

Make It Happen with Emily Kimball
.....Creative Aging Expert.....

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2007 Purpose Prize Nominations Open

Did you catch the awarding of the first group of prizes to Americans over 60 who are leading a new age of social revolution? Civic Ventures, with foundation help, offers five \$100,000 prizes and ten \$10,000 prizes to people over 60 who are taking on some of society's biggest challenges. The awards are designated for those with the passion and creativity to discover new opportunities, the experience to come up with practical solutions, and the determination to make lasting change.

Purpose Prize winners in 2006 addressed problems such as intolerance, racial disparities in preventable deaths, job opportunities for the disabled, housing needs of the elderly poor, and the disrupted lives of children with a parent in jail.

If you know someone 60 or older who is doing an outstanding job attacking some of society's worst problems, fill out a nomination application at <http://www.leadwithexperience.org/prize/>. You can also read about the exciting projects of the 2006 Purpose Prize winners. Deadline for nominations is Jan 31, 2007.

Dr. Bill Thomas Speaks in Richmond

Long-term care reformer Dr. Bill Thomas spoke in Richmond recently at the Virginia Health Quality Workshop. The lead sentence of the *Richmond*

Times Dispatch article about his visit said, “After hearing Dr. Bill Thomas’ call to put people at the forefront of the medical system, most health-care specialists act like converts to a ‘moral revolution.’ They leap to their feet, clapping and cheering.”

That’s certainly good news isn’t it?

Geriatrician Bill Thomas became one of my personal heroes after I heard him keynote an American Society on Aging conference. Dynamic and forthright, he teaches about aging and human health care using stories from Shakespeare, Greek mythology, and the lives of everyday people. He demands that we build our institutions around the needs of the elderly — not the needs of the institution. He prefers the human-centered model to the medical model. His work on reforming nursing homes and long term care facilities through the Eden Alternative and the Green House Movement are at the cutting edge of health-care reform for the elderly. Dr. Thomas has given up his medical practice to further this movement.

At the Richmond conference he said, “My optimistic view is that the aging of America is a very good thing. We’re going to see the emergence of an entire generation of elders who are going to seek multigenerational answers.”

“Maturity is a natural life stage when many people work to make sure following generations survive and thrive.” Because the boomers are such a large generation, they have an opportunity to correct the national downward spiral. Indeed his non-sectarian message is that “elders have a duty to be a moral influence.” Influence isn’t possible, however, if elders believe that older people are just “worn-out adults.” Elders are needed to get America “back on the road,” so we can create “a compassionate society that can stand to be judged by how it treats the least of us.”

Thomas suggests making a difference by:

- **Looking within:** Insight “is the place where all moral revolutions start.”

- **Accepting aging:** “The most important, and the most difficult thing you can do is embrace your aging and open your mind to the possibility that you’re becoming something new.”
- **Embracing elderhood:** Scrabbling after artificial youth keeps you from becoming influential.
- **Leading by example:** “Older people are not inferior copies of young people. They have their own identities to explore.” Self-knowledge evolves into exercising your influence for justice.

At the end of his presentation, the health-care people he told to abandon their authoritarian practices, gave him a standing ovation! (Many thanks to Betty Booker’s report on this meeting in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*.)

Elderly Support Groups

You may recall that I wrote about elderly support groups in my last newsletter, relating that I had gathered together some friends, ages 60-84, to form such a group. Since then I have found a very useful booklet, *A Harvest of Years: A PeerSpirit Guide for Proactive Aging Circles*. It costs \$7 and can be ordered from www.PeerSpirit.com 360-331-3580.

Our group has met twice and it is feeling very right. We decided to call ourselves Wisdom Seekers. At our first meeting after discussing why we choose to be in the group, we each shared the story of an object we brought with us that had special meaning. Then we ate a simple meal together. At our second meeting we learned more about each other by sharing stories of our growing up years. We have decided to talk about the things we enjoy in our lives that give us energy when we next meet. We are enjoying the process of slowly getting to know each other in deeper ways and it is very satisfying. I am proposing that the fourth meeting discuss the obstacles that make life more challenging as our body’s age. Stay tuned.

