

An abstract painting with a vibrant, warm color palette of oranges, reds, and pinks. The composition is filled with expressive, gestural brushstrokes and splatters. In the center, there are several horizontal, brush-like strokes in shades of blue and purple. Black, swirling lines and splatters are scattered throughout the scene, adding a sense of movement and energy. The overall effect is one of dynamic, emotional expression.

# joëlle rabu

## MAYBE THIS TIME

OH SO LAY WUE LAY PROO-ES  
WUE MEI-ERE DO AN MEI-ERE  
WEL ELAN WOKA VOOR LAY  
OH MAY LAY LAY

FRANKLINE



*“You should record another album,”  
they said, “and write liner notes  
about your life in Music,  
the music in your Life”.*

At first, I decided on *“My Love Affair with Piaf”* as the title and theme. Catchy? Perhaps a bit... provocative? Hmm, that oughta sell! Then I reconsidered: recalling April 1984, after a year-long run of the show *“Piaf, Her Songs, Her Loves”* at Vancouver’s City Stage, desperately trying to escape my typecast-status as: *“the voice of Édith Piaf”*, a hefty crown to have worn.

I spent years trying to shed the French songbird’s bewitching and protective cloak without exposing the bare, untrained voice; the insecure performer; the 25-year-old ex-waitress skeptical of future showbiz escapades. Yet, I did not want to plow over this perfectly manicured path that the great Piaf’s hits had landscaped for me. I was lucky and I was grateful. It had been my first time on a professional stage and voilà, I was in an award-winning show, “an overnight success”, they said. But my mother’s heavily French-accented whispers, after my opening night ovations, echoed loudly for years to come *“How do you top what has just happened to you?”* Sigh. Oh maman... you always had a way of grounding me. Her pragmatic question was followed by an equally practical solution *“You know, teaching is an honorable and stable profession”*. I laugh now - as this was only her way of protecting her ‘last mistake’ - her loving, funny way to describe the child she had at age 40.

This self-doubt occurred so long ago. It should have been easy to decide what to record now, with so much stuff packed into this resumé of Life. I burrowed into my song tunnel; a labyrinth of languages, styles, expressions, vocal ranges, favorite singers and my 79th 'Favourite. Best. Song. Ever'.

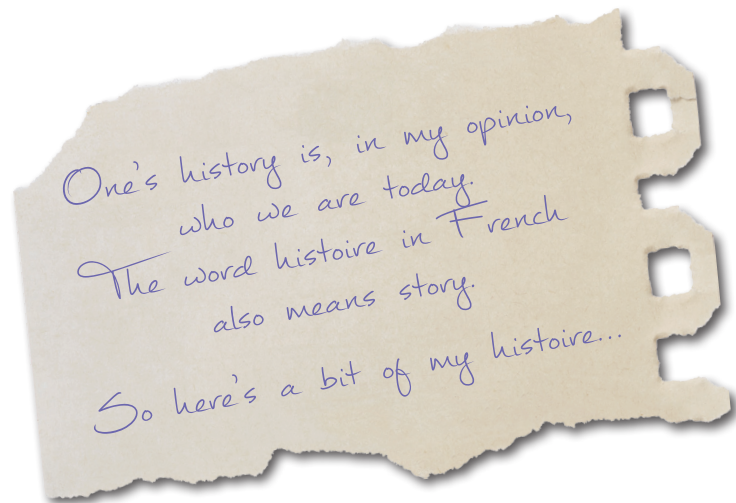
Tears started to well in my eyes. At first I thought it was anxiety. I was overwhelmed by having to make a decision about what my album in my 6th decade of life would sound like. I soon surmised I was having an identity crisis. I related to an old quote by Chef Anthony Bourdain, "*I feel sometimes like I've lived three lives.*"

I contemplated on what I had to sing. What I had to say. I decided that the Cole's Notes approach for liner notes would be more prudent. Otherwise, I'd never finish the album.

During my career, so many people expressed their love for me by telling me what I should sing. Problem: they all had different ideas. "*Less dramatic*", they said. "*Something we can listen to while eating or while reading. No, go with theatrical, more orchestral, your big voice works with that big sound*", they said. "*Have you considered Country... Folk...a bit of light jazz...an English only album?*" Sigh.

