

## A Whistler love In

Celebrating the people that make Whistler the place it is

By Michele Bush



PIQUE NEWSMAGAZINE  
A Whistler Love In

A few summers back, while running my Savary Island inn, I had the pleasure of putting up, (and putting up with) Mike Varrin, a Whistler local for more than 20 years, Whistler/Blackcomb F/B honcho, his lovely wife Kelly Hand and their daughter Wynne and their son Will — who, at the time, was currently in the oven.

While we were on the back deck smoking a salmon for dinner, Mike said that was sad that all the characters of Whistler were slowly disappearing. He was thinking of the Seppos, Rabbits and Flebbe's, not to mention the countless others that are well, literally dying off.

If you've been here long enough, you know that this town is rotten with it.

I said, "Well what about you? You don't think *you're* a character? And hell, what about me?"

So this article is a celebration of people I think are true characters that make this nutty, little town a great place to live. Particularly people that I may not hang out with, or know all that well,

but appreciate anyway.

It's like the "I love you man" part of the party without being wasted.

Maybe this will spur a little love in... where everyone can give a little shout out to people they appreciate and spread a few love rays. See, there's another character! Princess Stephanie Reesor! "Love, love, love," as she always says whilst wearing a tutu and kitty ears!

I appreciate.....



PAINTERTAINMENT.CA - CARY CAMPBELL-LOPES (THIRD FROM LEFT) AND PAULO LOPES (FAR LEFT) OF PAINTERTAINMENT.CA

PAINTERTAINMENT'S INCREDIBLY

**CREATIVE DUO — CARY CAMPBELL–LOPES AND PAULO LOPES**

I appreciate that Cary and Paulo decided to live in Whistler, since this marvelously talented couple gave up fame, and especially fortune, to live in Whistler after leaving pretty lucrative careers as formally trained artists in Hong Kong.

You'd have to be living under a rock to not have seen their incredible face/bodypaint work and intricate strolling characters that grace countless events in town. When I say incredible, I mean world-class, knock your socks off, "what the hell were they on when they came up with that" kinda stuff.

I hired them once to face paint for a corporate event. I paint stuff myself, (well, 'til then I thought I did), and mentioned I could pick up the slack if they got too busy. At the event they cheerfully airbrushed and hand painted anything the kids' hearts desired; Spiderman, tigers, doggies, fairies you name it — without batting an eye.

All I could muster up was a lightning bolt and hearts. Pathetic.

A kid sat in front of me and declared, "I wanna look like a dragon."

I said, "Beat it kid, I'm a hack. Go see Cary," and nudged him in her direction. Sigh.

Face painting just scratches the surface of what these two can do.

There's their risqué full-body painting (ooooooh naked breasts!) that usually turns mature men into clumsy babbling teenagers, especially at the old Bearfoot Bistro Cornucopia parties.

Note: Paulo should be voted in as "Luckiest Bastard Alive" for not only being married to Cary, but for — excuse the pun — racking up the huge number of breasts he's been forced to airbrush over the years.

Mermaids, walking chandeliers, strolling cupcake tables (for Michael Buble's wedding no less) walking carousels, breakfast tables complete with waitress, and the Peak 2 Peak Gondola costumes are a tiny example of their incredible repertoire of creativity. (On the P2P costume the gondolas are so realistic you can see the pot smoke wafting out the windows.)

Or what about the crazy Meat Dress? A custom-formed wire-mesh dress that's completely draped in cured meat slices with matching meat hat and meat shoes.

Of course! Why didn't I think of that? (because I'm a hack, remember?)

If that isn't entertaining enough, fun facts about the making of this dress include: the model — who had to stand for *hours* getting draped in meat was vegan; the "draper of the meat," Cary, only likes her meat well done; and when Cary ran out of prosciutto for one segment of the dress and was given more, she wanted to start again, "Because the fat pattern on the new meat was prettier."

You just don't hear sentences like that very often.

I had the pleasure of poking around their house/studio once. Before you even come in the door there's a two-metre tall foam Inukshuk in the front yard, which is way more impressive than 'yer average garden gnome.

When I come in Cary says, "the house is clean now, but you should have seen it last week. We were getting a haunted house ready, so the counter tops were covered with jars full of fingers and eyeballs. Bloody entrails were all over the counter!"

