

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #39*  
*October 2024*

*from*  
**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*Namaqualand spring 2024*

When I placed a photograph of Namaqualand on the first page of my last letter, I promised myself that I would not put another on the first page of this one. As you can see, I am flaunting my failure – the flowers made me do it!

The vast sweep of colour on the previous page was just one example of the vivid panoramas that greeted me day after day during my August visit. Here are a few more.





*As far as the eye can see – wildflowers*

**There has to be a compelling reason for doing anything 46 times, especially flying half way around the world to the same spot. So why do I go back and back? And why do I usually stay for a month or longer?**

**Well, I've long observed that most of the time most people, including me, sacrifice the pursuit of beauty – natural or otherwise – on the altar of perceived necessity. There always seem to be more important things to do. Life gets in the way. Yet, the day will surely come when we no longer have the opportunity to have the experiences, nor to create the enriching, sustaining memories that come with them. One might call it "self sabotage."**

**So, I go back to Namaqualand because of the incredible spring floral display, but it's equally because of the friends I've made. Sharing this season with good friends is a gift to myself, the best sort of gift, one that can never be taken away.**

**Everybody has a Namaqualand equivalent in their lives, many of them in fact. Our challenge is always to recognize, prioritize them, and let them bless us.**

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**"The sunrise every morning is a beautiful spectacle, and yet most of the audience still sleeps." *John Lennon***

## *Plus je vieillis, plus je suis occupé!*

The older I grow, the busier I become. I didn't think it would be this way, but I'm not complaining, except that I find myself overwhelmed from time to time by too many "things." It's nobody's fault but my own, of course, and it's often a matter of timing.

September has been such a month – "brim full and running over" with delicious meals and wonderful conversations with friends who matter to me enormously, facilitating both day-long and week-long workshops, keeping annual medical appointments, shortening a list of e-mails that stretched back as far as six weeks, downloading picture files from my weeks in Namaqualand, accomplishing a litany of urgent, unexpected tasks, and so on, and so forth seemingly ad infinitum. *That's why this letter is late!*

I firmly believe in the dictum "pressure is inevitable, stress is optional" and although I haven't spent nearly as much time in my garden as I would have liked, going there has been my "magic potion." Within a minute my attention shifts from myself to the community of plant, fungus, and animal species, which are every bit as important to making our planet work as *Homo sapiens*. Within two minutes the pressure I feel is in free fall and a sense of ease and freedom begins to sweep over me. I am utterly present.

Maybe I'll just sit in a shaded circle under a tall cedar, observing sunlight cascading through branches of a birch onto a clump of cinnamon ferns, maybe I'll start pulling handfuls of damp autumn leaves around a small rhododendron to serve as moisture-retaining mulch, or maybe I'll pick up fallen dead branches and carry them to a "burn pile" that I ignite a couple of times a year. Even when I go single-mindedly into my garden, determined to complete an unfinished task, I may end up doing something totally different. I become lost in the "other-than-human" and in the "other-than-me."

I read recently that the occasional doctor is actually prescribing amounts of time spent in Nature for anxiety, emotional malaise, and stress. We are, after all, products of the natural system, so going into forests, fields, canyons, and other wild places is simply "going home."



## CONVERSATIONS

Recently I listened to an hour-long conversation on CBC Ideas between three retired Supreme Court judges – one from India, one from Brazil, and the famed Rosie Abella from Canada (the last two now at the Kennedy School at Harvard University.) At the end of their conversation the three jurists unanimously agreed that the single most destabilizing factor in the world today is social media.

Related to that opinion is the alarming statistic that the average Canadian teenager now spends eight and a half hours in front of a screen, primarily a phone, but often a phone and another screen at the same time. Think of the enormous deprivation, of all the truly valuable things they could be doing with their lives during precisely those years when their brains are developing most rapidly!

I have to admit to a strong bias on these topics, as I resolutely avoid all social media platforms and keep my cell phone in my car where it won't interfere with my already busy life, but will be handy if I need a phone when I'm not at home. (Those of you who still have a land line will be aware of how comparatively non-addictive it is.)

Quite frequently now I'm being asked about the use of AI (artificial intelligence) in photography, but I'm not yet sufficiently informed to discuss the implications intelligently.

However, because I'm very interested and concerned about how AI is influencing conversation, these comments by Yuval Noah Harari, reported in *The Globe and Mail* by publisher and author Anna Porter, grabbed my attention. Harari was asked what he would say to Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk, or to anyone else involved in the development of AI were they to ask his opinion on the way forward? Here is Harari's reply, which I've edited (shortened) considerably.