Nail biting, while fence-sitting, vacillating between boldness and self-doubt, I finally made up my mind. **I would record songs that spoke to me at this time of my life, music that I had held close to my heart for decades, and, maybe this time, I would simply believe in moi.**

And to find '**moi**', I had to revisit the past, because one's history is, in my opinion, who we are today. The word *histoire* in French also means story. So here's a bit of my *histoire*...







### I HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF GROWING UP ON THE BANKS OF THE RED RIVER

in Manitoba: my birthplace. My brother and sister are 20 and 14 years older than me, so by the time they were out of the house, I was singularly pampered with love and attention. One childhood souvenir that always tugs at my heart strings is my parents' weekend ritual, which honoured their birthplace: Brittany. Maman, *klissen* in hand (Breton, for spatula), preparing a *déjeuner of Krampouez* (Crêpes Bretonnes), and papa dancing in the kitchen infusing joie-de-vivre in our home. The French tunes they accompanied vocally were from a huge library of vinyl LP's featuring Ball Musette, Javas, Tangos, and all of those melodramatic French singers, wailing about lost love, new love, unrequited love, lusty love, bad love. Nonetheless, all spoke the same language of *l'amour*. As a side note, I must mention that the other language fluently spoken during my childhood was culinary in nature. I come from a family of exceptionally talented chefs, and I thank my brother Michel and my sister Lily for their contributions to my album in the form of traditional recipes. To avoid any sibling rivalry, our deal has always been: you cook, I sing.

Two very memorable songs on those scratchy records were Édith Piaf's *La Vie en Rose* and *L'hymne à l'amour*. By the time I was 12, I could hum along to most of the Parisian Sparrow's song. As an adolescent, I didn't quite understand the complexities of love about which she sang. To me, these songs were beautiful melodies, with words that held little meaning, sung by a voice that inexplicably made me shiver, weep and could move me to the depths of my young soul.



Joëlle (5 years old) with Sheba





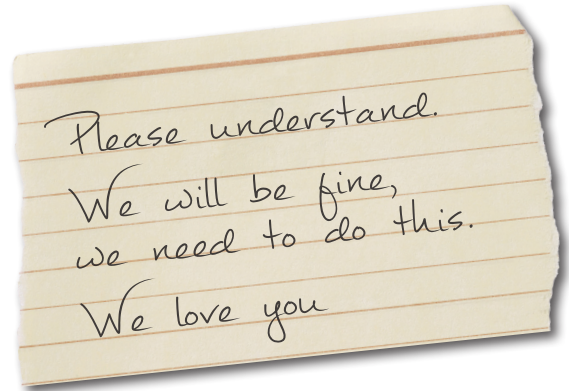
How was I to know that one day, an older me would be personally exposed to those emotional complexities? The ones that make you feel like you're flying, the ones that make you feel like you're drowning. How was I to know that one day I would enjoy euphoric love and in the same lifetime, I'd come to live with a new roommate called Grief who would leave me fragile and dented.

But one needs darkness  
to appreciate the light;  
heartache to appreciate love,  
non?

"Grief is the price for love"  
(thanks for the quote Brent A)

### MY FIRST TRUE LOVE AFFAIR WAS WITH MY HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART.

It would prove to be an important life lesson. In February of 1975, at the age of 16, we ran away from home to see the world. We were both honour roll students, no parent-teen issues, we had a safe circle of friends. It was curiosity and a longing for adventure, cultivated by our vagabond parents, that sparked a 'coup de tête' departure to the antipodes. When we met as teens on Vancouver Island, we discovered we both held an enthusiasm for foreign languages and distant cultures; a longing to experience this great planet beyond the encyclopedia and TV nature shows. The fact that we suddenly decided to upend our lives, leave our families, and drop out of school was not because we were running away from anything. We were running to something. We didn't exactly get our parents' blessings... we took off at night, leaving a "please understand, we will be fine, we need to do this, we love you" note on their respective kitchen tables. Their concern was tempered with the realization that it would have been futile to stop us.





