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We first wish to clarify the mission that has guided this Newsletter for the past 14 years. Our primary aim has been to bring to light resources - from research, professional practice, and daily life - that contribute to an appreciation of the aging process. Challenging the longstanding view of aging as decline, we strive to create a vision of life in which aging is an unprecedented period of human enrichment.

Such a revolution vitally depends on the communities of research and professional practices that focus on adult populations, especially people over 50. It is within these communities that new ideas, insights, factual support, and practices of growth enhancement can congenially emerge. By focusing on the developmental aspects of aging, and the availability of relevant resources, skills, and resiliencies, research not only brings useful insights into the realm of practice, but creates hope and empowers action among older people. By moving beyond practices of repair and prevention, to emphasize growth-enhancing activities, practitioners also contribute to the societal reconstruction of aging.

The readership of the newsletter has expanded over the years, including both professionals and the public. With help from Associates of the Taos Institute, the Newsletter is now translated into seven languages. Alan Robiolio, our friend and colleague, has been translating our newsletters into French since 2004. In Argentina, a brother-sister team, Marco and Christina Ravazzola, have been doing our Spanish edition since 2005. Our Portuguese edition has been produced by Eurídice Bergamaschi Vicente; our German edition by Anne Hoffknecht and Thomas Friedrich-Hett. Our Danish translator
is Geert Mørk. In China, we have one translator for the mainland, Liping Yang and one for Taiwan, Su-fen Liu. We are so grateful to each of them. Past archives, of both the originals and the translations are available at www.positiveaging.net

Now we are pleased to announce a new turn in the development of the Newsletter. Our much valued colleague Samuel Mahaffy, had been reading the Positive Aging Newsletter for some time, and he liked very much the message we were sending out to thousands of people about the potentials of positive aging. Samuel also saw the possibilities for going far beyond our dreams, and asked us to consider allowing him to reform the presentation to allow more interaction between our readers and ourselves. The result of these discussion is the new web resource Positive Aging in Action (www.Positiveagingnewsletter.org). Please have a look, try out a few of the features, and enjoy the new opportunities that the website provides. Also invited are opportunities for readers to make contributions, and to exchange ideas. As we said, if there is to be a transformation in our ideas and practices of aging, communities of sharing are essential.

Mary and Ken Gergen

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***RESEARCH***

* Focus on the Positive, for Health and Well-being

Over the years, we have published many findings that point to the positive effects of focusing on what is positive about aging. The present line of research from the Yale School of Public Health adds important dimension to this conclusion. As this research first suggests, older individuals who are exposed to positive stereotypes about aging show improved physical functioning that can last for several weeks.

The study, published in Psychological Science, consisted of 100 older individuals (average age 81 years). The researchers used a novel
intervention method in which positive age stereotypes (such as “spry” and “creative”) were flashed on a computer screen at speeds that were too fast to allow for conscious awareness. Individuals exposed to the positive messaging exhibited a range of psychological and physical improvements that were not found in control subjects. They benefited from improved physical function, such as physical balance, which continued for three weeks after the intervention ended. Also, during the same period, positive age stereotypes and positive self-perceptions of aging were strengthened, and negative age stereotypes and negative self-perceptions of aging were weakened.

“The challenge we had in this study was to enable the participants to overcome the negative age stereotypes which they acquire from society, as in everyday conversations and television comedies,” said lead researcher Becca Levy. “The study’s successful outcome suggests the potential of directing subliminal processes toward the enhancement of physical function.”

While it has been previously shown by Levy that negative age stereotypes can weaken an older individual’s physical functioning, this is the first time that subliminal activation of positive age stereotypes was found to improve outcomes over time. The study found that the intervention influenced physical function through a cascade of positive effects: It first strengthened the subjects’ positive age stereotypes, which then strengthened their positive self-perceptions, which then improved their physical function. The study’s effect on physical function surpassed a previous study by others that involved a six-month-exercise intervention’s effect with participants of similar ages.

In other research by Levy related to Alzheimer’s Disease, similar findings indicated that people who hold more negative views toward aging show more evidence of brain deterioration associated with dementia than their peers who hold more positive views. This is the first study to demonstrate that a culture-based risk factor could predict the development of Alzheimer’s Disease. As Levy surmised, to avoid the onset of this disease, "It would be great to bolster positive age stereotypes in everyday life."

From: Positive subliminal messages on aging improves physical
functioning in elderly by Michael Greenwood, Yale News, October 15, 2014

And


* Sustaining Cognitive Performance

In one fascinating study, brain researchers discovered that brain deficits did not mean a loss in cognitive performance. According to researchers at the Rush Alzheimer’s Disease Center, Rush University, in Chicago, autopsies on brains of older people showed that some people with extensive signs of cellular neuropathologies (a negative brain condition) had good cognitive abilities; while many who had few signs of pathology were cognitively challenged. Why the disconnect? This question could not be answered by brain science. A lot could be learned, however, by paying attention to how we thrive in everyday life.

