

Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

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A New Season, New Beginnings

By Mary Gergen

It is Labor Day weekend (in the US), and I saw pumpkins on sale at the market today. School now begins and thoughts turn to new beginnings, constructing new opportunities for living. I was especially inspired in this case by our latest Taos Institute publication, [*70 Candles! Women Thriving in their 8th Decade.*](#) A trailblazing book in many ways! The authors, Jane Giddan and Ellen Cole, engaged in focus groups with older women across the country, and distilled from their discussions some of the best ways of being 70+. Among the ways these women had found joy, high on the list was being a grandmother. (Interesting that older women do not mention children the way they do grandchildren; perhaps they are drawn to those who are also newly beginning.) Some mentioned finding joy in the work they were now doing, and having a sense of accomplishment. For others, there was a deepened appreciation of those who were close - partners, relatives and friends. Some were finding new pleasures in their gardens, in nature, and in travel. Interestingly, the drive to be creative was central to their well-being.

What resources we seem to have for creative expression when we are not confronted with regimenting demands. And what joy we seem to find in those moments. A recent article in the *International New York Times* advocated a turn to creative activity on the part of adults, at any age. Julie Cameron, who published *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* in 1992, now has written a new book, *It's Never Too Late to Begin Again: Creativity in the Golden Years*, dedicated to older adults. She claims, "Many of us find that we have squandered our own creative energies by investing disproportionately in the loves, hopes, dreams and plans of others." She urges people to find spaces for playing with their possibilities.

Here I think of three people especially close to me who have combined art with their work lives. Diana Whitney, a Taos Institute founder, and world renowned Appreciative Inquiry leader, has become seriously engaged in art – painting, collages, designs... She has even built a studio on to her home. Dawn Dole, Executive Director of the Taos Institute, dances with the *Leap of Faith Liturgical Dancers*, a group she founded at her church. Then there is my husband, Ken. Sometimes he seems like a workaholic, but he also sneaks out to create sculpture pieces for the yard. (I look from my window to see a pyramidal statue made of 14 brightly painted blue bowling balls!) What better time than now – as a new season begins – to unleash some of our curious and creative potentials?

