



# I WISH I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW

**“I wish I knew then what I know now.” An old adage that I’ve discovered, holds as much water as a leaky bucket.**

What we can comprehend at the moment we are in, is what is available to us. It’s a given that there is more wisdom floating around in the universe than we can absorb at one time and we can’t grasp it until we are ready. That leads to another adage, “You’ll never get more than you can handle.” I discovered that wasn’t true as I barely entered my teens. At fourteen, I hit the road on my own, maybe with more confidence than sensibility.

It was the sixties, a time long past we will never see the likes of again. All of the replications have fallen short of what life was really like in that decade. My traditional Irish, Scottish parents offered little in the way of emotional

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*By Megan Hutton*

support, or stability for an introspective young girl who also harboured a dark secret. All the innuendo’s confirming my future, a husband and marriage, were not even on my radar. I knew I was different. We are all unique, however some of us are always awkward, trying to find a place to fit, and that was me. I wasn’t much more than three when I remember my attraction to girls and women. It was an overwhelming feeling, and how it could come about was a mystery to me, even at a young age. My early creative play did involve me “mothering”, but there was never a husband and certainly not a thought about marriage. I’m still not convinced that marriage is a necessity, but that’s a personal opinion. Gender roles were clearly defined for me, and along with that, there were expectations to conform. That was difficult for me, a born non-conformist.

I learned early how to adapt for survival and when I knew that there was nothing more for me to learn at home, I left. The sixties were a fantastic time to be on my own, young, fearless,

and ready to experience the world on my own terms. I had never been conventional so this was just another step in my life's journey. By the time I reached puberty I had been secretly in love with a number of girls or women. Growing up with parents who were emotionally absent, I craved that connection, and wanted to be cared for, and to be important to someone. All of these feelings were undisclosed because my fear of rejection was very real, and kept me from reaching out. While other girls my age were learning about relationships with one another, I concentrated on getting to know myself. Perspective is everything at that age, and every person who came into my life, and every new experience taught me something.

In spite of my confidence and maturity, I was still young with real human needs, a connection. I experienced a spiritual search in my early teens that led me to church. The rituals provided me with a comfort and stability I'd never known. I explored organized religion and was even baptized in a river. Church was the first place I fell deeply in love. Ruth was a couple of years older than I was and I loved everything about her. She was kind, caring and sensitive, also very religious and heterosexual. I didn't care, I loved her anyway. I don't think she was aware of my true feelings for her and I didn't have language for them. Looking back, I searched for someone like her for many years after. There were also some dark days when the solitude and uncertainty were overwhelming. Only once I felt a sense of hopelessness. One night I waded out into the cold waves of the Pacific Ocean. As hot tears ran down my face and the water made my body numb, I went out until the water rose up to my neck and was jolted to my senses. There was no one to listen to my cry for help. With my usual self-determination I made a promise to myself that I would always be able to find my way.

Vancouver was a happening place in the sixties. There was a vibration that included an air of exhilaration, mixed with a fear of the unknown. While Woodstock represented a free for all,







the Vietnam War shook my foundations and brought about more uncertainty. One of the first friends I made, Ian Bradley, came across the border to avoid the draft. He was a Folkie, an amazing banjo player from Kentucky. His father was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan and Ian was also running from him. We spent hours sitting on the beach, Ian playing his banjo while I wrote poetry about the afterlife. When he told me he was in love with me, I said the words out loud I had kept inside for so long. "I love you too but I am only interested in relationships with girls." That was the first time I said those words to anyone.

There was no reason to "come out" during that time. I don't remember that anyone passed judgement. If a relationship was what you were looking for, there was no limit and no one judged. From the perspective of a teenage girl in the middle of it, there was the war which we were on the periphery of, then there was the excitement of this seemingly new free world. The beaches were alive at night with musicians, and other strangers who soon became friends. They jammed into the night while bonfires on the beach blazed. Girls from all corners of the world came through Vancouver. I had crushes on girls from Australia, the United Kingdom and Denmark. Crushes, but no relationships.

I didn't try to form intimate relationships, as the free spirit I was wasn't sure what that would look like, and I was accustomed to being alone.

Writing poetry sustained me during those years, and the timing was perfect to be a poet. There were coffee houses springing up filled with musicians, but not many young female poets. I was very young, confident and always had a performing spot. I found a large rock at English Bay where I wrote most of my poetry. I would wade out at low tide, climb onto my rock with my pen and paper, and write and dream until the waves began to splash, signalling the time to get back to shore. The Bunkhouse Coffee House was a popular stopping spot for many musicians. Blues duo Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee came from New York, where they played Broadway and Carnegie Hall, and also recorded an album there. We would all hang out in the green room together, Jose Feliciano, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGee, David Wiffiin, and Ann Mortifee, who later in life married the legendary flautist, Paul Horn, and me a teenage poet.

I met my next close friend one day at English Bay. She was sitting alone holding a clarinet. I introduced myself and she took me home with her for the next two years. Carol's parents



owned an estate two blocks from the beach. They barely noticed I'd moved in and we rarely saw anyone but the housekeeper who cleaned our room and cooked our meals. I was about seventeen then and in my third year since leaving home. Carol played her clarinet and I wrote. We spent countless hours singing to Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Carol was quiet and introspective, so we spent ample time in silence with one another. Although I was alone most of those years between fourteen and nineteen, I never felt lonely. I think, as a teenager on my own there was no expectation from others. It wasn't until I experienced an intimate relationship that I really understood what loneliness felt like, as with a relationship came expectations. Sometimes, as a writer too much introspection ignites the feeling of loneliness.

As I moved through those years, I found life to be a great teacher. I watched and I listened to the rhythm of life that was going on all around me. Those years formed the basis of how I would view the world. I realized that not fitting in was also a possible way to survive. My writing rock at English Bay is still there. It juts out of the water about twenty feet from the shore, appearing to rise as the tide recedes. My longing for the unknown, a connection to something I couldn't reach, began there. Something beyond my understanding in a

universe that was about to unfold, and was yet to come. Being alone taught me an awareness I would never have known. After this idyllic period of self-discovery, I fell straight into convention, a state of being so foreign to the essence of who I'd become. As a wise friend reminds me, "It is what it is."

While the sixties were a time of growth and reflection, the next couple of decades were an uphill battle for many of us. Today it's a stark contrast to "coming out" than it was then, however when interviewing two lesbians in their twenties, I discovered that struggles still do remain. Be sure to read my follow up article in the Summerplay issue.

In the early 1960's Megan spent five of her teenage years on her own. Through the solitude of those years she found life to be a great teacher. Today she is a Poet/Playwright/Short Story writer, and has published numerous articles on relationships. She read from the Anthology "Dykewords" at Toronto's first "Word on the Street", and she's currently working on a poetry collection and a short film.

