

THE TAOS INSTITUTE  
**Positive Aging**



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**THE POSITIVE AGING NEWSLETTER**

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The Positive Aging Newsletter by Mary and Kenneth Gergen  
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“THE BEST IN...INSIGHTS IN AGING”  
Wall Street Journal  
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### **\*\*\* An Ending as a Beautiful Beginning**

We were very sad to learn that Geert Mork, who has so graciously translated the Newsletter into Danish these past five years, will be retiring from the post. As a parting gift, Geert wrote such an illuminating and inspiring account of the new chapter in his life, that we asked if he would be willing to share portions with our readers. We are pleased now to share some of his thoughts, following a passage in which he described the way his boyhood gave rise to a longstanding love of working with wood:

*Six months ago I retired voluntarily at the age of 65. I still have a lot of energy, I´m healthy and 5 years ago I met and married Trine, my soulmate and life inspiration. Everything is perfect but you start thinking a lot when you cross the line between life-long contract work and a new period of life without having to do contract work that is being retired. I never really planned a lot about my retirement, but decided to “let go” and forget about the intellectual process of making a lot of plans. I was quite confident that “letting go” and going into a process of just “being,” and feeling about what makes value to my and Trine’s life. This would bring the right answer for what to do for the next period of our life.*

*What I experience is that a new kind of intellectual “work” is filling me with joy. By “letting go” I´ve sensed that a lot of passion is growing and growing. Moments of great joy from the past are coming back and being transformed into the “intellectual work” supported by my hands. The smell of sawdust is still rewarding and joyful, and I am experiencing a huge pleasure renovating the old wooden house at the coast (our summerhouse). ...doing work with my own hands and seeing the house change and blossom in its own beauty is so rewarding. The same thing is happening about kayaks. For various reasons I*

*stopped building kayaks about 15 years ago. Building a boat takes so much intellectual work... worth nothing until the boat is finished and launched. Then you know if all your planning and drawing and thinking was worth everything. I have just started on my next boat: a Northeaster Dory, and I love its beauty and the process...*

*In a year from now my wife will retire too, and we share the same feeling about body and soul/mind. The value of re-finding things that gave joy and pleasure in earlier life and transforming these experiences into the next phase of life. It feels so good. Letting go and letting passion and creativity start to build up in both mind and hands is a wonderful and joyful process. It is completely new for me, and I enjoy every minute of it.*

- Geert Mork

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**\*\*\*RESEARCH\*\*\***

**\* What Kind of Exercise is Best for Longevity?**

Everyone knows that it is healthier to exercise than to be a couch potato. But given a wide range of possibilities for moving about, what works best in terms of health? An early study of 80,000 British men and women found that those who played racket sports tended to outlive those who jogged. It was a strange finding, and piqued the curiosity of a group of scientists who had made claims about the benefits of jogging. To explore further, they turned to the Copenhagen City Heart Study, which tracks the lives and health of thousands of men and women in Copenhagen.

The Copenhagen participants had all completed health exams and lengthy questionnaires about their lifestyles and whether and how often they took part in eight sports common in Denmark, including cycling, swimming, running, tennis,

soccer and, badminton. The study included 8,600 participants, who had been part of the study for about 25 years. They could then track how long a person had lived and how they had exercised.

The most obvious finding was that people who had reported almost never exercising had shorter lifespans than those who did. The more interesting results emerged from a comparison of lifespans for the various sports. Cycling was the most popular activity among the Danes in the study, many of whom reported riding for four or more hours every week. Their pedaling was associated with a lengthier life span, adding an average of 3.7 years to riders' lives, compared to inactive Danes. Running likewise was associated with an extra 3.2 years of life. However, more impressively, playing soccer added almost 5 years to a player's life, and badminton was linked to an extra 6.2 years. Most amazing, tennis was linked to 9.7 added years of life. These associations remained unchanged even when the researchers controlled for people's education, socioeconomic status, and age.

“Why and how some sports might add more years to people's lives than others is impossible to know from this kind of observational study,” says Dr. James O’Keefe, a study co-author. Still, he suspects that the social aspects of racket games and other team sports are a primary reason that they seem to lengthen lives. He says. “We know from other research that social support provides stress mitigation. Being with other people, playing and interacting with them, as you do when you play games that require a partner or a team, probably has unique psychological and physiological effects. But for now, people who run or ride solo might consider finding a group or partner with whom to work out.”

