

Learn More and Connect

Elders in Our Midst: spec.bc.ca/eldersinourmidst

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Connect: info@spec.bc.ca