Joëlle & Greg  
on Serifos Island Greece



Joëlle with Diane the Orangutan  
in Sabah, Borneo

OUR WANDERLUST STARTED IN NEW ZEALAND (in those days, our meager savings managed to cover 2 one-way tickets to Auckland, there was no turning back now!). Three years and over 40 countries later, our circumnavigation of this glorious planet came to an end. When working your way around the world, one must be prepared to accept many forms of employment, which in my case included: personal waitress to Singapore's visiting Prime Minister in Queenstown; waitress in an East Indian restaurant in Manly, cook at a resort on the Great Barrier Reef, receptionist at a hair salon in Perth, grape picker in the Champagne Valley and turkey slayer in an abattoir in Brittany. Most of the viable jobs were in tourism, where there was always so much going on. That was where I found inspiration.

At the ripe old age of 19, I returned with a clear vision: I would make my future in the tourism industry. I dove into my parents' Vancouver Island business, the Gourmet by the Sea-Bennett's Point Resort, in Oyster Bay. I explored every facet of the business, and started, what I thought, would be my life-long career. My brother, the Chef, had other plans for me. He thought my voice should be heard in public. And the whispers, behind my back, of "We have to find a way to get her singing on stage", were largely ignored by me. I was far too pragmatic to believe I could ever make a living in the music industry. After four years of cutting my teeth in the family business, I moved to Vancouver with my new love Dusty Rhodes, a waiter from my family's restaurant, and I quickly found work in some of the finest restaurants in town in order to further hone my tourism skills.



IN APRIL OF 1983, MY BROTHER, WHILE VISITING, MADE A CASUAL REMARK to my French colleague about me. “She can sing like Piaf, you know. Do you have any connections with theatre people?” And here starts the Cinderella story part of my life: That colleague happened to know the Vancouver director, Ray Michal, who was hoping to resuscitate his Thurlow street theatre, City Stage, which had been suffering the impact of the 1980’s recession. Ray needed a hit. We met, I sang 3 Piaf songs, and he pulled an old Piaf script out of his desk. Within 48 hours, I was catapulted into the world of theatre and thus began my love affair with, not only Piaf, but with the stage. My 3-week contract of *Piaf, Her Songs, Her Loves* was extended so many times, that eventually we became one of the longest running musicals in Vancouver’s history, racking up 3 Jessie Awards. This show became the impetus that spurred an international career and established a 30-year long relationship with 4 magnificent musicians.

After more than 500 shows interpreting the little sparrow in Vancouver’s West End, over a year of amazing accolades and rave reviews, my mother’s wisdom echoed again. “Yes, but what can you do beyond playing Piaf?” My dedicated musicians J Douglas Dodd, Tom Neville, Charlie Knowles and later, Jack Stafford along with my sound man Phil Posner and my (now) husband-lighting designer Dusty Rhodes set out with me, on my quest to find Joëlle.

This detour into discovery was quite overwhelming for this 25-year-old Red River girl who had never had a singing lesson in her life, and now, was no longer protected by a hit show’s reputation.







Tour bus Warsaw, Poland 1989



Joëlle as Sally Bowles  
in Cabaret with  
dresser Nirmal - 1984



THREE DECADES OF TOURING AROUND THE GLOBE WITH MY PILLARS, affectionately known as “Les Guys” was indescribable. We were a family unit. We saw each other through marriages, divorces, births, family illness and death. We cried and laughed, we always had each other’s backs, and the best part was that we really enjoyed sharing the stage. I was truly blessed. As the concert appearances increased, the ‘*Star of Piaf*’ tagline on the posters grew fainter. My name became more prominently displayed, we wrote some of our own music, we recorded several albums, and we always performed in several languages. One headline fittingly labelled us *Purely Canadian*. Whether touring in theatres or concert halls; or recording for the Universal Esperanto Association or the Special Olympics or lending our supportive voices to the Gay Games and a myriad of fundraisers, I can attest that each show was a unique musical love affair which championed diversity, linguistic inclusivity, creative exploration and respect.

Predictably, I could never leave the stage without being asked to belt out a signature Piaf song. But throughout my career, I did have the opportunity to explore other roles such as: the Canadian icon Marg Osborne in John Gray’s ‘*Don Messer’s Jubilee*’; the quirky Irma in ‘*Irma la Douce*’; the farmer-nun in ‘*Marion Bridge*’; the spicy Reno in ‘*Anything Goes*’, and the incomparable Sally Bowles in ‘*Cabaret*’, the latter granting me yet another epic tune that follows me to this very day: **Maybe this Time.**

IN 1989, NATURE FORCED ME TO TAKE A SHORT 'ENTRE-ACTES', an intermission. By this time, I had performed *Joëlle Rabu in Concert* in China, Eastern Europe, the western USA, England, and across Canada from sea to sea to sea. I had an original symphony show called *Magic of the Music Hall* which made me fall in love with the lush sounds of a full orchestra that would so effortlessly envelop my voice, and we had recorded 5 albums, one of which was nominated for a Juno. But it was time, it seemed, for a break.