“Raising your heart rate is important” for health, he says. “But it looks like connecting with other people is, too.”

From: [www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/well/move/the-best-sport-for-a-longer-life-try-tennis.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/well/move/the-best-sport-for-a-longer-life-try-tennis.html)

## **\* Aging Successfully: Its Meaning and Achievement**

Twenty years ago researchers defined successful aging in terms of three characteristics: a low risk of disease and related disabilities, high mental and physical functioning, and active engagement in life. More recently gerontologists have added a new dimension, proposing that successful aging should include how people face the ordinary challenges of aging. A value is placed on strengths and capacities that carry them through adversities. Often this response to adversity is called resilience. In this case, one may be disabled, but still age successfully.

Many studies looked at those who had achieved these goals, and found that lifestyle factors, more than genes, determines how one ages (at least until 90). As we have reported in previous Newsletters, studies of emotional qualities suggests that optimism and positive emotions are highly predictive of both health and longevity. Other researchers have suggested that having mature psychological defenses helps one live a good and long life. These defenses include altruism, humor, and suppression of negative thoughts. The ability to reconstruct the meaning of events - especially those that would otherwise be stressful, is important in fostering resilience. As we have also stressed in previous Newsletters, research suggests that being involved in the community, being in touch with family and friends, and having strong positive relationships are also beneficial to successful aging.

From: What does it mean to “Age Successfully” as a woman in modern America? By Margaret Hellie Huyck.

*Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*,  
Winter 2017-2018,  
pp.116-123.

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**\*\*\* IN THE NEWS \*\*\***

**\* Caregiving: From Burdens to Blessings**

As of 2017, 20 million Americans became caregivers, with the major cause being care provided by mature adults to their aging parents. As revealed by a national survey, giving care carries considerable costs. First there are the finances. The caretaker role was costly for most individuals. The average amount spent per year was \$7,000. These costs worried 36% of the caregivers, and 18% cited a negative impact on their careers. However, the biggest challenge for 68% of study participants was the mental and physical time and effort involved in caregiving.

Most fascinating, however, is that despite these substantial burdens, 95% of the caregivers were grateful for the opportunity to provide care. Almost 80% said they would gladly do it over again, and 65% said that caregiving had brought meaning and purpose to their lives. Perhaps we often focus too heavily on the detrimental aspects of caregiving, and not enough on these significant blessings. Giving aid and comfort to a loved can be one of the most fulfilling acts of a lifetime.

From: Caregiving can be a financial burden, but often reaps rewards. *Aging Today*, Jan.–Feb, 2018, pg. 15

**\*Enriching our Memories**

Time seems to slip by ever more rapidly as we grow older. We may recall very well incidents from earlier years, but as we grow older it seems that whole weeks can slip by without our recalling anything vivid or interesting. This is quite

unfortunate as memories are among the most valuable resources for living a rich and meaningful life. At any moment we can dip into the past, and retrieve events and people of importance to us; we can again enjoy, find stimulation, or be moved. But too often, it seems, we add less and less to these treasures as we grow older.

In her book *Time Warped: Unlocking the Mysteries of Time Perception*, the British psychologist Claudia Hammon offers some advice. Two points are especially useful. First, if we wish to carry with us a richer set of memories we should avoid repetition, or one might say, avoiding the luring comfort of routine. As Hammon advises, we should bring a big dose of novelty into our lives. We are much more likely to recall unusual or unique events over the repetitious. For example, if we do something unique or rarely experienced every day, we will come to the weekend with a strong sense that our week was quite long and eventful. If we volunteer at a new venue Monday, invite someone to dinner Wednesday night, go out to lunch to a new cafe Thursday, clean a neglected closet Friday, we will look back at a richer week. Shopping in a new store, calling an old friend, changing the décor in a familiar room, all of these and more can give life a richer and more lasting tint. The second piece of advice is to create markers of events. Having a calendar that one can look back on, or keeping a journal, a photo album, a photo cloud, or diary can hold the memories and furnish a sense of a long and interesting life. Telling stories is one of the most powerful ways of sustaining the richness of the past. Conversations with friends and families, in which we share stories - momentous, humorous and tragic, keep the past vividly alive. And those who hear the stories will assist.

