North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

November & December 2026

THE GRAPEVINE

North Shore Caregivers Newsletter



FEATURED STORY

S.O.S. Senior Shopaholic by Catherine Bryson

S.O.S. Senior Shopaholic

By Catherine Bryson



Fall is here, incredible though that may seem.

This morning I made my usual walk past the majestic trees near the school. As I walk, the elegant and graceful dancer-like branches delicately enfold, like a mother's loving arms. The trees are generous with their canopy of leaves. And if you ask me, trees are Vancouver's jewel in the crown.

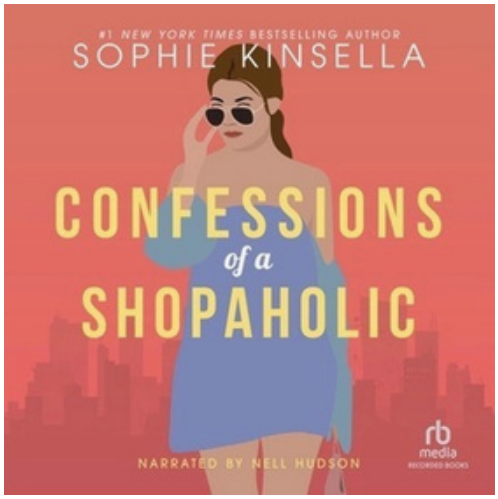
Not to mention, of course, the tremendously rich cultural diversity of this city. Though truth be told, a city with the heart of an adolescent so it would seem; what I dubbed 'high school Vancouver' back in 1991 and it still persists. Everyone is so busy trying to look and sound 'cool.' You would think that with adulthood individual expression would naturally follow. But it seems so much smoke and mirrors these days.

But enough of that. On to our topic for the month: Shopaholic Seniors (and/or their respective caregivers.) A while ago a hilarious book by Sophie Kinsella 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' came out. I will try in this rather serious topic to infuse some of that book's levity. Not too much gravity (goodness knows we get enough of that already.)

Consider the following: an online ad for running shoes promising '3 pairs for the price of 1!' Click! Click! Done!

A week later, a large package arrives on the front doorstep of your loved one. Meanwhile, you pull back the voluminous rack of clothes in her closet, and spy at least 4 pairs of running shoes, still in their boxes!

Ah, yes. Click-o-mania. And yes, the science backs it up, online shoppers do get a 'hit' of the feel-good hormone dopamine every time they hit Buy. It's like a kid eating candy, except the stakes are higher—in the case of compulsive shopping (which we shall examine shortly), the risk of serious debt. I once heard a talented Irish blues singer sing a song called 'the ice cream man'. In that song, the 'ice cream man' was a euphemism for a drug pusher. Well, I suppose one might say that about the 'Amazon man'. Almost like a lover, Hark! Methinks I hear his van. Behold! The Amazon Man commeth. Make haste! Online shopping can become almost like a drug habit. Shocking, but true.



To get us started, here are the 5 Symptoms of Compulsive Buying:

- Buying in secret
- Lying about purchases
- Spending more than you can afford
- Buying to feel better
- Conflicts caused by overspending

It is true, however that a healthy desire for 'retail therapy' should not be a cause for concern, unless, of course, it becomes a problem either for the senior concerned or those who are tasked to care for that senior. Nor am I leaving out the fact that due to the inevitable 'caregiver stress', caregivers themselves can become compulsive shoppers, and this in turn can impact their willingness or ability to care for someone. Shopping can become 'all-consuming', much like a drug.

But for starters, how do you know if either you or your loved one has 'Compulsive Shopping Disorder'?

First of all, compulsive shopping may indicate a mental health issue such as depression and/or cognitive decline.

For the person to be diagnosed with Compulsive Shopping, it must be evident that addiction is involved. If it is determined to be an addiction, then a whole other level of treatment is required. (More on that later.)

As an addiction, it becomes apparent that the person is self-medicating, perhaps to quell feelings of depression, boredom, and/or loneliness (Loneliness in itself deserves its own study and discussion, as it is so prevalent in our society. More on that in future Grapevines.)

As previously mentioned, shopping can be a mood booster and in fact gives you a hit of dopamine, a substance found in many addictive drugs. The senior (or caregiver) could just be desperately trying to self-soothe in a troubled world or troubled circumstances such as grief or a serious illness.

Personal issues such as losing a spouse, retirement or children moving away can all lead to a sense of emptiness or void. It is almost as if retail therapy, if only for a brief moment, gives the shopper an almost spiritual sense of connection or 'Oneness'. In fact, a moment of 'transcendence' like this is hilariously depicted in Sophie Kinsella's book 'Confessions of a Shopaholic.'

