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NEIGHBOURS OF EDGEMONT



Following Her Compass
How Johanna Simmons Found Her
Way Back to a Childhood Dream

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Following Her Compass

How One Edgemont Resident Finally Found Her Way Back to a Childhood Dream

■ By Patricia Barnes

Photos by Persia Anjam-Campo | Simayatography



There once was a book called "Play Therapy" that, for one Montreal teenager, quietly changed the course of her life.

"A friend of mine gave me the book," says Johanna Simmons. "It was written by pioneering psychologist Virginia Axline, and it introduced the idea of helping children heal and grow through play. By the time I finished reading it, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: I wanted to become a play therapist."

Life, however, had other plans. Johanna felt the calling early, but her parents discouraged her. "Psychology was not a field my parents saw value in," Johanna says, "So they encouraged me to go into Chemical Technology." But it was a path that felt fundamentally misaligned with her spirit, and Johanna dropped out before completing the program.



When her family moved to British Columbia in 1979, a new opportunity emerged. There was a desperate need for French-speaking educators, and Johanna earned her teaching certificate, embarking on a journey that would see her spend eleven years in elementary classrooms.

While teaching, Johanna met Tom, the man with whom she built a life defined by imagination and shared adventure. They would spend the next thirty-eight years together, and their origin story is a testament to Tom's persistence.

"We met through a friend of his that I was dating," Johanna says. "Later, Tom wanted to get in contact with me, but couldn't ask his friend. However, he did know that in order to get back to university, I was trying to sell my car and that I'd put an ad for my 1976 Honda Civic in the Auto Trader. Tom tracked down my ad, called me, and the rest is history!"

"Tom went into business for himself," Johanna shares, "Manufacturing plastic bottles and jars for the food and pharmaceutical industry. I worked for him doing his bookkeeping and managing the administrative duties of the operation."

"Then, in 1994 and 1995, I took two trips to China to bring home our baby girls. After trying to be a working mom, I realized it wasn't for me and stayed home with my girls. When my oldest was 10, I went back to school to become a counsellor."

Johanna went to Adler University to pursue a Master's in counselling psychology. She thrived in the academic environment, fascinated by every branch of the field from addictions to family counselling. Yet, the "universe" nudged her back toward her original passion. An internship in elementary schools fell into her lap, reminding her that her heart belonged to working with children.

This realization propelled her to become a Registered Play Therapist and eventually to study Synergetic Play Therapy under Lisa Dion. This work introduced her to the critical roles of the nervous system, brain development, and regulation, the final pieces of the puzzle for her own therapeutic framework.

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"After graduating from Adler University, I wanted to facilitate parenting classes," Johanna says, "So I approached John Braithwaite Community Centre and ran parenting classes there twice a year for 4 years, at no charge to the parents or the centre. I wanted to give back to the community in some way."

Today, Johanna is a university instructor, clinical supervisor, and the author of "Parenting in the 21st Century: The Neuro-Informed Parent." Her book, released in 2026, represents the culmination of sixteen years of study and clinical practice. By helping parents view their children through a neuro-informed lens, she empowers them to navigate behavioural challenges with empathy and science-backed strategies.

Her dedication also extends to the professional community. Johanna has spent 16 years on the board of the British Columbia Play Therapy Association, serving 5 years as president, during which she spearheaded initiatives to credential play therapists and expand the association's reach across Canada.

Throughout it all, family life remained the vibrant backdrop to her professional evolution.

Johanna's daughters grew up immersed in the magic their parents created. "Christmas was always the big, important holiday at our house. Every Christmas Eve, after the girls were in bed, Tom would dress as Santa. I'd wake the girls up, and we'd 'spy' on Santa delivering the presents. I'd record it, and the next morning we'd show Dad, who always seemed to miss seeing Santa."

"At least once a week, I would pick the girls up after school, and we'd either go skating or cross-country skiing," Johanna says with a smile, "Skiing in the evenings at Cypress Mountain after a fresh snowfall were the most wonderful and beautiful time. After a couple of hours out, we would go to the warming hut for a bowl of soup and a cup of hot chocolate."

"In the summer, we spent many hours in our backyard pool or days at our cabin in Egmont on the Sunshine Coast. There we would kayak, go swimming, or the girls would enjoy playing in the creek behind the cabin, which they said was where the fairies lived. It was a time for their imaginations to run wild and a time for us to reconnect to nature and as a family."

Johanna's love for exploration has taken her across the globe. She fondly remembers driving her convertible with her daughters to the Oregon Coast or up to Whitehorse, where they encountered grizzlies, bison, and wild horses. Her travels have spanned Fiji, Italy, Australia, and, most recently, Barcelona, where in January 2026 she fulfilled a dream she had held since her undergraduate art



Johanna's story is a reminder that while the path to one's dreams may be long and winding, every stop along the way provides the wisdom needed to arrive exactly where one is meant to be.

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history day - witnessing Gaudi's architecture in person. Whether exploring Sicily's ruins or joining her daughter in Melbourne, Johanna views travel as a vital way to reconnect with the world and herself.

For all her global adventures, Edgemont Village has been her home for twenty-six years. It is here that she raised her children among neighbours who have become lifelong friends. She recalls the warmth of a neighbour bringing a fresh loaf of bread when she first moved in, a gesture that defined her experience of the community.

Today, she enjoys the village's walkability and the annual block parties, finding deep roots in the history shared on her street. Even as her daughters move into their own adult lives, one pursuing a Master's in occupational therapy at UBC and the other travelling abroad, Edgemont remains the center of her world.

Reflecting on her journey, Johanna Simmons sees a series of "scenic routes" that all led to the same destination. Her life has been a dedicated pursuit of understanding and support. She continues to give back, whether through volunteering at shelters or mentoring the next generation of clinicians.

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