"I would start with a question: How is it that we have the most sophisticated information technology in history and we are losing the ability to talk with one another? You are heading the most powerful media companies in the world, Facebook, X, Google. You are experts on information technology. Explain to me why conversation all over the world is breaking down. People can't agree on the most basic facts. People can't listen to each other. We are overrun by hatred and anger.

"Even in a place like Canada; if you think about the whole of human history, you can't find a place where people have better lives than here in the 21st century. Of course, there are problems, but what other time or place in history was better? Yet here, too, people are so angry. Why? That's the first question I would ask them. Because my suspicion is that to a large extent [social media companies] are responsible for the breakdown of conversation.

"Are they pushing the wrong buttons, inadvertently? Is the algorithm doing that? ... I don't think that, as individuals, they (Bezos, Zuckerberg, Musk) have bad intentions. But they have a different goal: more user engagement. They want more people to spend more time on their platforms and, unfortunately, the algorithms of these platforms discover by experimenting on millions of human guinea pigs that the easiest way to increase user engagement is by spreading hate and anger and greed."

**“What advice would you give people who are developing AI,” I (the reporter) asked. “I would want them to invest more in safety, to slow down the development of AI. Humans are extremely adaptable, creative beings. But we are organic beings, we need time to rest. Inorganic beings like computers and algorithms don’t need time to rest. The pace of life keeps accelerating because there are non-organic algorithms in control. We need to push back, take time to adapt. Artificial intelligence is potentially far more powerful than any atom bomb in the sense that it’s the first technology in history that can make decisions by itself and create new ideas by itself. A.I. is a kind of alien immigrant that will take control of your life. In five years you have these millions and millions of A.I. bureaucrats and A.I. soldiers. They will decide whether you get a loan in the bank. They will make crucial economic and political decisions. That’s what we should be worried about.”**

**Personally, what I really want to hear is a good discussion on whether or not artificial intelligence can in any way be equated with artificial consciousness, as intelligence and consciousness are very different things.**

**Of course, September also included conversations about gardening, the problems and the delights of growing older and, not surprisingly, about the similarities between dreaming and creating art or, more accurately perhaps, between the symbols in our dreams and the symbols in our art, a subject I love exploring. Many of the best conversations were not about “things,” but about ideas and feelings, and all of them were explorations and positive discussions, not hostile arguments. I am grateful for them all.**

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**“Every good conversation starts with good listening” *Anon.***

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**Last week I facilitated a workshop with André Gallant on Photography and Visual Design. Although we can each assume the other’s role, André handles tools and techniques and I teach visual design. Unfortunately André encountered some untimely computer and other problems that interefered with his personal enjoyment of the week, but he didn’t let his frustration show, and both the participants and I ended the week on a very high note. Once again, I came away enriched by the daily experience of sharing information, ideas, and feelings – in class, in the field, during meals (really delicious and nutritious, by the way) or in a lounge at the inn.**

**Although on-line workshops are a fact of life these days, none of them compares with the learning that occurs in on-site workshops where the participants and the instructors live together and have many good conversations.**

**Next week André and I will be back in St. Martin’s (New Brunswick) for our Autumn workshop and a week later I’ll be off to St. Andrews (also on the Bay of Fundy coast in New Brunswick) for the second Artists Retreat of 2024. After 52 years of facilitating photography workshops, I am as excited as ever about the prospects, maybe even more.**

## WORKSHOPS 2025

Full details for 2025 workshops will be posted on [www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com) by early November, but you can read more about workshop content on my web site now.

### INSCAPE

St. Martins Country Inn, St. Martin's New Brunswick  
June 22 (Sunday afternoon) until June 29 (Sunday morning departure)

INSCAPE, which is short for "inner landscape," is not an instructional workshop in visual design or any specific artistic medium, but an opportunity to examine basic life questions through presentations by informed facilitators, both group and one-on-one conversations, films, meditation, and (if you choose) making art.

Every aspect of the workshop is optional.

The three facilitators are:

DAVID MAGINLEY, recently retired as chaplain with the cancer and palliative care program at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia and author of BEYOND SURVIVING: Cancer and Your Spiritual Journey. He is also a four-time cancer survivor. This led him to explore meditation, illness and transformation, and the nature of consciousness. David has lectured throughout Canada, conducting workshops with health-care staff and the public on spirituality, cancer, grief, and aspects of emergent and integrative spirituality. He is a Lutheran minister and member of the International Association for Near Death Studies, contributing to research on patient experiences at end-of-life. He is also passionate about photography and brings a wealth of life experience to his unique perspective.