As it turns out, 5% of Canadians have this disorder, so it's a significant issue affecting many people. However, for the individual to be diagnosed, there must be an apparent 'dependence', as for a substance. In fact, compulsive shopping belongs to a sub-set of addictions known as 'behavioural addictions.' These are addictions involving poor impulse control. And a diagnosis comes only if the person's shopping habits begin to interfere with the person's life, either financially or socially. A caregiver could be so busy scanning the websites for bargains that they are late picking up their loved one for a medical appointment. In that sense, it is a 'disorder', because shopping has now 'spilled over' into that person's daily life.

I will say that much as 'retail therapy' can be enjoyable, shopping isn't an effective long-term solution for stress—be it a serious illness, grief, or the daily wear and tear of caregiving in BC in the 2020s. Indeed, as with most habits, moderation is key.

Here are some 'next steps' you can take should you find yourself in this situation:

- Consider a cognitive assessment if dementia is suspected
- CBT for compulsive shopping has been found to be effective. That said, the person needs to own that they have a problem. Furthermore, the literature on the subject warns that a diagnosis alone won't stop the overspending
- The person needs skills in self-control (not 'will power'). They need to get tools so that they can manage their stress in healthier ways
- One thing to know is how we as adults feel about the tasks of independent living. Interference, such as taking away credit cards, may be met with resistance. The person might feel that their sense of control is threatened.

Nevertheless, there are services out there such as Debtors Anonymous (link in Resources).
It might be helpful to bring in someone less emotionally involved, above all, someone who will not judge. The person with the disorder is already in pain, that's why they shop compulsively after all.

It is a pity that in our relatively affluent society this problem exists.

I hope this article has been helpful. I look forward to writing the next one on accessing Respite care. With a primary focus on the North Shore. Thank you for taking the time to read this. True, it is a serious topic, but my hope was to try and infuse a little levity (as I try to do every time I write.)
We are entering the holiday season soon and for some people this time can be hard emotionally. But still, self-care in the form of reading has proven benefits. The Caregivers Blog posts I offer are meant for you, as part of your self-care 'toolbox.' At least, that is my intent. As readers seldom give feedback, the impact of my intent I do not really know, although I did win an award from NSCR last year. It's certainly encouraging to be appreciated.

Resources

'How to Handle a Shopaholic Senior'
https://www.agingcare.com/articles/elderly-parent-spends-too-much-money-shopaholic-135925.htm

'Struggling with my mother's shopping addiction'
https://www.reddit.com/r/shoppingaddiction/

Your Brain on Shopping: A Look at Compulsive Buying Disorder
https://muhc.ca/newsroom/article/your-brain-shopping-look-compulsive-buying-disorder

Debtors Anonymous
https://debtorsanonymousvancouver.com

Sophie Kinsella 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' (2001)

It saddens me greatly that I learned Ms. Kinsella has passed (at the age of 55), after a battle with brain cancer.

A note on the images: Sophie Kinsella's book cover and a touch of autumn beauty from a photo I took.

Events Calendar

NOVEMBER

Tues 03	**Caregiver Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom)	**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**
Thurs 05	**Men's Support Group Meeting** (In Person)	**10:30 AM - 12:30 PM**
Mon 16	**Persian Group Meeting** (In Person)	**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
Wed 18	**Korean Group Meeting** (In Person)	**12:00 PM - 2:00 PM**
Mon 23	**Bereavement Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom)	**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**
Mon 30	**Caregiver Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom) *Please note date change for this meeting originally scheduled for Dec 1	**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**

DECEMBER

Thurs 03	**Men's Support Group Meeting** (In Person)	**10:30 AM - 12:30 PM**
Wed 09	**Korean Group Meeting** (In Person)	**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**
Mon 21	**Persian Group Meeting** (In Person)	**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**

In the Depths of Despair Comes Compassion: Caregiver Self-Care Tool #1

By Catherine Bryson

Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody' Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)

You remember the group Pink Floyd, and the album the 'Dark Side of the Moon'? Well, there is a side to you that stays private, and just as there's your 'Public Caregiver Persona' and your 'Innermost Caregiver Self', so I give you a Caregiver Self-Care Tool (Tool #1, in what I hope will be a long and happy series of tools); that speaks to your Innermost Private Caregiver Self. (Which could just as easily speak to your Innermost Ex-Carer Self, for indeed once a caregiver you were, so will you always be.)

