



THE POSITIVE AGING NEWSLETTER
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Issue 101

The Positive Aging Newsletter by Mary and Kenneth Gergen
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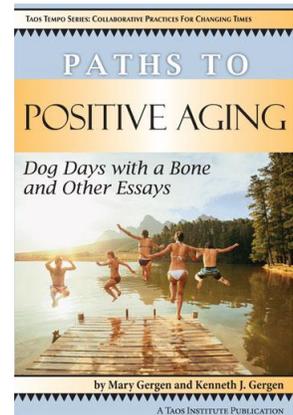
"THE BEST IN...INSIGHTS IN AGING"
Wall Street Journal

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***** NEW BOOK: Paths to Positive Aging: Dog Days with a Bone, and Other Essays, by Mary and Ken Gergen.**

We are pleased to present some of our favorite essays, drawn from the past 100 issues of this Newsletter. All are devoted to appreciating the later years as among the richest and rewarding of one's life. We add a few photos from our own adventures in aging, and hope this little book can be inspiring for others. The book can be purchased on-line at:

www.taosinstitute.net/paths-to-positive-aging-dog-days-with-a-bone-and-other-essays



***** COMMENTARY: Death: A Decision, not a Destiny**

Given the emphasis of this Newsletter on positive aging, we do not often write about death and dying. In part this is because by most cultural standards it is very difficult to speak glowingly about these events. But as we were reminded by a recent article in the *New York Times*, we should be watchful about the ways our cultural standards limit our potentials. And the positive potentials surrounding death and dying may be vast.

In this case, the Times headlined the story of a man in hospice care who chose the date, time and means of his death. He also created a wake for his family and friends, one that he attended!. For us this was not only a story about a man who turned a period of relentless sadness into a celebration, but as well, a man who regained his dignity. Rather than treating himself as an anguished victim of an uncontrollable destiny, he decided for himself how he would end his time on earth.

Mr. Shields initially came up with the idea that on his last night of life, he wanted to have a celebration, to which his family and friends would be invited. The wake was held at his hospice, and efforts were made to redecorate an office suite to make it festive. His wife, his hospice staff, and other family members and friends organized the refreshments and the activities, which included poetry and song.

The next morning, John signed the papers that allowed the doctor to give him the medications that began with a deep sleep, and culminated in his death. John was clear that he did not want to continue on the inevitable path of his illness, which was full of pain and suffering. He was content that he had control of his death.

As more and more people live into a very old age, laws are changing and people are talking about how they wish to die more openly than in the past. In Canada, where John died, the law now allows people the right to decide how they wish to die. Interestingly in Oregon and Washington, states that allow elective death, people are often given the means to take their own lives, but choose to die a natural death. The choice is what is so important to them.

And creative impulses now blossom. Recently the owner of a Chinese restaurant told us that an old customer of hers was having a second wake for herself the following weekend. The first wake was three years earlier, when she was 85, but she now felt life was closing in. The internet is also providing means for people to share their last rites ceremonies, and allows family and friends to share their thoughts and memories of them, both before and after they have died. Death may be inevitable, but its meaning is up to us.

- Mary Gergen

From: *The Death and Life of John Shields* by Catherine Porter. *The New York Times*, May 28, 2017, pg. 1, 17-21.

RESEARCH

* **The Significance of Support Convoys**

Researchers have created the interesting idea of *support convoys*. Convoys are the collection of supportive relationships that move with individuals through time, space and the life course. Here you might think for a moment about the individuals you would place in your “convoy.” Some convoys are more supportive than others; much depends on who is in them. The composition of one’s convoy has implications for one’s happiness and life satisfactions.

Some of the most interesting research on convoys has been on older gay men, many of whom have suffered from various forms of oppression throughout their lives. Their convoys prove to be very important to their well-being. In this research, 20 gay men between 60 and 83, living in Atlanta, were interviewed about their support convoys. Most of the men had gone to college, were middle class, and white. Each of the men was asked to name the most important people in their lives, and how close they were to them. From this information, the researchers created networks or maps, which helped them to evaluate the nature of the networks. The men were also asked to discuss the type of support they received from each member of their convoy and how satisfied they were with each

person's actions. From this information, the researchers evaluated each convoy as to its support.

These support convoys tended to be composed of friends who were also gay. Unlike older heterosexual men, for whom male friendships tend to be fairly unimportant and usually involve joint activities (e.g sports, music), emotionally based friendship is central to the support networks of gay men. Men who had more negative networks were involved with people who were heterosexist or homophobic. They often had to conceal aspects of themselves to relate to these people. Often they were family members, who had religious objections to a homosexual lifestyle. One participant said, "I have all these people around me, but very, very, very few people that I am really close to. I feel somewhat sad about that."

