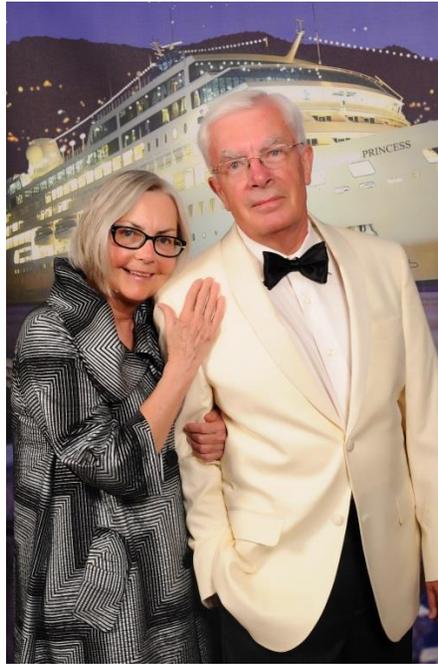


Mary-Ellen (McKechnie) Turnbull



Thank you for listing me among the 1965 Grads although I did not graduate with my class I left in January of '65 to attend school in Alaska and graduated from East Anchorage High School in Alaska. I recognize many of my former schoolmates on this list having attended Willows School, Oak Bay Junior High School *and* Oak Bay High with many of them. I played percussion in the Oak Bay Junior and High School bands. I didn't realize then that I was the only girl in the percussion section and how unusual that was until I turned 60. Or how apt.

I married Lane Turnbull on a sunny Monday in May of 1980, and our son, Jefferson Walter was born the following Thursday. One doesn't want to rush into these things. I have lived in Edmonton, Alberta, quietly, on an elm-lined street, with one golden retriever or another in the backyard for 37 years. For those who remember me, and remember me well, I am not making this up.

We are grandparents and have quite the most beautiful granddaughter in the whole wide world. Not four grands, Tim and Nancy Mercer, you've got us there. But my, oh my, oh my.

Still working, and liking it that way. Travelling too.

Have a wonderful time, all of you. And somebody, for God's sakes, do the mashed potatoes, hitchhiker or the twist -- I don't care which -- just turn up the sound, and shake it on down.

I do some writing. I've included a piece I wrote about five years ago. This seems like a good time to let it go.

I like smoke and lightning
Heavy metal thunder
Racin' with the wind
And the feelin' that I'm under

Steppenwolf, 1968

I am 63. I was riding the bus home recently during rush hour. The bus was packed; all seats were taken, standing room only. As I was carried along to the back of the bus, sandwiched and shuffling amid the passel of passengers, a woman sitting at the front of the bus elbowed the woman sitting next to her, and commanded, "give her your seat, she's old." I looked around to see who she was referring to, and was startled to discover that she was referring to me.

What was it that tipped her off? My diminutive stature and grey hair?

So, here it is: in my head I'm 26.

For a long time now, I have been mystified as to the identity of the old woman who has been stalking me into department store change rooms over the last fifteen or twenty years. She gets in because I can't see her until I look in the mirror. I have no idea who she is, or why she persists. She's relentless. She looks absolutely terrible in the stuff I try on. "Seniors wonder where the fashion went" wrote Martha Gold, in a recent Edmonton Journal feature. In the vernacular of the day, LOL. I know that thief. She disappears regularly through the looking glass.

When other people my age have retired and taken up ballroom dancing, I work full time, go to school at night, my husband of thirty years and I just built a new house. I walk a dog alone in the largest urban greenbelt in North America, populated by coyotes and street people. I love to dance and sing. At one time or another, I have danced the feet out of my socks, and sung in bars. I have eclectic tastes in music that have taken me from Abba to Wagner. Great Big Sea to me has nothing to do with that great frozen body of water north of Hudson's Bay. And the punk bands, "Bad Religion" and "Less Than Jake" have given me some of my sweetest memories, not the least of which is tearing up MacDougall Hill on my way to work, in a right-hand drive 1991 Skyline, bright red, with my son at the wheel. I have been picked up and thrown over the shoulder of a waiter at the Keg n Cleaver and spirited off into the night giggling. I have walked on an endless white beach in the northeast corner of Brazil with the brightest young cellists in the world. I remember where I was when John F. Kennedy was shot. I remember hearing the Beatles for the first time. Sitting in my living room with my mother, before a big colour Zenith TV, I have seen a man land on the moon. I have waged war on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, one of the hotbeds of radical dissent during the late sixties, early seventies. I possess illegal black and white glossies that I used to carry in the pocket of my army jacket, the civilian uniform of the time. I have sat alone, in the back seat of a tin can taxi,

stunned, on my way back to my apartment hotel in the business district of Manila, hearing for the first time that the Americans were pulling out of Viet Nam.

I have taken off into my life without knowing where I was going, who was going to be there when I got there and whether or not anybody spoke English. I have won and lost. I have held my breath, lost my breath and saved my breath.

And you know what that's about, it's about spirit. And spirit doesn't age. The trick is getting this aging body, this shell, to keep up. And to getting those around me to see past it. Who knew? "Not I," said the arrogant 23 year old girl that I was, long ago and far away, deeming it wise not to trust anyone over 30. Well, well. The joke's on me.

I would like to see a sea-change in the way we see "old". I would like to see people stop for a minute and think before they make assumptions and come to conclusions based upon the wrinkled, or stooped bodies topped by grey hair that they see before them, beside them and alone at tables in food courts. Let's start with obituary columns. Let's have a photo of the dearly departed in his or her prime. Let's open our mouths, look the old person in the eye, and say, "Hello, what do you know for sure?" Let's have someone give up their seat on a bus because it's good manners.

At another bus stop, in another time, in Victoria, British Columbia, I met a woman who had owned a motorcycle at a time when women didn't own motorcycles, much less ride one. In the 1920s she used to ride that motorcycle over the Malahat Highway. The Malahat was completed in 1911 as a single lane gravel road, carved out of the steep cliffs rising above the Saanich Inlet. 1,155 feet at its summit. It hammered the hell out of tires, axles and engines of the automobiles of the day. The only highway connecting Victoria to the rest of Vancouver Island, paved, with rest stops well placed along its tricky curves, today it is treacherous. All I saw when I walked up to the bus stop was a weary old lady, stooped and struggling with grocery bags. Holy Moses.

General Douglas McArthur, famous for his and the U.S. Army's defence of the island of Corregidor in the mouth of Manila Bay during the Second World War, wrote: "You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence; as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair."

I'll bet he came up with that, retired, out-of-uniform, after riding the bus.