Recent Studies of Older Women

Older women who exercise regularly have about half the risk of coming down with a cold than similar women who don't get a regular workout, a new study indicates. Writing in the November issue of the *American Journal of Medicine*, researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle report that even by getting about 30 minutes of exercise five days a week, women who had previously been sedentary were able to achieve an immune-system boost. Ladies here's just one more reason to exercise.

(Richmond Times Dispatch, 10/27/06)

Women ages 45 and older feel that growing older is not only better than expected but can be a positive time of life with new rewards, according to a new AARP survey. The telephone survey gathered perspectives from 1,200 women, including those who are African-American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. Eight-four percent said they know of at least one woman older than themselves who they consider to be a personal inspiration. The majority (65 percent) of women consider themselves happier now than they have ever been, and 77 percent consider their older years a time for pursuing dreams and doing things they have always wanted to do. *(AARP Foundation, April 2006)*

Unique Retirement Home Programs

Westminster Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia is helping to promote agelessness by their "Big Dreamers Club." The program's purpose is to encourage residents to "push their own envelope" by setting a "lofty" goal and going out and achieving it! Neill Butler, age 87, has taken a stand for the visually impaired residents and developed an audio book collection. Rosemary Griffin, age 66 has been working with another resident, Paulette Nipper age 81, who is a master swimmer, in order to increase speed and endurance and improve her technique in the pool. In the beginning she swam 8 laps and now she is up to almost a mile (60 laps)! Four residents (age 62-92) and one staff member are learning to belly dance. One participant six months ago was using a walker. Now, because of her belly

dancing, she walks tall without her walker (and does a few spins and hip shakes too!).

Fairhaven in Sykesville, Maryland, a continuing care retirement community belonging to the EMA organization of communities, has instituted Well-Being Dinners. These dinners are about the total dining experience, not just food. The dinners seek to allow participants to be “in the moment” and to relate to others. The dinners begin with a blessing, revolve around an educational topic with a speaker, offer food choices and preparations that promote health, and include table assignments to encourage residents to mingle and to develop new relationships. Dinners are hosted once a month and have grown from 40 participants to 200.

(from the Moreau Report,
www.JeanMoreau.com/mr.html)

Effect of Structured Reminiscence on Participants

Andrea Gross, founder of Legacy Prose, found out first hand just how memories can enrich lives. A seasoned journalist and former contributing editor at *Ladies Home Journal*, Gross longed for positive fulfillment among the tragic stories she frequently covered. After being inspired to interview her parents and put the story of their lives to paper, something profound happened. “Afterward, my mother seemed more cheerful, so much so that an aunt who lived out of town called to see what caused the change. My father began to sit up straighter and phoned more often, ‘just to talk,’” she said.

Deciding to research the subject, Gross found her parents were not alone. “Numerous studies show when an elderly person is led through ‘structured reminiscence,’ they become less depressed, require fewer doctor visits and even live longer,” she described. Read the rest at

http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_3829724

Happy Holidays

Writing my newsletter on Halloween night I realize not only is it getting darker with the time change, but we are about to roll into November and the holiday season. My Christmas gift to the family is renting a beach house on the ocean as a gathering place for my three children and their families. Josh and Susan work at colleges and my daughter Kim is an independent jeweler so they are able to take a full week off. We all do our own thing and have a wonderful, relaxed joyful time together. I count my blessings each year that we are able to spend this time together. May you and yours have a joyful holiday season. If you are looking for a unique gift for older relatives my *Resource Guide for Aging Adventurers: Unusual, sometimes inexpensive opportunities for volunteering, learning, traveling and adventure* might just fit the bill. Read more about it at www.TheAgingAdventurer.com To order this 14 page booklet send \$12.60 and the address to which you'd like it mailed to Make It Happen! 3220A West Grace St., Richmond, VA 23221