

# Aging Differently:

## Healthy Living through Creativity and Engagement

By Tim Carpenter

Victorian novelist George Eliot said it best: "It is never too late to be what you might have been." That woman sure knew what she was talking about. That's right – George Eliot was actually a woman named Mary Ann Evans who used a male pen name to ensure that her works were taken seriously.

These days, unfortunately, authors that are older rather than female might be the ones that could benefit from a pen name. Fine writers such as John Updike and Maya Angelou, both in their 70's now, might do better to sell their literary wares to a youth-obsessed public by

donning more youthful *nomme de plumes*. In today's world, wine and cheese might gain value as they age, but humans? No such luck.

The good news is that, even though society remains tilted discriminately toward youth, older folks themselves are finding better ways to not only retain youthful energy and live longer and better, they are doing so in ways that embrace aging rather than deny it. Dr. Gene Cohen studies creativity and its effect on the aging process at George Washington University and has found in his studies that pursuing creativity as we age strengthens morale, improves physical health, enriches relationships and allows us

to leave a legacy in later life.

More Than Shelter For Seniors has been providing creativity and lifelong learning programs to thousands of seniors for many years now and creates programs for the Burbank Senior Artists Colony, a one-of-its-kind senior apartment community that offers a theater, arts studios, digital filmmaking and other creative amenities to its residents. One of those residents, Suzanne Knode, has experienced a personal renaissance that is a terrific example

of the effect of creativity and lifelong learning on later life.

"I couldn't believe that there would be an artists' community of writers and actors and filmmakers and painters that would exist for me at this time of my life," Knode said. "I think the thing that is stunning

me the most is that I really thought that all of this had passed me by. I never thought that I would be able to find something else that's new inside of me. You know that same feeling when you got out of school and the whole world was open for you? Now, all over again, the whole world is open to me and I have no idea what it's going to bring."



"Tim Carpenter and one of his MTSFS seniors, Bertha Dyar"

What Suzanne tells us about her experience tells us the "how" of successful aging – find something that is new inside you. Creativity can provide that spark. And, as Dr. Gene Cohen says, it can be "creativity with either a "big C or a little c," meaning you don't have to paint like Van Gogh to be creative. You can write a truly great letter to grandchildren, create a lovely patch of garden or a healthy gourmet dish for dinner tonight. But the key is to create, and to engage, lifelong.

Tim Carpenter is the founder and Executive Director of More Than Shelter For Seniors, a non-profit providing life-enhancing programs to thousands of Southern California seniors and a host and producer of the radio show *Good For Life: Experience Talks*, which airs each Tuesday from 2-3 p.m. on KPFK FM-90.7 in Los Angeles, FM-98.7 in Santa Barbara and streams live on the web at [www.kpfb.org](http://www.kpfb.org). Check out MTSFS and *Good For Life* at [www.mtsfs.org](http://www.mtsfs.org).

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