What kinds of activities are likely to insulate us against decline in cognitive abilities? Perhaps no surprise to readers of this Newsletter, physical exercise is high on the list. Also significant is social interaction; isolation and inactivity are a threat. Interesting as well are paying attention to responsibilities, and finding a sense of purpose. Or, one might say, pursuing some goals in life inhibits decline. In this light, David Bennett, MD, director of the Rush center, suggests that the focus of attention for the medical professions should be on prevention of cognitive decline, not cures. We need to build capacities to withstand various factors of decline.

Other research does suggest a range of activities that can positively affect brain functioning. A good diet is important in increasing levels of protein, and reducing the risk of Alzheimer’s and strokes. Supportive social activity and educational experiences can also enhance the presence of this chemical in the brain. They seem to
encourage new neuron growth and support the formation of synapses. There is a strong tendency to see our brains as our destiny; however, it also appears that we have a strong influence over our brains.

From: The brain fights back: New approaches to mitigating cognitive decline by Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ. JAMA, December 15, 2015, pg. 2492.

* Rebuilding Capacities through Schooling

Traditional research paints a picture of aging as a period of cognitive decline. More recent evidence is mounting that most of this decline may simply be a matter of activity. If the brain is a muscle, fitness means exercise. Nor is it ever too late to regain what has been lost. This is at least one conclusion from a study in which a group of Australian psychologists recruited 359 participants ages 50-50 to return for a year of full-time or part-time study at the University of Tasmania. The participants took a series of cognitive performance tests both before, during and up to three years after their school experience. The tests measured cognitive capacity in areas such as memory, information processing, decision making and planning. Most of the students took courses on campus, but some completed online classes. The courses ranged widely, including history, psychology, philosophy and fine art. The study participants, were screened to exclude people who had dementia.

As the results showed, schooling can make a difference. More than 90 percent of the participants displayed a significant increase in cognitive capacity, compared with 56 percent in a control group of 100 participants who didn’t take any college courses. As lead researcher Megan Lenehan, PhD. commented, “The study findings are exciting because they demonstrate that it’s never too late to take action to maximize the cognitive capacity of your brain.”

From: “Sending Your Grandparents to University Increases Cognitive Reserve: The Tasmanian Healthy Brain Project;” Megan E. Lenehan, PhD, University of Tasmania-Launceston;
Enhancing Transitions to Retirement

Retirement can be a period of enormous opportunity. However, for many people, especially those who thrive on active and influential lifestyles, life seems diminished. Periods of monotony and boredom loom. Regardless of whether one has been a mega-boss or a creative contributor, some transitional planning is important to do. It is important to figure out a way to both leave behind the excitement of work, and develop a new lifestyle that is the right blend of meaningful activity and freedom. Newly sprouting organizations are now helping in planned transitioning.

As management consultant, Leslie Braksick commented, upper level managers "found it difficult to know what to do" after their professional work ended. Braksick’s company, My Next Season, provides companies with transition programs for retiring top executives. They match executives with nonprofit organizations for volunteer executive assignments, and donate back 20 percent of its fees to the nonprofit. My Next Season puts executives through comprehensive health evaluations, interest exercises, conversations with spouses or partners, ghost writing services for publishing articles on the client's expertise, and personalized networking.

"To go from 100 miles an hour to zero was frightening," said one client, and having this transitional job "helped allay my fears. I'm finding myself quite consumed by very interesting projects to think about on the social side. On the business side, I've had way more overtures about opportunities than I expected."

Other programs provide valuable services, even if not gold-
edged. For example, the program RSVP, formerly known as Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (seniorcorps.org) offers some 600 locations in the U.S. with volunteer programs. Betsy Werley, for example, is network expansion director Encore.org, an organization that offers programs for retiring workers looking to engage with nonprofits. Encore now offers fellowship programs with $25,000 stipends in about a dozen cities. It also partners with the Executive Service Corps (escus.org), which has locations in about 20 markets. All of these programs can have substantial value as people retire and consider next steps.

Share your journey to or through retirement or pose a question at journey@janetkiddstewart.com.

From: How to avoid boredom and monotony in retirement by Janet Kidd Stewart, Chicago Tribune, Jan. 18, 2016, online.

* Creative Aging: Fulfillment through Playwriting

The creative yet challenging process of playwriting is attracting many older adults. They learn how to blend characters, plot, and action into dramatic works that actors love to perform and audiences love to watch. The writers’ communication skills flourish in the revision process and in collaboration with actors and directors. The writers’ sense of fulfillment also comes when their play is published, such as those in the ArtAge Senior Theatre Resource Center.