From: As I get older, time seems to just fly by. Every year seems shorter. By Selene Yeager, *The AARP Magazine*, August/September, 2018, pg. 15.

## **\*A 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party: Surprising the Guests**

Friends and relatives from all over the country came to Brooklyn to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Mannie Corman. Mannie wore a black shirt on which was written “Vintage 1918: Aged to Perfection.” Among the guests was his girlfriend of several years, Judith Goldman. After strolling around on the Liberty Warehouse deck, playing the games, and visiting the stations set up to entertain the guests, all were asked to come inside and take a seat. When they were seated, a closed black velvet curtain suddenly opened to reveal a flower girl and ring bearer standing at attention. A wedding was about to take place between Mr. Corman and Ms. Goldman. The guests were completely surprised. The loving couple had been engaged for four years, but had not revealed their plan.

Ms. Goldman’s son approved, saying, “They’re both adventurers, and they love that in each other.” Rabbi Potasnik, who presided over the marriage, added, “They don’t worry about tomorrow. They may think about yesterday, but they concentrate on today.” For Mr. Corman, “I never thought I’d get married at my stage. Love is not a commodity. It’s a deep, intense feeling.” And in his bride’s words, “I love this man – age is just a number.”

From: At his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party, He Got a Bride. *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2018, ST17.

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## **\*\*\*READERS RESPOND**

\* Marty Roberts writes:

Dear Mary and Ken,

I was interested in your recent newsletter with a focus on structure or more flexibility in post work-life. For my research grant two years ago, I learned from my participants who were retired or working beyond what they deemed as retirement age that engagement was what contributed to their happiness. The term “engagement” was what captured the responses from my Grounded Theory analysis. Perhaps there is a better word.

I hope that you both have had a nice summer with flexible engagement. Marty

Connie Zweig writes:

Hi Mary,

Rick Moody had hoped to introduce us at the conference in Philadelphia. But somehow we missed each other. I'm an author and newly retired therapist (yay!), currently writing *The Reinvention of Age*. It extends my work on the Shadow (or the unconscious) into late life for Boomers.

I'm blogging excerpts of the book here: <https://medium.com/@conniezweig> You'll see that the last blog was about my retirement and earlier blogs include interviews with spiritual elders. I'm hoping that, in your next newsletter, you can post a link to the blog for your readers. It's an ideal fit.

Please feel free to ask me for anything you need to support that intention. I really enjoy receiving your newsletter! I look forward to connecting, Connie

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**\*\*\*ANNOUNCEMENTS\*\*\***

**\* Senior Improv Class in Santa Fe, NM**

Kita Mehaffy, administrator for Santa Fe Improv, has scheduled the first improv class for older people.

I suspect the presence of mind, teamwork and movement aspects of improv would be both enjoyable and strengthening for anyone determined to stay sharp while having fun. The idea of bringing seniors into this particular realm is a bit of a mystery to my colleagues, but it is, to me, a clear and obvious point of growth. We would be good for seniors and they would be good for us.

If you have readers here, please pass this on for me. I haven't filled this class yet and want to make sure it's a go.

**SUNDAY CLASS SERIES – 7 weeks (Elders Class)**

**WHEN:** Sundays 10:00 – Noon, November 4 – December 16, 2018

**WHERE:** 1213 Mercantile, Suite D, Santa Fe, 87507

**INSTRUCTOR:** Benjamin Bailey-Buhner

**COST:** \$151.81 (\$140 + tax)

**\*A New Open Access Journal**

- ***Innovation In Aging***. Oxford University Press.  
[Academic.oup.com/innovateage](http://Academic.oup.com/innovateage)

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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](mailto:gv4@psu.edu)

- Past issues

Past issues of the newsletter, including our translated issues in Spanish, German, French, Portuguese, Danish, Greek, Italian, and Chinese are archived at: [www.positiveaging.net](http://www.positiveaging.net)

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