I don't know if it was my new foray into motherhood that nudged me back to my roots and culture, but whatever it was, that pause in 1989 led me back to Édith. I had been feeling the longing to delve deeper into my French upbringing, to relive those Sunday afternoons with the crêpes and the accordion, and I realized I was not done with Piaf. I needed to tell her story in a more intimate, complex nature than the one I had done in 1983. It had to be more than a slick pastiche of her life. I realized that her music reflected the intensity, the belonging, and the raw narrative of my French ancestry.

I started to write *Tonight...Piaf*, a dramatization of Piaf's final New York concert set 2 years before her death at the age of 47. She: near death, a morphine-addicted mess drowning in pain and heartache. I: pregnant, full of unbridled glee, gliding through life on hormonal bliss and madly in love with everything.

I re-immersed myself in the old books I had read about Édith. All the stories and interviews I researched were in French. They had to be. There was no room for bad translations or misinterpretations of what really happened in her short, albeit, *wide* life. I worked with my friend, the late Ted Galay, a dramaturge who helped connect the scattered dots in my script.



In June of 1989,  
we premiered  
Tonight... Piaf  
at Vancouver's Queen  
Elizabeth Theatre,  
under the direction of  
the late Ray Michal,  
my very first director.

Les Guys 2015  
Jack, Charlie, Tom, Joëlle, Doug, Phil



Joëlle in Tonight... Piaf  
premiere 1989







## FIVE MONTHS AFTER THAT JUNE PREMIERE, MY SON NICO WAS BORN.

Fast forward 25 years after that particular opening night: my son, now a professional musician, joined me on stage with a full symphony, with all of the orchestral arrangements for my Piaf show penned by his 25-year-old hand. That year, he and I recorded *Full Circle*.

The *Full Circle* recording was born from an epoch of happenstances between 2005 to 2015. It was a decade when shift happened. It started with the heart-wrenching realization that my magnificent soulmate-husband and father of my sons, Dusty Rhodes, was not going to escape the bipolar hell that had infiltrated his psyche and taken us hostage. We had been together since 1981, he was an award-winning lighting designer, genuine, hyper intelligent, exceptionally loving, extremely creative, he was... well: magnificent. We first fell in love on a dance floor, wrapped in the sensual grasp of *Unchained Melody* and then he showed off his disco moves. That clinched it. The man could dance. For decades, we laughed and loved to the same tempo and timbre. We had no idea a cruel mental illness would one day silence our song. Our love affair was slowly coming to a tragic end. I held on until I found myself dangling dangerously at the end of my hope. My father had just passed, my mother had cancer. I was raising a teen bewildered by the unusual behaviour of his beloved father. My band required my attention, and I could no longer provide it. There now was a stranger living in our house, one that had no idea of the devastation this illness was causing to his health, and to our collective hearts. I had stopped singing.



Joëlle and Nico

We had stopped sharing. We had stopped dancing. But we never stopped loving. That was when I learned that even when a heart breaks many times over, it keeps on beating... 'cause it has to, I guess. My husband was given his final years of happiness living with his son, Jace, and working a few last theatre shows with his son Nico. Less than 2 years after our reluctant separation, and 6 months after losing my mother, Dusty died. Leaving us all in shock, but in an unsettling way, he also left us reassured. That was his thoughtful and rational way. Whether in a surreal manic high or a grounded, considerate low, both roles were consistent. I learned much later that our song, from that time long ago on the dance floor, was from a 1955 film centered on a man who contemplates either escaping from prison to live life on the run or finishing his sentence and returning to his wife and family.

I learned that even when  
a heart breaks many times over,  
it keeps on beating...  
'cause it has to,  
I guess.