If you've ever been to one of their bowel-liquefying haunted houses you'll know that their jars of body parts are disturbingly accurate. Later, while poking through their garage I spotted a giant eyeball tucked into a corner, and translucent garbage bags filled with severed limbs. I'm pretty sure a finger twitched in my direction, so I ran screaming from the garage and asked them to show me something a little cheerier.

Upstairs, their house is crammed with hundreds of costumes. They literally kicked daughter Tazara, also artistic, out of her bedroom because they needed the space.

(Cary mentions she wants their other daughter Kianna to be a lawyer or something because the family "can't all be starving artists.")

What strikes you about every costume is that... Every. Single. Intricate. Piece... is cut, painted and sewn by hand. Every miniature detail is made by something regular folk wouldn't think of — the tiny trees on the Peak 2 Peak costume are each made painstakingly with felt. I look at another costume. What are those things? I ask. "Earplugs," says Cary.

So when you see all the costumes just sitting there and wonder, "Why don't they just rent them out and make some money?"

Well...think about a party gal wearing an intricate costume that took hours and hours to create doing shots of Jager whilst getting pawed by a drunken fry cook. That's why they don't rent them out.

That said, they could just charge admission to walk through their home, or, as Cary puts it, "We just need to find someone really rich with lots of space that wants to wander through a room full of cool costumes."

As of this writing they have just returned from Oslo, Norway after creating a cupcake dress for the Queen's birthday. It seems they were spotted in Whistler by an event agent, Thomas Tallis, who convinced The BBC that they simply *must* be flown out to Norway. World class indeed!



SUBMITTED – STEPHEN VOGLER

### STEPHEN VOGLER — CHAMPION OF THE ARTS.

I've known Stephen for years. Danced to his band's ska music on numerous occasions, sat in pubs, raised a glass with him and read his books. Gone to and participated in his Creative 5 eclectic shows, which he has consistently organized and put on for years now.

I'm not saying I'm glad he lives here because he put me in one of his books — *Tales of a Mountain Town*, page 92. It doesn't tickle me or anything... I'm glad he lives here because he does so much of this creative stuff.

We were also in a movie together for the 72 hr. filmmaker showdown. Rebecca Wood Barrett and Lisa Fernandez, who I'm also happy live here, were filming us for the *Gorby Games*. I was "Cougar Gorby," he was "British Git Gorby."

We were shooting on the mountain and he was directed to come off a small jump and crash.

Well, having totally forgotten that he was heavily into freestyle years earlier, he came off the jump, caught huge air and did the most impressively skilled fake flailing I've ever seen. He then crashed into a tree as directed, and if memory serves me, got stuck in it (not

directed).

Lisa and Rebecca were duly impressed. "We had no idea he could ski like that!"

It's always great when someone pulls an unknown talent out of their asses and impresses everyone like that. It's like when someone you've written off as a total redneck meathead suddenly sits down at a piano and plays the most heart-wrenching version of Franz Liszt's *La Campanella*.

I'm especially glad Stephen lives here because of the great work he's doing at The Point Artist-Run Centre on Alta Lake.

When the municipality took ownership of the old Whistler Hostel site Stephen, along with a few other like-minded artists, saw the opportunity to get a foot in the door and make it into a viable venue where artists can perform, paint and create.

And it appears to be working — most of the events so far have all been consistently well attended — which is a hard thing to do in Whistler.

I've missed most of the goings on at The Point as they've all been held in the summer and I'm gone, but this year the muni gave the nod to do events in the winter, so I happily got involved. His laid back style when he shows me around the inner workings of the The Point is always entertaining — "OK, so when you use this supply drawer, make sure you lean this high-tech yoga mat against it to keep it closed..."

Organizing events is always a frantic, stressful occupation, but Stephen pulls it off in a really calm and casual Whistler way (who knows — his head could be a circus inside but you wouldn't know it).

To make organization meetings even more Whistleresque:

- The group meets in a pub that's so loud ideas are screamed back and forth, but you understand each other anyway.
- Stephen shows up in the bar with skates, hockey stick and a puck because he "skated to the meeting" from his place, at night.
- He, as leader, notices the little details that make him a true creative leader. "Hey guys, next time let's have the meeting in a bar where the wine isn't so expensive." Just for us wine drinkers in the group. Isn't that sweet?