For heterosexuals, family members tend to be the major members of support convoys. For men, male friends generally play a less important role in sustaining emotional support and care. However, women have more in common with gay men, in terms of relying on friends for emotional support.

From: Older Gay Men and their Support Convoys by Griff Tester and Eric R. Wright. *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 2017, 72, 488-497.

***Resources for Reducing Ageism**

From an Email sent by American Society on Aging President and CEO, Bob Stein to its members, and others who advocate for a better society for all:

The way Americans currently think about aging creates obstacles to productive practices and policies. In response, and in collaboration with seven other leading associations serving the field of Aging, ASA is pleased to share a set of resources designed to help members and stakeholders join a movement to reframe the dialogue around aging, with the goal of reversing ageist assumptions about older adults. Through a two-year research initiative, our collaborative has learned that as Americans live longer and healthier lives, society needs to adjust both attitudes toward aging and systems that support wellbeing in later life. Our *Gaining Momentum Toolkit* is now available so you and your organization can become part of the movement to reframe how the public views older adults. This work is SO important and our aspirations can only be achieved through large-scale adoption of the principals and tools we provide to you today.

[**Gaining Momentum**](#), is what we call our new toolkit. The Toolkit is designed to help you and other aging advocates change the ageism narrative, using

new guidelines for better, research-informed communications.

We invite you to explore and use the full [**Gaining Momentum toolkit**](#) which includes:

- A full research and recommendation report, ***Finding the Frame: An Empirical Approach to Reframing Aging and Ageism***
- A frame brief titled, ***Framing Strategies to Advance Aging and Address Ageism as Policy Issues***
- A ***Quick-start Guide*** with phrases to use, and to avoid
- ***FAQs: Staying on Frame in Real Time*** – a list of common questions with guidance to help keep answers "on frame"
- ***ReFrame Cards*** help advocates find the right metaphor and structure for reframed communications about aging
- ***A Research Base and other resources***

Our work is not done and we remain committed to adding to, and enhancing, these resources to help all passionate professionals working in the field of aging join the movement, Reframing Aging.

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

***Rebuilding at 90: The Road Runner**

Retired dentist Charles Eugster claims that vanity was the motivation for him to basically “rebuild” his body, beginning at 80. He described himself at middle age as “a self-satisfied lump of lard.” At 87 he engaged a leading body builder to help him re-sculpt his body. His physique changed remarkably. Then, after two years, he wanted to increase his strength and flexibility and so engaged Sylvia Gattiker, a former gymnast from Austria, to develop a program of strength building for him. At 90, he had achieved that goal.

He then went on to train for the track, and became a world class sprinter. (Winning prizes was not so difficult, given his age class.) Later he started to compete in the long jump, and has been doing well in that athletic venture.

He does not see himself as an exceptional person, but an average guy. “Two decades after I retired, I have transformed myself from feeling redundant, out of shape and effectively waiting to die into a fit and motivated 97 year old. We need to change our perceptions of aging. Society has put an expiration date on us and sees being old as an inexorable path to inactivity and physical decline.

Society needs to do more to engage my peer group and to not waste our talents and knowledge – and we older folks need to do more to reinvent ourselves too. “

As Confucius once said, “A man has two lives. The second life begins when he realizes he only has one.” As Mr. Eugster says, “It is time to start a revolution that isn’t anti-aging, but pro-aging.”

From: “The road runner” , The Next Act/Life Stories, *Financial Times Weekend Magazine*, April, 2017, pg. 44.

* **Oldest Woman in the World**

Sent by a Loyal Reader for our Enjoyment:

Jeanne Louise Calment had the longest confirmed human lifespan on record: 122 years and 164 days.

Jeanne was born in Arles, France, on 21st February 1875. When the Eiffel Tower was built, she was 14 years old. It was at this time that she met Vincent van Gogh.

"He was dirty, badly dressed and disagreeable," she recalled in an interview given in 1988. When she was 85, she took up fencing, and she was still riding on her bike when she reached 100. When Jeanne was 114, she starred in a film about her life; at 115 she had an operation on her hip, and at 117 she gave up smoking (having started at the age of 21 in 1896). Apparently, she didn't give it up for health reasons, but because she didn't like having to ask someone to help her light a cigarette once she was becoming almost blind.

At age 90, she signed a deal to sell her apartment to a 47-year-old lawyer called Andre-Francois Raffray. He agreed to pay her a monthly sum of 2,500 francs on the condition that he would inherit her apartment after she died. However, Raffray not only ended up paying Jeanne for 30 years, but died before she did at the age of 77. His widow was legally obliged to continue paying Madam Calment.

Until the end of her days, Jeanne retained sharp mental faculties. When she was asked on her 120th birthday what kind of future she expected to have, she replied: "a very short one."