Son Jace & Joëlle  
with newborn Nico



Dusty



## I RAN AWAY ONCE WHEN I WAS 16 AND I RAN AWAY AGAIN WHEN I WAS 54.

The latter being the push of my life's restart button. No longer tied to the stage and touring, no obligations to children or parents. I accepted an offer to go to Haida Gwaii, off the northern coast of British Columbia. The offer was from the economic arm of the Haida Nation who had acquired a 10-room lodge situated on the serene Tllaal river. The lodge had been a highly contested trophy bear hunting business and the Haida decided that the senseless killing of these magnificent animals would end, and the only way to stop it would be to buy the lodge. They retired the extremely high-priced hunting licences and handed me a key to the front door. I was entrusted to prepare the road map for this new business that would strive to value the environment, create sustainable employment, and respect the Haida culture that had remained vibrant since time immemorial. Returning to my tourism roots reenergized me and mowed a clear path amongst all this confusing and obstructive foliage that had been my life for the past 7 years. I dove deeply and seriously into my new work. It was an honour and a challenge. I was alone, I had no one to blame if I bungled my pledge. I put love out of my mind, it would only get in the way after all.

The years sailed by, and the award-winning business flourished. I began to feel at home in this archipelago of more than 150 stunning islands. My pied-à-terre was the Tllaal river which reminded me of my Red, my new friends reminded me of the closeness I had with my musical family, life was starting to feel right again. I'd even started to sing a bit with my son Nico, doing little winter gigs here and there, no big



*Chief Gyahgujaang  
& Joëlle 2019 Potlatch*



*Joëlle & adpoted  
mom Ildagwaay*



commitments. I was nudged back onto the stage, but on my own terms, as the lodge was my primary focus, my identity, and my inspiration now. It was home. I soon identified Haida Gwaii with the word family when I met an Elder whom I would eventually call Mother. Ildagwaay - Matriarch of the K'aadas Ga KiiGawaay clan of Taan'u asked to adopt me. She gave me my name, jaada K'aajuu Gayaa – *girl with precious voice*.

My life on Haida Gwaii felt like a fairy tale come true, and what would a fairy tale be without a love story. Some people only find love *once upon a time*, but I was blessed *twice upon a time*. I met the person I would grow old with and laugh through the wrinkles of time. Patrick Wesley was a beautiful Haida artist, someone who also understood the need for creativity in life, the need for joy and more importantly, the significance of being valued. I learned so much from Patrick, I can't thank him and his caring family enough for opening their arms, their traditions, and their hearts to me. We hit the relationship ground running, well more like a fast walk, considering our age. We knew we had started our life together late; time was precious. He needed a new heart valve, I needed to finish my succession plan for the lodge. Six months into our relationship, he had open heart surgery. This gave him a new lease on life, our caring of each other deepened, we were starting to make serious plans about our future. We only had a few years together, when suddenly on September 6th of 2018, a minor headache turned into a full out brain hemorrhage and Patrick's voice was abruptly silenced. I sat at his Intensive Care bedside in Vancouver for 26 days, and like a relentless metronome, my heart kept trying to keep time with the beeping rhythm of the 11 pumps, wires and tubes keeping my Patrick alive. Every night, as I followed the bedtime ritual of washing, combing, massaging and whispering "*I'm here, you are not alone, I love you*", I would prop my phone by his ear in hopes he could hear the soothing music. The one song I would sing along to, until it would unavoid-



ably choke my vocal cords into silence, was *Harvest Moon*. The line “*I want to see you dance again*”, tripped me up each and every time - one cannot sing while sobbing.

The doctors did not speak the language of music, they spoke an unfamiliar language of facts, speculation, statistics and the unknown. It was one doctor who asked me the most important question while explaining a Being in a vegetative state: “*What did Patrick do?*” he asked. My answer was the determining element in releasing Patrick from his current, merciless, counterfeit life. “*He paints, he carves, he photographs clouds, he loves music, he walks for miles in nature, he fillets fish like a master, he makes me laugh, he loves bonfires at the full moon on the beach, he fills many hearts, he loves his family, he likes puzzles, he likes dice games, he cries watching Animal Planet.*” I spoke about him in the present tense until October 1st when released from artificial breaths, he took a final gasp on his own and his beautiful light went out, and my world, like the final scene in a stage play, faded to black.

