

The Time of Your Life: Everyone Has a Story - Book Review, by Martha McGinn

What might these Canadians have in common: an Eastern Orthodox priest; a Spiritual Church pastor; the mayor of a small Ontario town, a TV broadcaster; a Country music columnist and poet, a school librarian; various teachers; a full-time foster parent; senior civil servants; a computer specialist; an entrepreneur, singer songwriter; medical doctors/specialists; a university professor; a writer and life coach; a lawyer; a fulltime parent/spouse caregiver; a Palliative care nurse; an NHL player; a small business owner; a retail sales worker; a Rideau Canal locks master; a US Embassy worker; a Meditator; a restaurant, farm owner; a Bandleader and drummer; an artist/writer; a musician/bus driver; a school teacher/jazz singer; an Immigration consultant and community and church volunteers?

The answer is that they're all aged 50 to 100, and their collective voices have been candidly revealed in a newly published book, The Time of Your Life: Everyone Has A Story. Inside are recognizable characters - family, friends, neighbours, and the occasional public figure. Their very personal perspectives, philosophies, experiences and insights are vividly captured in chapters set up as individual interviews that flow seamlessly into life stories.

Co-authored by Gayle Leona Jabour, of Ottawa, and Aylmer resident Daniel Tigner, the book project is a fascinating document of 40 unique people, and what made them into who they are at this point in their lives. Why the topic of this book? As they explain, "We interviewed people from age fifty to one hundred because they have lived long enough to have struggled, wept, known defeat, and found ways to overcome and to celebrate. ... The simplest thing in life such as eating porridge can be a joy."

The stars of the book, the interviewees, have lots to talk about. They remember and reflect with spirit, wisdom, intelligence, passion, patience, humour, resentment, anger and, always, a poignant candor. Their stories shift between the past and present, and uncover a kaleidoscope of the colourful lives of women and men living in so-called retirement while very actively living. They face their futures with multiple and openly ambiguous emotions, plans and energy, depending on their allotted quota of good health, resources and faith. The book's narrative age-arc is striking – ranging from early fifties to one hundred (!) – and yet is surely a current reflection of that rapidly changing Canadian demographic loosely termed 'Senior'. Because as one person wryly asserts, "When you're talking about seniors, you have to realize there's more than one level. There are the young-old, the middle-old and the old-old".

Several interviews are sad and fearful, such as the 50 year old civil servant who had to quit her very demanding career to be a fulltime caregiver to her mother and husband; she fears her own eventual immobility and loss of memory. Often it can take a years, post retirement, to adjust to such a major life change. A teacher found it frustrating and disorientating at first, until he found purpose and structure. Others seem to glide effortlessly into this chapter – like the author and life coach whose philosophy is to continue to "explore things. I like to learn a lot about myself. I'm about self-discovery and helping others to do self-discovery." Certainly a theme that emerges again and again is that the more actively engaged the person the happier and healthier they remain. These intrepid interviewees

are finding and facing ongoing daily challenges, be it in the arts or community volunteering or – and not to be underestimated as a life skill - just coping with the routine of day-to-day.

Each chapter introduces us to a unique human being, another viewpoint and another story. There are photos. Some of the interviews are so personal that in the accompanying chapter-photo the face is hidden. One used a pseudonym, The Dreamer. Why not?

My favourite chapter was about the nurse from Zimbabwe who, after immigrating to Canada, worked all over the country, including the far north as a midwife. I also enjoyed the civil servant who hated his job, saw it through to get his full pension and then resumed his first real passion: music, as a drummer and band leader. We should all be so lucky. As he sagely expressed it, “Age means recovery time. If there’s a definition of age, I would say that when you’re twenty you have 95 percent of activity, 5 percent recovery, and as you age, that ratio reverses. That’s all age means to me.” This is an inspiring and valuable book for our times.

Book Signing – Michabou, 210, ch d'Aylmer, Gatineau, QC J9H 1A2 819-684-5251; November 30, 12 noon to 2 pm. Meet Gayle Leona Jabour and Daniel Tigner, authors of The Time of Your Life – Everyone Has a Story