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10 Aging as an Adventure

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How long we live and how well we age are, in my opinion, a crapshoot. In other words, they're risky and associated with unpredictable outcomes. Sure, we have some control over the process, but however you think about it, there is still much left to chance. Presumably I have some good genes, at least on my mother's side, because she died naturally just a few months short of her one hundredth birthday. My father, on the other hand, died at 72, a mere two years after being diagnosed with ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. I hope I've dodged that bullet. I have a younger sister, but all other immediate biological family members passed away some time ago. Neither my sister nor I has any children, so our branch of the family comes to an end with us. As I write this, I have just celebrated my seventy-ninth birthday.

I am being a bit facetious when I call aging a crapshoot because I have spent a lifetime believing that sport and physical activity might help me age better and stay alive longer. They have certainly provided me with a life full of physicality, adventure, camaraderie, and just plain fun. In many ways sport and physical activity, through both first-hand experience and writing about them, have been my life and still are. What follows is an account of this life.

I was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1942, but after a few years I moved with my family to Ottawa, where I went to school. Both my parents were medical professionals—my father a radiographer and my mother a nurse—which meant that my sister and I grew up in a comfortable middle-class family. For most of my childhood, our house was at the bottom of a spacious, dead-end street with several empty lots that provided an enormous playground—at least it seemed so at the time—for us to roam, climb trees, create forts, and use the street for ball hockey in winter and pickup baseball in summer. When not in school, I was outside playing with the neighborhood boys and, rarely, girls, whom I often considered too prissy and fragile for my liking. I was, in other words, a classic tomboy and proud of it. My parents indulged my never-ending pleas for a new hockey stick or baseball glove, and when I was a bit older, they relented on the subject of a bicycle. I was so proud of that first bike—a secondhand, postwar CCM (Canada Cycle and Motor)—which my father fixed up and painted, complete with a racing stripe down the back fender. It was truly my "freedom machine" as I explored the larger neighborhood, rode to and from school, and visited my friends.

Summer vacations were usually spent with our mother at a Girl Guide camp, where she was often in charge. My favorite was Camp Woolsey, just outside Ottawa, where my days were spent on or near the water. It was there I learned to swim, row and canoe, and be safe and comfortable on the water. As soon as I was old enough, I became a Brownie, then a Guide, and finally a Sea Ranger. I learned camp craft skills, went on canoe trips, and could take care of myself and others in the wilderness. When I was 16, I acquired my own canoe, a sleek Peterborough cedar strip, with money earned from babysitting and working as a lifeguard during the summers at Brighton Beach on the Rideau River in Ottawa. I became a camp counsellor, then waterfront director, and later a trainer of camp leaders. In fact, from the time I was 5 until I was 25, I spent part of every summer at some camp or other.

Sportswise, I was a decent all-around athlete. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, at least where I lived, there were no organized sports programs for girls. I learned, from playing with boys on the street, how to throw a ball properly, how to shoot a puck, and how to run fast. I learned to skate on a nearby playground, flooded in winter, where a winter carnival often took place. In 1948 Ottawa-born Barbara Ann Scott won an Olympic gold medal

and the world figure skating title. A tumultuous reception awaited her upon her return to Canada's capital. Children were let out of school to watch and wave as she toured the main streets in a car strewn with spring daffodils. I remember seeing her as she passed by but was too young to understand who she was or what she represented. I had, however, no desire to acquire a Barbara Ann Scott doll, complete with skates, fur-trimmed dress, and tiara, because to do so would seriously damage my tomboy image. Like millions of other young girls of my generation, I took up figure skating but secretly longed for black hockey skates, hoping one day to play with my real heroes, the stars of the Toronto Maple Leafs or the Montreal Canadiens, knowing full well that I could never be, indeed did not want to be, like Barbara Ann Scott.

There were no organized leagues for girls to play ice hockey or baseball, or any sport for that matter in those days. Opportunities to compete were limited, but that situation changed somewhat when I entered high school in the midfifties. Here, for the first time, I encountered properly trained physical education teachers, who organized intramural and extramural sport programs especially for girls. I was able to join a team and try out for the junior and, later, the senior school team in several sports—basketball, volleyball, and track and field. I loved it, basically becoming a gym rat, since we were encouraged to help run things through the Girls' Athletic Association. I had decided that I would become either a doctor or a scientist—probably influenced by my parents' professions—but as my high school years came to a close, I realized I could continue doing what I truly loved if I trained as a physical education teacher.