I brought Patrick home and the community gathered. His spirit was everywhere. He was in every soaring eagle, every teasing raven. He was in the fragrance of the towering cedars and the salt of the Pacific wind. His heartbeat was in every pulsating chant and beating drum. But without him by my side, I felt lost. I returned to Vancouver Island, cracked but unaware of just how badly. To me, death and broken love affairs feel the same. Along with the intense despair, there is a huge sense of abandonment and anger. The lyrics to Gilbert Bécaud’s song ‘*Et Maintenant*’, say it best “*And now what will I do? Towards which dark void will my life slide? You left me an entire planet, but without you, the planet is small*”

Once again, I dove back into my job, but remotely. The summer passed, grief ebbed and flowed like the tides. My courage and sense of identity were slowly resurfacing. In the summer of 2019, I was preparing to be formally adopted into my clan at the Potlatch for our Hereditary Chief. This would also mean returning to Haida Gwaii and deciding if I could find home there again. However, that decision would not be mine. Ten days before my arrival in mid-September, the newly arrived management of the corporation decided to ‘restructure’ the company, and consequently my life-path. Along with many others, I was let go from a job I had loved so much. Still, I attended and served at the Potlatch of our new Clan Chief. I danced my adopted name, proudly wearing my new Raven crest Vest, witnessed by hundreds of friends and family. Embraces of ‘*welcome home*’ soaked up the bittersweet tears I left on so many shoulders.

Life-partner and career gone; this chapter of my life was tucked in a scrapbook, on a shelf alongside the other photo albums of travel, music, marriage, success, love and loss.

Now, back on Vancouver Island, a year of introspective analysis ensued. I realized that I had not only said *au revoir* to many loved ones over the past few decades, but I had conceded to a kind of defeat. It was more than a *c’est la vie* moment. **I had lost trust in everything, including myself.**

Ultimately, time changed  
my perspective. Shift Happened.

**IT WAS TIME TO REINVENT MYSELF-AGAIN.** I started a new little business of creating unique weekend getaways with invited guests such as writers, chefs, sculptors, singers... the perfect world for me: mixing tourism with the arts. Maybe this time things would work out the way I envisioned them unfolding in my head. And then, a nasty virus hit our planet. I was no longer in a place of self-doubt or self-renewal; I was now in a place of challenging my endurance. "What'll I do?" The world was unravelling, but I would not allow that loose thread to define the final design of my life's tapestry.

I learned to do what so many had to do faced with the Great Pause of 2020: adjust. You learn to dig deep into yourself, you reach out for assistance, you look at salvaging some of your worn-out parts, you file some shaky thoughts under 'L' for Later, you shred others, you take out the scratch pad where doodles now look like new concepts, you surround yourself with people who see you for who you are, not what you do or what you can do for them. And most importantly, you don't take yourself too seriously.

You listen to the people who believe in you,  
you listen to the old songs humming  
in your intuition, requesting to come out.  
And if grief returns for another brief  
sojourn, or if life is muddled:  
don't resist.

Back in 2017, my dear friend Francine Peters, had painted me 'live' while I sang on a stage in Mexico. We had both mused how this vibrant, colourful painting would make a great album cover. Francine, like Bourdain, lived several lives until the last one in 2019. Her last words were "Remember the good times". And that I do, for not long ago, as I admired her paintings that grace my walls, I gazed at her giant canvas interpretation of me. I finally stopped searching. Francine had captured my *Identity*. A kaleidoscope of contours, circumstances, and characters; a path of bold strokes, of multicoloured fragments of light, reflecting on the uneven surfaces and chaotic, spectacular moments of this thing called life. Thank you for this one Franny.



**SO MAYBE THIS TIME, I'LL RESTORE MY VOWS... WITH LIFE AND WITH MUSIC.** I promise to love hard at all costs, to offer a wide berth, to give without obligation to collect, and I'll remember that *when there are clouds in the sky, you'll get by*, if you just smile. As for this recording, I have come to realize that my life is sounding like a series of song quotes! So in true Rabu nature, I am going full out. Afterall, I have nothing to lose, and *all the odds are in my favour*.





“When there are  
clouds in the  
sky, you’ll  
get by, if you  
just smile”.

[www.joellerabu.com](http://www.joellerabu.com)

©2022 Joëlle Rabu • All rights reserved • Made in Canada