

KEIKO HONDA



Scientist, Mother, Community Builder & Artist

Tell us about your work. Tell us about some of your projects.

I My background as a cancer epidemiologist at Columbia University took an unexpected turn at 40 when I became a wheelchair user. This experience profoundly highlighted the importance of social support networks. Upon moving to Vancouver in 2009, I launched the AIR Salon (Artists-in-Residence salon), an artist salon series held in my home, to foster community and creativity among neighbors and artists.



This month, we celebrated our 174th gathering! Over the past 15 years, the salon has cultivated countless connections, intergenerational friendships, and collaborations, nurturing, I believe, future agents of change beyond my initial expectations. Unbeknownst to me, a community of practice was organically forming.

This experience laid the foundation for the Vancouver Arts Colloquium Society (VACS), which I founded in 2014. VACS is dedicated to fostering intergenerational connections, building resilient communities, and empowering marginalized voices through artistic exploration. Drawing on the insights gained from both the AIR Salon and VACS, I began teaching the aesthetics of co-creation and arts-based problem-solving at SFU's 55+ Program in 2020.

I emphasize that learning is inherently relational, and our identity is shaped through active engagement within a community of practice. To demonstrate the power of this organic transformation, we produced two documentaries last year, "Viewpoints" and "The Art of Composition." Featuring passionate and dedicated community members, these films showcase how conversation and wonder can facilitate art-based solutions for social and environmental sustainability. They underscore that genuine, lasting change originates from within, requiring a strategic approach that leverages existing resources and builds momentum through consistent effort. Our white paper provides a written record of this co-creation process.

Throughout this journey, I have also shared my personal narrative of transformation and resilience. My memoir, "Accidental Blooms" (Caitlin Press, 2023), recounts my own unexpected path, and I will continue this exploration in "Hidden Flowers" (Heritage House, forthcoming 2025). My overarching goal is to contribute to building bridges and fostering connection, especially during times when empathy is paramount. All of my work from the salons, to the documentaries, to the books, are all part of the same mission – to create space for change.



What makes your work hard?



As a scientist, I relied on structured methods and data-driven evidence. Transitioning into artistic and community work required me to embrace uncertainty and creativity in ways I never had before.

Much of my work involves co-creation, a process that goes beyond collaboration by giving everyone an equal voice. Co-creation can be difficult because participants bring different perspectives, expectations, and strengths.

My role is to help people navigate these differences, ensure that everyone feels heard, and inspire them to see the world through multiple lenses. Though it is challenging, the results are deeply rewarding. It reminds us of the power of collective creativity to counter isolation and foster a shared sense of hope.

What gives you hope?

Meaningful connections give me hope. Whether with animals, people, or fictional characters, this sense of connection can profoundly enrich our lives. I remind myself that everyone, throughout history, has faced unique challenges, but we must move forward and rise to the demands of the present moment. “This gives me courage, hope, and a sense of continuity that is quite reassuring.”



What keeps you awake at night?

At the end of each day, I take time to write and reflect. This practice often raises new questions and sparks curiosity. Even small steps forward can reveal unexpected insights, and this sense of discovery often keeps me awake. It is not worry that keeps me up, but rather a feeling that there is always more to explore, to learn, and to understand.

What do you see if we get this right?

I imagine a world where we recognize our interconnectedness and live in greater harmony with the natural processes around us. I envision a society that values all stages of life, from beginnings to thoughtful endings, and one that supports people through transitions with dignity and care.



While this vision may never fully materialize, imagining it is important. It is through these ideals that we can recover meaningful values and create a future worth striving for.

Stories of resilience and positive action remind us that our efforts matter, even in the face of overwhelming challenges.

What would you like to say to younger readers?

I recently wrote a biography, *Accidental Bloom*, and the central message became finding new ways of looking and a sense of meaning from a wellspring of joy. This art of crafting a personal narrative was new to me but it advanced my self-understanding and my resolve to co-create and design for futures. So, I would say to reflect, create, make something, and share with the collective future(s) you want in mind.



What about older readers?

I often hear older people tell young people you are the future, but from young peoples' point of view, we older individuals are also part of the future. After all, their futures are a continuation of ours. We don't live in isolated times; we live in a continuum of time and it's important for elders to remain active participants in these efforts.

What does Wisdom mean to you?

Wisdom to my mind is embodied and practiced knowledge. What separates wisdom from knowledge is action. Someone can know many things, but unless they embody them, they are not wise. Wisdom requires practice and tactile acts. I don't think this necessarily has to be translated into work.

I ask my own father what he does to make his community better. He replies that every time he goes outside, he gently bows to people in public spaces. He shows respect and humility to strangers through this simple gesture. I think this speaks volumes.



It not only makes us feel that we live in a wonderful community but also prompts us to reflect on how we can live well with others.

In this sense I think wisdom must be practiced through tactile acts, seen, heard, and shared. This means that young people can hold wisdom too.





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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