I went off to Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, for a four-year program that would grant me both bachelor of arts and bachelor of physical education degrees. For three years, mornings were spent in academic courses and afternoons completing PE courses. The final year was devoted to finishing the more theory-oriented PE courses. I did well, graduating and winning the gold medal in 1964, which gave my father some consolation because he was concerned about how I would continue to teach PE when I got "old." At that time, no one fully understood where physical education was headed as an academic field. While at Queen's I played intercollegiate

volleyball for a couple of years and basketball through all four years, although at that time in Canada there were no national championships for any women's intercollegiate sport. We were limited to competing against teams in several Ontario and Quebec universities. That limitation too would soon change. Nonetheless, it was exciting and fun to travel for away games, and to be coached and trained properly.

After another academic year in Toronto to acquire my teaching certificate at the Ontario College of Education, I was ready to begin my career as a high school physical education teacher. Jobs were plentiful in those days because new schools were opening to accommodate the postwar baby boomer generation. I chose to return to Ottawa where I expected to land a job in one of the new schools. Instead, I ended up in the third-oldest school in the city because the principal, who had been the vice principal of the high school I attended, requested me for his staff. I suppose I should have been flattered, but the job turned out to be a nightmare. I was shocked at the blatant discrimination and impossible conditions under which I was expected to teach and encourage young girls to acquire an interest in physical activity. As the only PE teacher at my school, I was working around the clock preparing lessons in three subject areas, administering an intramural program, coaching all the girls' teams, and teaching my lessons in a small, dingy gym while my three male counterparts, having taken the best facilities and equipment, lounged about just waiting for me to crack up. I found some solace by playing in a women's recreational basketball league.

My solution at the end of the school year was to leave and return to university. No one ever asked me why I was leaving the school, and those awful memories stuck with me for a long time, fueling much of what I did and thought from then on. I was accepted at several universities, and wishing to remain in Canada, I chose the University of Alberta, arriving there in the fall of 1966 to begin my master's program. I played for the Pandas, the women's U of A basketball team, for one year, all that was left of my eligibility, but I was not a success. In Ontario universities, we played the six-a-side, two-thirds court, and limited-dribble women's rules, whereas in the west, universities had long since switched to the five-a-side, full-court, unlimited-dribble men's rules. They are entirely different games, and I had

difficulty making the adjustment. Nonetheless, it was good to compete and be part of a team again. Also, my downhill skiing ability improved significantly with access to the marvelous ski resorts in the Rocky Mountains. I earned money both during the academic year teaching skating to first-year students required to take a PE course, and in the summer teaching beginner tennis classes for the city's recreation program. Life was good.

I completed my master's degree in the requisite two years. At 26 years old, I was pondering what to do next when I was called into the dean's office and unexpectedly offered a job in the Faculty of Physical Education at the University of Alberta. Put simply, was I immediately available to take the place of a female faculty member who had unexpectedly become pregnant? Of course, I said yes, hoping that I was also qualified for the job. I taught a variety of courses those first years on staff—secondary school PE, history of sport and PE, comparative sport and PE, and the usual activity courses like aquatics and skating. In 1969 the Faculty acquired a brand-new PE building that had been added on to the old one. In addition to new offices and research labs, it also came with six squash and six racquetball-handball courts. In a place like Edmonton, which was freezing cold and covered in snow for six months of the year, having an indoor space for new sports was a huge plus. I took up both racquetball and squash, loving them both. In North America at that time, the standard squash game was hardball—played with a hard rubber ball that certainly hurt if you got hit with it. By the 1980s, however, we had switched to the international version of the game. Our courts had to be widened slightly, and we used the smaller, soft squash ball. It was certainly more fun, easier to teach, and safer. I competed recreationally in both squash and racquetball, and at one point won the Canadian women's novice racquetball championship. I was also jogging regularly to improve my stamina. I ran a few 5Ks for fun but never contemplated a marathon.