So thank you Stephen — keep up the good work!



PHOTO BY BRENDA BAKKER – ANGIE NOLAN

### ANGIE NOLAN — TIRELESS ARTSY HAPPY PERSON

She's up to just about anything to do with film, theatre and just everything. Her background is in film and writing and sorry I have to say it because it's tradition now — SHE WAS IN THE BEACHCOMBERS! It's true. She teaches, writes, acts and directs pretty much all the time.

Once in the middle of rehearsing for my comedy show a few springs ago, I realized she was juggling the Filmmaker Showdown, the Chairlift Review and my show. The girl can't say no when it comes to this stuff, which is why I constantly take advantage of her.

"Hey Angie!" I'll say. "We've completely neglected to organize the tech side of our show in Vancouver. How bout y'all drop everything and do that for us? Oh, and it's tomorrow."

And she will. Not only that, she'll come to the rehearsals, stage-manage and direct. Oh sure, the show "may make some money and you'll get a cut," so there's a little bait there, but it usually doesn't, but she'll make the best of it anyway.

She'll say uplifting things like, "Well, I have no money to get home now, but on the upside it was really fun, I got to stay in a nice hotel in Vancouver and have a great dinner after! Thanks guys!"

So of course, we HAVE to give her a ride after that — and let her ride up front.

Her propensity to say "yes" no matter how busy she is did have an amazing outcome one night. It was the evening of the Chairlift Review five years ago and her then boyfriend Fish (Boulton), told her she had to learn one more skit.

"Now?" she probably said. "I'm already in two skits...Why would... shit, OK."

That skit turned out to be Fish's way of proposing to her live and on stage, but see what I mean? I just love her, "Of course I'll do that!" attitude.

Love that Angie Nolan!



SUBMITTED – FEET BANKS

### FEET BANKS — OR FEETUS BANKUS — EDITOR, MC, REVIEWER AND POTTY MOUTH

I don't know Feet all that well, but I'm glad he's here. It might be his frequent use of the word "ball sack" and "F" bombs when he's MC'ing the Filmmaker Showdown. Or it might be his potty-mouthed movie reviews in the *Pique*. He's funny, to the point and he doesn't pull any punches. Also, he's usually right and despite his love for violence, and blood, and heads getting blown off in Tarantino movies, he can usually properly savage those lame-assed films that audiences get shoved down their *f&%\$@&\* throats* these days — my God, I'm channelling him... excuse me.

Thanks Feet.



PHOTO BY DARREN ROBERTS / WWW.WHISTLERALIVE.COM – ACE MACKAY-SMITH

### ACE MACKAY-SMITH— DJ, GO-GO DANCER, PARTY PLANNER, ETC, ETC.

Ace has been here since the '80s and has always been doing cool stuff in a great understated and not "look at me, look at me" way.

Not sure if she's still go-go dancing — as I haven't been to a club in about seven years, but she did do it, and for so long — even when the younger

chicks fondly referred to her as "Momma Go Go." (Then again, you should see her dance. Very impressive. Envyable. I'll stop before I say something totally catty... skinny bitch...OK, I feel better.)

She too is always up for anything fun.

A few years back I asked her if she wanted to be in my SNL-style comedy show. I wanted some dancers to perform between sketches. She said she would, but was of course very busy. I told her she could have Carte Blanche. "I trust you!" I foolishly said.

When the music came on I had no idea what to expect. Well — "Big Kev" Mikkelsen enters dressed as a horse dancing to the tune "I Want To Be A Cowboy" while Ace and fellow dancer Megan spray silly string on him.

I'm not sure if that's a good visual for you, but for me it was like someone had slipped acid into my water. I mean — that's good solid stuff! The audience loved it, probably because it was a purely local audience and Whistlerites just get it.

She also is one of the best DJ's in town, makes cool movies and organizes the Retro Hot Dog party at the end of the year.

Sooo, glad you're here Ace!



SUBMITTED – ISOBEL AND DON MACLAURIN

### ISOBEL MACLAURIN — CHANNELLING HER INNER ARTIST OUTWARD

The first time I talked to Izzy was when she had called me to say how she had enjoyed an article I had written about aging. I had just turned 35 and I felt old. (Ha!) "I must be old I had said — I just tried golf and I've started gardening."