Life can be "lonelying" for caregivers. (A little creative wordplay here), people don't always understand what you're going through. I mean, the gut-wrenching emotional pain. Indeed, there can be an unbridgeable chasm between those who care for someone they love (or have done so), and those who don't. So, in the depths of that great barrenness, reach out to your weary careworn self and write yourself a heartwarming self-compassionate letter. Almost as if you were your own caring parent, or doting aunt, or favourite grandparent, whichever suits you most.

Here now is a brief introduction to self-compassion theory. This teaching on what is called Compassionate Mind Training is based on the work of psychologist Paul Gilbert. In the Resources you will find the reference to a truly wonderful book (by his student) that will get you started in the practice of self-compassion if you so choose. The alternative is Kristin Neff's book 'Self-Compassion' if that is a better fit for you (I include a reference to her work as well in the Resources).

In compassionate letter writing, we write about our difficulties from the perspective of our compassionate self, so as to get deeper insights and understand ourselves better.

Compassion has two parts:

1. Feelings: We feel for others, we feel for ourselves
2. Action-based: We seek to heal or help ourselves or others.

Therefore, compassion involves both thought and emotion, as well as action. For example, if you saw someone struggling in the water, you would not only show concern but also throw them a life preserver (or reach out a long stick that they can grab onto). Furthermore, if the waters were dark and murky, you would not only try to help but ensure your own safety as well.

These are the steps involved in compassionate letter writing. You do not have to follow them all:

1. Find a quiet place to sit with yourself undisturbed for 15 or 20 minutes. (However, we live in a fast-paced world as caregivers, if you only have 5 or 10 minutes that's okay too. No write or wrong here. Pardon the pun).
2. Why are you writing this letter? Set a goal or intention.
3. Identify a problem or area of difficulty. If multiple problems, choose the one that resonates the most right now.
4. Try to connect with your compassionate self (like a true best friend), so you can see it's not your fault. Life can be complicated, and so can human beings. Like author Mr. Chris Irons says, humans have 'tricky' brains. So true.
5. At the same time, try to take responsibility for your actions or behaviour (or lack of action).
6. Try to see if there is a better way or a 'lighter' way of looking at the problem or difficulty and see if you can think of one positive step you could take to help you deal with it better.
7. Identify areas of challenge or obstacles you will need to overcome to take that step. Are there things you could do or put in place to make that first brave step more likely to happen?
8. Give yourself support and thank yourself for taking the initiative—-maybe identify one person you could ask for help, support or guidance in taking that step.
9. Read the letter back to yourself—note that you could write an abbreviated form on an app on your phone if you prefer typing to handwriting.

You can start the letter by saying 'dear me' or 'dear friend' for example, if that feels right.
Some people write letters like these and keep them in their wallet and pull them out and read them in times of difficulty. For instance, if you had to take your loved one to ER one night, it would be like someone holding your hand (again, you could use your smartphone). Write in the language that resonates most for you and don't fret about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Just to help you along, I've written a sample compassionate letter. Here it is:

'Dear me,

You remember the time I lived in Paris in the Eighties and read that book on Palmistry that was so revealing? You found out your 'number' (everyone had one to describe their unique personality) was '5' and that your biggest obstacle was fear.

Or should I say, a certain preponderance for sensitivity?

Every day a new mountain to climb.

For this reason, you indulged in certain behaviours as a means of mitigating what could be a somewhat difficult reality.

These days I try to engage in healthier behaviours.

They are not such Everests now as there were then.

But some days can be a real test.

It's funny how people always say how 'calm' I seem. Nothing could be further from the truth!

You can try your 'calming' stone, that one you made out of clay. That one you are quite certain is imbued with special powers.

Or your volunteer jobs. Having something to do helps a lot.



And the dogs in your life. The cats, too, for that matter. Angels sent down from heaven, or so it would seem, that the 'Red Thread of Destiny' (see image above) sends you these remarkable beings (not just pets) from time to time. (The idea of the 'Red Thread of Destiny' comes from Chinese culture. You will read more about it in the image.)



And of course, your 'colour therapy' such as the 'clownfish' above.

Nurture the 'kid' in you.

Discover your inner clown. And why not? Humour is an excellent way to deal with stressful moments. Remember that time you were in a Team Meeting about your late father, and you could feel the tension in the room but then you suddenly said, "Yeah well... he's a Taurus." And everybody laughed and all the tension melted away!

At least for a few seconds.

Never forget that clown.

She will not let you down.

So, you see, there are tools at your disposal, to deal with those nightly dancing macabres (ghoulish), skeletons. (Or should I say: 'skelingtons'.)