After three years of teaching in the Faculty of Physical Education, it was clear that the next step educationally was a doctorate. I had become friends with the British sport sociologist and educator Peter McIntosh (*Sport in Society*, 1963) when he visited the U of A to give special courses. We also met up on the squash court. Through him I investigated the possibility of

going to a British university to continue my education, and I arrived at the University of Birmingham in the summer of 1971 to begin my doctoral studies. To my knowledge, I am the first Canadian, and probably the first North American, ever to complete a PhD in physical education in England. This made me an oddity because the area was not fully recognized in Britain as a legitimate university subject. My degree was earned entirely by research, and I had taken to England a straightforward question: Why do some women make physical activity an important part of their lives and others do not? Given the freedom to explore where I was heading intellectually was both exhilarating and frustrating at the same time, because although I had a wonderfully supportive supervisor, I was basically on my own for much of this time. I've written more expansively about this period in my formal education in *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Human Kinetics, 1996).

More important for this essay is that I took up squash far more seriously than ever before. I joined a private club in Birmingham and took lessons from Nasrullah Khan, a member of the famous Pakistani family that ruled the squash world for fifty years. I played at the club and for the University of Birmingham, although the team was not very successful. Nonetheless, it was fun, and I improved sufficiently so that I taught squash courses when I returned to the U of A, and indeed for the next twenty years. My most serious athletic injuries also came from playing squash: a complete rupture of my left Achilles, which was repaired and has not since been a problem, and rotator-cuff tendinitis in my racquet arm, which still bothers me today.

I returned to teaching at the U of A in 1974 with my newly earned doctorate. Researchwise, I knew that "women in sport" was the general focus but was undecided as to which disciplinary perspective to take. The social sciences and humanities interested me the most, but would it be history, sociology, psychology, or social psychology? I had little formal training in any of these areas. This dilemma also corresponded with what was happening in physical education as it seriously began to transform itself from a profession into an academic discipline or, perhaps more accurately, a series of subdisciplines now readily identified as the history of sport, sociology of sport, psychology of sport, and so forth. Coupled with the growing rise

of the feminist movement and academic feminism, it became clear that I could help shape the sociological study of women and sport. To gain a better understanding of my intellectual life at this time, one can read *Feminism and Sporting Bodies*.

From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, I was extremely busy through teaching several courses, doing administrative work in the Faculty, publishing my research, attending and speaking at conferences, and volunteering for work related to feminism, such as establishing a national organization devoted to feminist research or a women's studies program at the U of A. I did, however, try to keep reasonably fit through regular squash and jogging, and the occasional downhill skiing trip to the mountains.

In 1983–84, I was granted a one-year sabbatical from my university, and I decided to spend the first few months at my alma mater, Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where I had graduated almost twenty years earlier. I drove across the country, stopping off in Minnesota to join a canoe trip organized by a group called Woodswomen, one of the first adventure travel companies serving women exclusively. Advertising a "trip for women who have done wilderness canoeing and want to develop more skills in making [their] own route decisions, map-reading, and navigation," the company also pointed out in its brochure that the expedition would be strenuous, with rain, hard portages, clear lakes, some rapids, and beautiful scenery. I had not been canoe tripping for a while, and this jaunt was a wonderful opportunity and privilege. Over two weeks, eight women canoed along the Boundary Waters of Minnesota and then into Quetico Provincial Park, a large wilderness area in northwestern Ontario. A highlight was discovering the ancient pictographs, or rock drawings, on the side of a cliff in Darky Lake, deep in the Quetico wilderness. We bonded as a group, and I promised myself more wilderness canoe trips, something not easy to accomplish in landlocked Alberta.