MARGARET WOODSON NEA of Virginia is a photographer, teacher, and speaker whose photography has taken her to over 20 developing nations around the world. Her images of women, children, and the natural world have been exhibited nationally and internationally. A graduate of the Haden Institute of Spiritual Direction, she believes in Carl Jung's philosophy that "dreams and photographs are messengers of the unconscious." With her clients, she works with dream and photographic images as portals to the sacred. For the past 25 years she has been a member of a dream group that meets weekly. Knowing dreams to be a rich source of wisdom, they continue to attend dream conferences with teachers including Jeremy Taylor, Alan Jones, Jerry Wright, and Marion Woodman. Margery shares the belief of Celtic spirituality that there is sacredness in all of creation.

FREEMAN PATTERSON, Freeman's primary source of awe and wonder is Creation; he is equally at home in a Canadian forest or in the vast sand dunes of Namibia and equally at ease investigating the meanings of the symbols in his dreams or in his art. His main INSCAPE presentation is about the strong connection between these symbols.

I'd like to add that during the 11 years the three of us have facilitated INSCAPE, three persons have enrolled three times, several others twice, and the 2021 participants have stayed together – meeting by ZOOM for three hours every month since the workshop and visiting each other across the continent.

## ARTISTS RETREAT

Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts  
Kingsbrae Garden, St. Andrews, New Brunswick

*July 24 (arrive) to July 30 (depart) and October 14 (arrive) to October 20 (depart)*

I've long felt that photographers have much to learn from artists working in other visual media, such as painting, sculpture, and the fabric arts and that persons creating in these media can learn a great deal from photographers, especially the potential of the medium. However, many serious photographers don't regard themselves as "artists," because both they and the general public know how simple it is to make a technically well-exposed image with a camera or a cell phone. These retreats are intended to correct this false assumption.

The focus is on art (the imaginings, dreams, and passions that motivate us to create) rather than on craft (the tools and techniques of photography or another visual medium.) You will visit the studios of artists working in other media in addition to my presentations and to both classroom and one-on-one discussions about your work. And, of course, you will have around-the-clock access to the 11-hectare/27-acre Kingsbrae Garden.

The number of participants will range from a minimum of five persons to a maximum of eight, all of whom will be accommodated in the Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts, a magnificently refurbished mansion with its own chef on the edge of the garden.

Here are a couple of "testimonials" from this year's July retreat participants.

*« La retraite artistique au Jardin de Kingbrae fut pour moi une semaine d'émerveillement, de partage, d'expérimentation et de découverte. Le lieu est magique, enchanteur et très stimulant. Sous les conseils avisés de Freeman, le petit groupe de seulement six participants a exploré, discuté, réfléchi à ce qui constitue les éléments à la base de la création artistique. Les multiples sources d'inspiration proposées par le jardin facilitaient notre démarche, nos apprentissages. » Jean-Pierre, North Hatley, Quebec*

*"The artistic retreat at Kingbrae Garden was a week of wonder, sharing, experimentation and discovery for me. The place is magical, enchanting and very stimulating. Under Freeman's guidance, the small group of just six participants explored, discussed and reflected on the basic elements of artistic creation. The many sources of inspiration provided by the garden made it easier for us to learn." Jean-Pierre, North Hatley, Quebec*

*I want to express my sincere gratitude for the creative joy and growth that I experienced at Kingsbrae Gardens several weeks ago. The week was flawless and a delight for all of my senses.... I felt that the balance of the retreat activities (i.e., covering artist studio visits, tasting dinner, time in the gardens, time for reflection, group image reviews and feedback sessions with you) was curated to maximize opportunities for creative connections and growth. The tangible and intangible things that I have taken from the retreat are being integrated into my photography and my approach to life going forward. To say that it has been impactful is an understatement. Pam, Calgary, Alberta*



**André and I have yet to determine exactly which workshops and when we will be offering together at St. Martin's in 2025, but they will also be posted on my web site [www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com) by early November.**

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**Bejewelled spider's webs decorate the fields and forests of Shamper's Bluff nearly every October morning. (Did you know that the spider that created this web can ingest every strand when it wants, storing it for reuse?)**

**I find that the webs are also an invitation to play. Take a peek at the next two pages.**





**Play with abandon!**

**Jouez avec abandon!**

**Speel met verlatting!**

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