Her megawatt smile is contagious, particularly when she ads her *absolutely fabulous*, "sweetie darling!"

She's also up for a little fun. When I asked her if she wanted to be a character in a multi-media show we did of Absolutely Fabulous she said she'd love to. Cut to the scene of our characters Patsy and Eddie beating up her car, with her in it, in a very funny

road rage scene.

Her paintings are a joy to behold all around town, she has a son named Mushroom Mark and she looks fabulous in leather, plus she has a wonderful picture of her jumping off her deck into a snow bank in a bathing suit and moon boots. A true classic Whistlerite!

This year Isobel lost her life partner Don — a man whose legacy stretched throughout Whistler, from summit to valley, in its high alpine trails and valley-floor forests — more than 50 years of shaping and caring for our natural environment. And, importantly, treading that delicate balance between forestry and recreation, years before his time.

But in true Isobel style she said that Don never mentioned "If only" to her.

Without even a hint of remorse, she told *Pique* recently: "Our bucket was empty."

### BONNY MAKAREWICZ — BOSSY BONNY TWO-BRAIDS

I wasn't going to write about, I wasn't going to mention anyone lost to Whistler, that's how the whole article came about — but I do have to mention Bonny. I really appreciated that she was in Whistler, and was so shocked and sad, like everyone, when she passed away recently. While walking my dogs and taking in the scenery I realized that she's probably photographed every square inch of Whistler and most of the population. She was always fun to see, and never blinked an eye when I called her for various bizarre photo shoots. Like when I asked her if she could take some pics of me and my pig for some ads for my old store, or mucking through cow manure to try to get a shot for some greeting cards I was making — my model Darryl Palmer hugging a cow. I will always appreciate that she lived here.



PHOTO BY JOERN ROHDE. COURTESY OF MIKE VARRIN – MIKE VARRIN

### MIKE VARRIN — REVEREND, FOOD AND BEVERAGE GURU, PLAYGROUND BUILDER, SHOW STEALER

Over the years I have watched, or been involved in, various stage shows Mike has performed in. You're usually lucky to get him to commit, as he's rather busy running three bars for Whistler Blackcomb, and now juggling his gorgeous young family into the mix. When he does commit, however, he usually steals the show with his lightning quick wit and impossibly white teeth. In one show he taught us how to perform a very realistic, but not painful, "kicking a guy in the balls" move that I'm sure will become a great party trick in the days to come.

I've followed with amusement his various moustache styles that have sprung up over the years — but I think he's stopped that now — and enjoyed his various mottos. Like if you are confronted with something wrong you've done, the best way to deal with it is: Act surprised, show concern, and deny, deny, deny.

Works every time.

He does have the Reverend thing going as well. I'm not sure if you can legally get married by him — I think he achieved this status from a send away thing from Nebraska or something — but if I were to ever go down that crazy road, I'd pick him to take me through my vows. It would be a fun affair, and probably better that it's not legal.

So keep up the good work!



SUBMITTED - MAUREEN DOUGLAS

Tags: Feature Story

## MAUREEN 'MO' DOUGLAS — EVENT GURU, FUN GAL.

Mo Douglas gave me my start in the street entertainment biz 15 years ago. She had recommended me to Tourism Whistler to create a character for some event that I can't remember now, and I came up with The Fashion Police. This led into many other silly characters I created over the years and ensured my house would be cluttered with wigs, costume jewelry and glitter for almost two decades. This also led her to introduce me as a "streetwalker" in front of 200 people in the inaugural Icon Gone show. Mo is simply a very quick witted, fun and lovely gal to know.

When she was organizing First Night I wound up finishing two giant puppets in my living room when the other participants in the "puppet project" lost interest. And on the five-year countdown to the Olympics she hired me to make giant fives to decorate the Olympic office — which were again created in my living room.

So whenever I see glitter or sequins, I think of Mo. And I think that's a good thing...

Well, that's my inaugural "Love In" article. There's a lot more people I'm glad are here, from the incredible group of people I can call on whenever I'm organizing a show or an event, to my friends, obviously, and the funny people I run into every day doing every day things. This town is a gem and the people here are awesome.

I....I...love you man!!

*Michele Bush is a 32-year local who didn't move here to ski. But she's met some fun people and has had a good time anyway.*

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