At Queen's University, I had been appointed a Queen's Quest Visiting Scholar in Physical Education and a scholar-in-residence through the dean of women. I taught a couple of courses and lived in one of the student residences with four hundred undergrads, who were free to consult me if they wished, although not many did. Kingston, Ontario, was then, and still

is, primarily a university city, but both the university and town had grown enormously since my student days. A strong Canadian women's movement was also emerging, and Kingston was no exception in developing a vibrant and supportive women's community. It was through this network that I met the woman who has been my partner for the past thirty-eight years. We had little in common through life experiences because she had previously been married and had four children. At the time, Jane's youngest was still in high school but the others were well on their way to establishing their own lives. She had earned her teaching degree and was working as a special education teacher. We shared two interests primarily—a love of books and reading as well as a love of physical activity and being outdoors, preferably canoeing on a lake in summer or skiing in the mountains in winter. We spent many a happy time exploring Frontenac Provincial Park just north of Kingston.

After another four months in Toronto studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, I returned to Alberta. Before the term began in September, Jane and I decided to join a monthlong canoe trip down the Noatak River in Alaska, again organized by Woodswomen. Above the Arctic Circle, the Noatak National Preserve protects the largest untouched river basin in the United States. We flew to Fairbanks, where we met the six other women on the trip including our trip leader, and from there went on to Bettles, in the Gates of the Arctic National Park. After a day or so of waiting, a float plane took us and our gear to Pingo Lake in the Brooks mountain range and very near the headwaters of the Noatak. It was stunningly beautiful.

We soon learned that canoeing on a river is not at all like canoeing on a lake. The Noatak is slow-moving and gentle for most of its 425-mile course, carving out a striking, scenic canyon that serves as a migration route for plants and animals between subarctic and arctic environments. It is also fed by a relatively large watershed, which means that rare but severe rain events can result in temporary rapid inundation of normally dry river bars often to a depth of several feet. If you were camping on one of these gravel bars, you could easily be swept away and drowned. This meant that every night, after we had chosen our camping spot on the tundra, we had to haul our various watercraft—two canoes, a folding Klepper kayak, and a rubber dinghy—a good fifty feet up the banks of the river. As the trip went on and

we used up some of our supplies, the boats became lighter or perhaps we simply got stronger. Navigating the occasional rapids was something we got better at as we progressed through the route, but it was always a thrill.

Our small group functioned in true feminist fashion. There were no rules (except for boat hauling), and through consensus we let our bodies, weather, and the river decide when and how long we should be on the water each day. Some days we rested and explored the tundra or climbed up a shale mountain, hoping to catch sight of a caribou herd or an elusive grizzly. We were being unobtrusively watched by the locals and our progress on the river followed, something we learned when we reached the tiny village of Noatak at the end of our journey. For Jane and me, the trip cemented our resolve to live together, which would not be easy given that our abodes were over two thousand miles apart, and Jane still had family and teaching responsibilities. It took us two years to figure it out, and in the summer of 1986, we moved Jane, along with her canoe and horse, Bucky, to Edmonton. We settled into a lovely, refurbished old house in the Mill Creek area, where we still live, with access to miles of trails for biking and walking.

True to his name, Bucky was a handsome buckskin. Jane had acquired him several years before because she wanted to ride regularly and to teach her children proper equitation. For this activity, he was the perfect horse—gentle, kind, athletic, and forever patient. When I visited Jane in Kingston, I rode Bucky on several occasions even though I knew absolutely nothing about riding nor had any experience with horses. When Jane and Bucky arrived in Edmonton to begin a new phase in our lives, I was 44 years old and Jane had just turned 50. It had not occurred to me to start a whole new athletic career, but that is exactly what happened.

Around Edmonton are a number of private riding stables where for a monthly fee you can board your horse. The stable help is responsible for feeding the horses, cleaning their stalls, and putting them out in paddocks, whereas grooming, riding, and maintaining the horses in top condition are up to the owners. We found an appropriate stable for Bucky, who at this point was getting on in years. Jane soon acquired another horse, which meant I could ride dear Bucky, but it became clear that if I was going to take up riding seriously, I needed a horse of my own. At the stable was a young,

chestnut "grade" (heritage unknown) named Aries, which the owner had found in northern Alberta. He was being used to teach children vaulting or gymnastics on horseback. Obviously patient and kind, Aries was suggested as the horse for me, which became a reality in the summer of 1988. I also acquired my first riding coach, Otto, a precise German with years of experience, who no doubt wondered if I would ever learn to ride properly. In those days it was possible to roam around the countryside unimpeded by fences, which meant we took the horses on long trail rides through the bush. Jane also helped to train Aries by riding him in the indoor arena and teaching him basic dressage movements. She also competed with him in local horse shows, where they did well. I was slowly gaining more confidence, but admittedly riding was the most difficult sport, indeed the most technical, I had ever tried. Riding also gave me an enormous sense of empowerment, perhaps more so than any other sport. It was thrilling to learn how to control something infinitely stronger than me, but it was pointless to try and physically overpower this animal because I was never going to win. Riding is all about subtleness and timing.