Quotes and rules of life from Jeanne Calment:

- Being young is a state of mind, it doesn't depend on one's body.
- I'm actually still a young girl; it's just that I haven't looked so good for the past 70 years.
- Always keep your smile. That's how I explain my long life.
- If you can't change something, don't worry about it.

- I have a huge desire to live and a big appetite, especially for sweets.
- I see badly, I hear badly, and I feel bad, but everything's fine.
- I think I will die of laughter.
- I have legs of iron, but to tell you the truth, they're starting to rust and buckle a bit.
- I took pleasure when I could. I acted clearly and morally and without regret. I'm very lucky.

*** **BOOK REVIEW: *Too Young to be Old: Love, Learn, Work, and Play as you Age*** by Nancy K. Schlossberg. Washington, DC: APA, 2017.

Nancy Schlossberg is a prolific writer, especially on the topic of living well as we age. Her most recent book is a swift and satisfying read, full of wisdom and encouragement for all of us. She addresses the evil of ageism and how to deal with it, especially as it affects one's self-image. A discussion of transitioning - of the challenge of moving, health changes, family formations - is especially engaging. Stories of how various individuals both cope with and thrive with aging enrich the text, and bring the more abstract ideas down to earth. At the end of each section, she assigns a "To-Do List" to encourage action as well as understanding. The book concludes with the idea of re-creating the self, with a focus on family, fun, romance, and self-satisfaction.

***READERS RESPOND

* In our book, *Paths to Positive Aging*, we asked Geert Mork if we could share a story of his life we had used in one of our essays. We wish to share Geert's gracious reply:

"Thank you so much for your mail. I'm honored that you want to use the essay in your book. Thank you. Your Positive Aging Newsletter is such a huge inspiration for me and many, many others.

My meeting with social construction and appreciative inquiry about 10 years ago has changed my life dramatically. I have found peace and love – and thanks to Ken's commentary, Nov/Dec 2012, I found Trine (again). You already know the story, but I would like to share with you, that during a daily focus on co-creation and on the words we use during our countless conversations, we have created a kind of deep love and understanding, that I, just a few years ago, not even dreamed

existed. I almost died January 2011 during a 8 hour long cancer surgery and only a miracle saved me, the doctor told me. Given such a wonderful new life after that has been the greatest gift in my life. I´m deeply grateful to you and Ken and social construction for this.

* Denise Chapman writes:

I just wanted to send you a quick email on behalf of some of the students I volunteer with at The Brenham Community Center here in Texas. We've been reviewing some resources on the internet for a project about retirement and what people can do after they retire from their careers. We came across your page <http://www.taosinstitute.net/2006-november-december> and found it extremely helpful!

As a thank you, a couple of the kids in the group wanted to send you back another page they found that included some resources for retirement that they thought you might want to add to your site because it could help you and your site's visitors with information - <https://www.commercialcapitaltraining.com/business-resources/business-ideas/retirement-business-ideas/>

They've actually been using some resources on there along with your website to complete their project.

Thank you in advance!

Denise

denise.chapman@BrenhamCC.org

* Diana Reiner writes:

Mary, just in case you've not seen this. Great for positive aging. Hugs, Diána

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/02/arts/television/carl-reiner-if-youre-not-in-the-obit-eat-breakfast-hbo.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share>

In the new documentary “If You’re Not in the Obit, Eat Breakfast,” the comedian serves as tour guide to the still-vital lives of his friends.

* Marie Villeza writes:

Hi!...Some of the greatest partnerships I’ve ever seen have been between senior roommates. Whether it’s a married couple who’ve spent decades together or a pair of siblings who retired together, the care and consideration they always have for each other never ceases to inspire me. I think sometimes we spend so much time worrying about whether our seniors *can* take care of each other that we fail to see

the amazing ways that they *do*.

Would you be willing to share some supportive resources for your senior audience? I think they'd be great not just for seniors who live together and care for each other, but for anyone who helps a senior loved one.

[Stretching Exercises for Seniors to Improve Mobility](#)

[25 Easy Recipes for Senior Nutrition](#)

[Home Modifications for Specific Needs](#)

[The Boomer's Ultimate Guide To Adding Value To Your Home](#)

Thanks in advance,

Marie Villeza

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*****ANNOUNCEMENTS*****

***A New Open Access Journal**

* ***Innovation In Aging***. Oxford University Press.
Academic.oup.com/innovateage

*July 23-27, 2017: World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics. San Francisco, CA. The theme is "Global Aging and Health: Bridging Science, Policy, and Practice." This is the premier meeting for professionals in gerontology and geriatrics. A special treat: THE AGE STAGE. The program highlights the many ways creativity plays a role in aging. Three days of entertainment, music, dance, fashion, and the visual arts, plus a one-day tech track. Information at iagg2017.org/agestage

***** 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, Portuguese, Danish, and Chinese are archived at:

www.positiveaging.net

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