Your friend forever and ever,

Catherine'

I am writing to the writer that lives in all of you, in all of us. Indeed, if you have read this far, then you are every writer's friend. Truly.

So, I raise a toast to you and indeed all caregivers (and ex-carers, like me) everywhere. We are heroes, all of us. And may you join me in that toast, even if it be in the small hours of the night. (That delicious uninterrupted privacy.) With or without inebriating accompaniment (or similar).

Resources

The Compassionate Mind Workbook: A Step-By-Step Guide To Developing Your Compassionate Self' (Robinson, 2017) by Chris Irons and Elaine Beaumont.

Required reading for all caregivers. Whatever the stage of their journey. Nevertheless, requires sustained commitment and focus on your part. (Just saying.)

'Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself' (2011) by Kristin Neff.

A little less 'intellectual' than the Chris Irons book, also, shorter. A better fit for some folks.

Greater Good Magazine: Science-Based Insights for a Meaningful Life
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu
A great resource. And free of charge (so far).

Images:

The Clownfish (I coloured)

The mural 'The Red Thread of Destiny'. Fascinating.

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

MEN'S CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

A monthly support group specifically for male caregivers who support their spouses/partners.



The group's goal is to create community and offer a time of sharing, listening, and connecting for men with experience of caregiving for their partners.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- November 5th (In Person)
- December 3rd (In Person)



FIRST THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH

10:30 AM - 12:30 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

nscr.ca @nscrconnect

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

A monthly support group for family caregivers who support their loved ones!



The group's goal is to create community and offer a time of sharing, listening, and connecting for anyone with experience of caregiving for family members.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- Tuesday, November 3rd (In Person & Zoom)
- Monday, November 30th (In Person & Zoom)*

Please note date change for this meeting originally scheduled for Dec 1



FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH*

6:30 PM - 8:30 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM & ZOOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

nscr.ca @nscrconnect

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

PERSIAN WELLNESS & EDUCATION GROUP

We aim to bring together members of the community to meet, share, and talk about topics brought forth by the group.



To join the new NSCR Persian Telegram Group, to receive information, meeting reminders, and to connect with the North Shore Persian community, scan or click the QR code.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- November 16th (In Person)
- December 21st (In Person)



THIRD MONDAY OF EACH MONTH

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

nscr.ca @nscrconnect

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

CAREGIVER BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

A group specifically for people experiencing grief in the loss of a loved one.



The group aims to create community and offer a time of sharing and resources, listening, and connecting with others with similar experiences.

NEXT MEETING:

- November 23 - 6:30 - 8:30 pm (In Person & Zoom)



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2026

6:30 PM - 8:30 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM & ZOOM

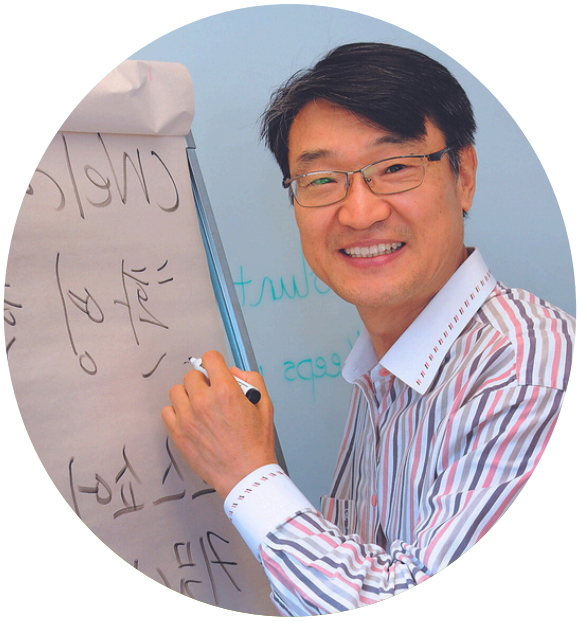
For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

nscr.ca @nscrconnect

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

KOREAN WELLNESS & EDUCATION GROUP

We aim to bring together members of the community to meet, share, and talk about topics brought forth by the group.



This group is held entirely in Korean, with guest speakers, resources, group interaction, and creative arts.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- November 18th - 12:00 - 2:00 pm*
- December 9th - 2:00 - 4:00 pm



SECOND WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH

2:00 PM - 4:00 PM* | **NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM**

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

nscr.ca @nscrconnect

North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

THE GRAPEVINE

North Shore Caregivers Newsletter



If you'd like to help support NSCR and the work we do you can follow the link below to donate:

DONATE NOW

We are thankful for all the support we get and couldn't help others without the generous help of patrons like you!