I was granted another sabbatical leave in 1990–91, and we decided to spend the first four months in Germany, where we had friends in Münster, one of whom was a professor at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität. Jane and I pursued our riding interests, although without a car we were forced to travel to a stable and back by bicycle. Jane was looking for a new horse, which she found in Feudale, a beautiful Westphalian mare bred specifically for dressage. Her newly acquired horse stayed in Germany for the next six months while we went off to Perth, Australia, where I taught at the University of Western Australia.

Back in Edmonton, our horses—Aries and Feudale—were now at a small, private stable called Beckwith, along with a dozen or so other horses, all with women owners who rode daily. We decided it would be challenging and fun to work up a "quadrille," which involves any number of horses (in our case, eight) who perform a series of dressage movements in a pattern to music. We worked diligently all fall and winter creating the routine and practicing every Saturday. In the process, we got to know each other, and we certainly became familiar with the foibles and quirks of each other's

horses. We called ourselves the Beckwith Belles, which we considered hilarious because most of us were well past middle age and anything but "belles." We had originally wanted to include everyone who rode at the stable, but several dropped out for a variety of reasons—their horse went lame, they did not have time, or they simply found it too difficult. Most, however, were involved in some way, such as transporting horses, helping find the right music, and lending moral support.

By spring, we decided that we were ready to show off our efforts. Getting ready for a quadrille performance takes a great deal of time and effort. Boots and tack must be polished, horses bathed, and their manes braided. Then the horses are loaded onto trailers and transported to the performance site, usually another stable in the area. We performed our quadrille mostly in indoor arenas and usually as an exhibition event at a regular dressage show. It consisted of fairly simple dressage movements such as turns and circles, shoulder-in, haunches-in (travers), half-pass, and extended trot. But the most difficult parts were keeping the horses in sync and persevering when one or more decided to act up. One of our most exciting performances was outside at a well-attended jumping show featuring international jumpers, and we were elated at how well it all went. The Beckwith Belles have long since disbanded, but some twenty-five years later, several members are still riding and we get together occasionally as a social group.

In the summer of 1993, Jane and I decided that we wished to purchase a summer cottage in Ontario. Although it seemed crazy given that we lived in Edmonton, Jane's immediate family, most of whom lived in Toronto, was increasing as her children married, and there was now one grandchild. Also, my sister still lived in Ottawa. Rather than disrupting their lives by staying with them while visiting, we wanted a place where the ever-increasing family could visit us. We laid out some criteria—the main one being location on a lake in the Canadian Shield, with its iconic rocks and pines, and relatively close to Toronto and Ottawa—and contacted a real estate agent. We found what we were looking for on a small lake about an hour north of Kingston, an hour and a half west of Ottawa, and three hours east of Toronto. White Lake is environmentally protected because it is home to an important fish culture station on the highway side. No craft are allowed on the lake except

canoes, kayaks, sailboats, and electric-powered boats. There is absolutely no fishing. Since 1994 we have spent every summer at this cottage, which has welcomed our extended family, now including ten grandchildren, and many friends. We sold it a few years ago to one of Jane's sons, but we retain a long-term lease and plan to enjoy it for several more years.

In 1997 I decided to take early retirement from the University of Alberta. Although only 55, I had been there for thirty years, and probably more important, we were offered a handsome financial package. The province of Alberta is financially dependent on its nonrenewable resources, primarily oil and gas, and it regularly goes through periods of boom and bust. We were experiencing an economic downturn in the late 1990s, and universities were looking for ways to buy out their most expensive staff. It had not occurred to me to retire at that stage, but I realized that I could continue to do what I loved most about being at a university—research, write, and publish—without the distractions of teaching, graduate students, committee work, and so on. As long as I had my library privileges, I would be fine. To this day, however, I still give a few guest lectures to various classes. I have also published seven books and numerous papers since retiring.