One older playwright is Florida-based Arthur Keyser who, at age 87, has 12 of his plays published in the new book, Short Plays by the Dozen. Arthur wrote his first play in 2010, after he retired from being a corporate attorney. Each of Arthur's plays is unique with distinctive characters and plots. If there's a common thread, it's optimism. The pieces are filled with modern characters in up-to-date situations who use humor to express a fresh, positive outlook on life.

ArtAge's Senior Theatre Resource center is the largest distributor of plays, books and materials for older performers. With customers around the world, Arthur Keyser's work will be staged by Senior
Theatre companies, community theatres, and other sites where older adults perform. His works are also featured on www.seniortheatre.com, the most comprehensive information source for older performers.

Howard Millman, former Producing Artistic Director of the Asolo Theatre, Sarasota, Florida, says, "Beginning a new career in playwriting after turning 80 doesn't compute, but Arthur defies the odds. His plays are funny, optimistic and a joy to watch." Gary Garrison, nationally known playwright, teacher and Executive Director, Creative Affairs of the Dramatists Guild of America said of Arthur, his "successes as a playwright, which first emerged in his eighties, are a wonderful testament to the truth that a passion for the craft knows no age and creative juices can continue to flow indefinitely."

*Short Plays by the Dozen* is available from ArtAge Publications at 800-858-4998

ArtAge helps participants fulfill their theatrical dreams by providing education and resources of the largest collection of Senior Theatre plays, books, and materials through our e-newsletter, and website [www.seniortheatre.com](http://www.seniortheatre.com).

Also contact: Bonnie Vorenberg, bonniev@seniortheatre.com

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**Book Review**


Author Tom Pinkson has served as a physician and clinical psychologist for many years. He has also spent many years studying indigenous peoples, especially by engaging in a lengthy shamanic apprenticeship with Huichol shamans in Mexico. His book is a compilation of the wisdom and joy that can be the culmination of a life
lived long. Unlike many books on positive or successful aging, his is not focused on evading the aging process, or being the youngest old guy on the block, but is geared more to an acceptance of a body transforming from fit middle adulthood to diminishing old age. The book also accepts that social power, youthful identity and losses of various sorts accumulate. Still, without the body beautiful of the youngish old, or the social cache of someone once a “big wheel”, he finds a harvest of gold in the Golden Years. As he proposes, each person’s life story is different. The particular challenges of one’s aging are different, and the rewards also come in different ways. “Dream with clear intention for the fullest blossoming of your inner flowers. Then do your best to live it out.”

The book is heavy on spiritual messages, mediations, ideas about love, acceptance, meaning-making and being a part of the universe. Here are some of my favorite moments in the book:

- When entering into any task, any encounter, no matter how mundane or messy: “This may be the last thing you ever do in this life.... This may be your ‘last dance’, so do it with full presence, full awareness. Do it the best you can. Take it all in, and finally, find a way to enjoy it.”
- “Aging is an art form.” James Hillman.
- “Do not live an unlived life.” Gene Cohen
- “Until one is over 60, one can never really learn the secret of living.” Andrea Sherman and Marsha Weiner.
- “It is not about doing holy things. It is about making what you do holy.” Meister Eckhart, 13th century
- “Meaning and purpose ... evolve out of relationship and ongoing interaction with others, with ourselves and with that which is greater than our individual concerns.”

The book contains exercises, inviting one to reflect and to act consciously about one’s life. One suggestion involved placing inspirational pictures around your living space to remind you of your intentions to create a meaningful life, full of love and gratitude. Others involve Recognition Rites Honoring Elders for their value in social life. All in all, innovative and inspiring. MMG
***ANNOUNCEMENTS***

* The American Society on Aging (ASA) Conference takes place March 20–24, 2016 in Washington, DC. ASA is always looking for new models, innovative programs and research-to-practice presentations for the conference. This is a fabulous opportunity to share your program developments and new ideas with this conference community of nearly 3,000 multidisciplinary professionals who, like you, care about improving the lives of older adults. www.asaging.org/aia.

* August 25-27, 2016 The 8th International Conference on Positive Aging will be held in Washington, DC, sponsored by Fielding Graduate University and its Creative Longevity and Wisdom Program. Proposals are due by Apr. 20, 2016. For more about this year's conference, and registration details, visit: http://www.csa.us/?page=PositiveAgingConf


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*** Information for Readers ***

We hope that you enjoy The Positive Aging Newsletter.

- **Questions & Feedback**
  If you have any questions, or material you'd like to share with other newsletter readers, please e-mail Mary Gergen at gv4@psu.edu

- **Past issues**
  Past issues of the newsletter, including our translated issues in Spanish, German, French, Danish, Portuguese, and Chinese are archived at:
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Join us at our new website – Positive Aging in Action – at:

www.positiveaginginaction.org

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