Of course, retiring from the university also gave me more time, although not necessarily more money, to pursue my riding career. Aries was still going strong, and both of us learned to be better at dressage. But by 2002 he was almost 20, and we decided it was time to retire him. He had been such a faithful horse, and I did not want to lose him entirely. Very close to our cottage in Ontario was an experienced horsewoman, who specialized in competitive trail riding, but she also had a large property with a sand ring where she gave lessons primarily to children. We told her about Aries, and she agreed to take him. She used him occasionally for lessons, and several of Jane's grandchildren rode him when they visited the cottage. Eventually he was put out to pasture with other horses, and when I visited and he heard me call, he would come thundering out of the bush to retrieve his carrot treats. He had a good retirement and lived until he was 26.

My second horse, Winston, was a sturdy grey purchased from a breeder in Carp, Ontario. Although we got along fine, dressage was not something he really enjoyed. We eventually tested him at jumping and he seemed a

natural, but I was not interested in taking up that aspect of riding. After four years, I sold him and bought Alaska, a beautiful, pure white American Hanoverian, who ironically was bred to jump but hated it, and was being retrained as a dressage horse. Alaska was certainly more horsepower than I had ever ridden before, and it was magic when he went well. I even entered a local horse show with him, but without much experience, we both found it stressful. We continued to work away together, but despite excellent veterinary care, he was showing signs of not wishing to perform any longer. By 2013, I was over 70 and had ridden consistently for some twenty-five years. I gave Alaska away to a good home where he could be a schoolmaster to someone with less riding experience. I put all my riding gear in storage and decided to think about it for a year.

Jane's riding career had its ups and downs. After she retired Feudale, she had several horses which for one reason or another did not work out. In 2002 we went on a horse-buying trip to Germany where she bought Elli, a lively warmblood mare. Jane was in a riding clinic in Edmonton with Elli in the fall when she was thrown and seriously hurt—broken femur and shattered ankle. Elli was shipped immediately back to Germany and never seen again. By spring of the following year, Jane was ready to look for another horse. She found one in Kenzo, another German warmblood but trained to the highest level of dressage. At the time, Kenzo was in Ontario at Franklands Farm in Brockville. Since we were coming to our cottage for the summer, I shipped my horse Winston to Franklands, and Jane and I both took lessons from Gina Smith, a former Canadian Olympian. Both horses were shipped to Edmonton at the end of the summer.

Kenzo was a wonderful horse for Jane, and she competed in quite a few shows with him. Unfortunately, he had to have emergency colic surgery, which he survived, but it was difficult to bring him back to his former self. Jane retired him and he lived until he was almost 30 just being a horse. She bought a couple of other horses, trained them, and then gave them away. (Jane turned 85 this summer, and is still very much involved in the local horse world.) I never did return to the sport but am surrounded by wonderful memories from my time as a rider. Not surprisingly, I have more time and certainly more money.

Pilates is a physical fitness system named after Joseph Pilates, who developed a series of mat and equipment exercises designed to develop stability and mobility throughout the body. He came to the U.S. after World War I, opened a studio in New York City, and began teaching classes, often to dancers. I had some experience with yoga but found it boring, especially the meditation, and it did not seem to do much for my body. Even when I stopped riding, I wasn't experiencing any bodily issues, but I knew that I needed to so something to keep agile and fit. Jane had been going to our local Pilates studio for some time, and I decided to give it a try. That was eight years ago, and I'm still taking classes several times a week. Due to COVID-19, and the restrictions of in-person classes, our studio switched to an online version that has worked extremely well.

Pilates uses precise movement sequences to develop stability and mobility throughout the body. The first thing I noticed was how uneven my body was, right side versus the left. When I lay flat on a mat with my legs outstretched, I could feel that my left side was jacked up higher than my right side. I am right-handed and play racquet sports with my right hand and arm; thus, over the years, it has become my dominant side. One of the things about riding is that you cannot have a dominant side in that you need to be able to move your hip forward evenly on both sides; in other words, you need to be symmetrical to signal exactly what you want the horse beneath you to do. I had trouble with riding because I was not nearly as strong and effective on my left side. Several years of Pilates exercises have changed this inequity, but my body is still a work in progress.

I have never been particularly flexible, especially through my hip flexors and hamstring muscles. I don't feel that I have become more flexible through Pilates, but the problem certainly has not become worse. The supposed benefits of Pilates are to add strength without compromising joint function, to lengthen muscles to improve range of motion, to correct structural imbalances, to reduce joint compression, and to improve balance, control, and coordination. I can say without doubt that I have benefited and seen improvement in all these areas, but progress has come slowly, almost without me noticing. In large measure this success has been due not just to my perseverance but mainly to the excellent instruction we receive

at our studio. Our classes are small; the instructors intimately know our individual bodies and capabilities; and they are continually learning and experimenting in their own Pilates practices. I see no reason why I can't continue practicing Pilates well into old age. (The Canadian government typically classifies people aged 65 and over as "elderly," at which point they are eligible for federal benefits such as the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security payments. Also, older members of Indigenous communities, who are respected for the wisdom they have gained during their long lives, are often called "elders.")

Although Pilates exercises provide for overall physical fitness, and proper breathing is an important aspect, they do little to improve cardiovascular fitness. I needed to play a sport that required running around and use of my racquet skills and court sense. Pickleball was the perfect choice. It combines many of the elements of tennis, badminton, and table tennis. Like miniature tennis on a badminton-sized court, it uses a plastic ball the size of a tennis ball, a paddle twice the size of a ping pong bat, and a badminton-like scoring system (you can score only when you are serving). It can be played indoors or outdoors. Since it has become so popular, and courts are at a premium, most people play the doubles game. I took a series of beginner lessons to learn the fundamentals and have been playing ever since, mostly indoors in the winter at one of Edmonton's large recreation centres. I team up with women and men of different ages, although most are retired, and it's soon evident who is playing "smart" because they simply can't run around as much anymore. I'm slowly learning how to play smart too. Unfortunately, COVID-19 temporarily put an end to my pickleball activity, but it was replaced by luxurious hikes throughout the trails in Edmonton's river valley.

I began this essay with the notion that aging is a risky and unpredictable experience, over which we have little control. Some of us have lucky genes, and some of us do not. In fact, if you read books like Barbara Ehrenreich's recent *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer*, you learn that our body is subject to randomness and even outright conflict at the cellular level. Our body can attack itself, and rather than protecting us, our immune system can nourish

cancer cells. There is little one can do about it. At 76, Ehrenreich considered herself old enough to die and refused annual physicals, Pap smears, mammograms, cancer screenings, and the like. "Not only do I reject the torment of a medicalized death," she states, "but I refuse to accept a medicalized life." She does, however, keep up her weekly gym workouts because they make her feel better and less grumpy.

To a certain extent I agree with Ehrenreich. I see my physician only when I have a problem and not to undergo a series of pointless tests. Nor do I read self-help books about "active aging" or "successful aging," or even worse, about "antiageing" or "reverse-aging." My diet has changed little over the years, and since I do most of the day-to-day cooking in our household, I choose our menus carefully and prepare almost everything from scratch. We eat well with no dietary restrictions.

Writing this essay has forced me to think about aging, which I realize I rarely do. Of course, I know that my body is aging because I can see it in the sagging skin and muscle loss. No amount of physical activity is going to change those aspects of aging, but it does make me feel good in the trying. I don't pine for my younger self because that is pointless and wishful thinking. I do not engage in nostalgia. Compared with most women my age, I don't think that I look younger, but people are sometimes surprised to discover how old I am. I find it amusing when people ask if I am still working, which given my research and literary output over the past twenty years, I suppose that I still am.

I don't see much changing as I continue to age, providing of course that I keep my good health. It should be clear by now that I don't believe I have much control over that aspect and all I can do is to keep doing what I am already doing. The adventure continues!