

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

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1. Elderly Support Groups

Marsha King, Seattle Times staff reporter, writes that “more and more groups of older people are intentionally gathering in small groups to explore the daunting territory of growing old – its countless apprehensions, existential questions, and practical needs for care.” She mentions an 18-member group -- or “circle” – which has met twice a month for the last four years in a Whidbey Island home. It has inspired four other circles to form, each organized around the subject of aging.

“There’s a great thirst for people who are approaching their later years to be able to talk frankly about what it’s like,” one group member said. “It’s not something younger people really understand.” King says these circles are another significant sign that boomers – and the generation just ahead of them – “are starting to create new kinds of community to support their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs in later life.”

Instead of adopting the idea of “aging in place,” many boomers now talk about “aging in community.” But they want to be the ones to define what “community” means. “It’s about recognizing this is a different stage of life that comes with its own gifts and responsibilities,” says Bolton Anthony, founder of Second Journey, a nonprofit association based in North Carolina that’s dedicated to creating a new vision of aging.

www.SecondJourney.org

I asked some of my friends about starting such a group, and most of them turned me down. However I found a 60-year-old friend who was looking for an experience just like this. We have now gathered four others from age 60 to 84 and will begin meeting later this month. I am full of anticipation of what this group might come to mean to me.

The article, *Elderly seek to grow old together, form new support groups* by Marsha King appeared in the May 30, 2006 edition of *The Seattle Times*.
<http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/taxis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=elder27m&date=20060501&query=elder+seek+to+grow+old>

2. Canes vs. Walking Sticks

Eighty-two year old Nate Bushnell, whose balance is impaired, uses a walking stick to help him get around. He has observed over the years that a walking stick is much better than a cane. He feels so strongly about this that he interested the engineering department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in conducting a study of canes vs.walking sticks that they will publish later this year. Nate says a cane is short, about 50 percent of a person's height, and is poorly controlled by the weak muscles of the hand. The cane supports weight only if pointing directly at the shoulder. He feels it is inherently unstable and unsafe.

The walking stick, usually 70-75 percent of the user's height, is controlled by the stronger muscles of the shoulder, giving a person a more stable mobile base. It gives better support when walking, going up or down stairs, arising from a deep, soft chair or from a fall. In a fall, a good stick gives time for the strong muscles of the shoulder and arm to contract and slow the speed of the fall, thereby reducing injury. The sling which holds the hand should be closely fitted to give comfortable and safe control, even by a weak or arthritic hand. A strong grip is not necessary for reliable stick control.

Because of his experience of the superiority of the walking stick, Nate has made over 100 sticks for

people in his community and beyond; many of them formerly cane users. He also provides instructions for making one. Parts cost about \$2.00 plus 15 minutes of work. For free information, email Nate at nateb@ecentral.com.

3. Civic Engagement on the Web

I caught a look at the online listing of volunteer opportunities from *Coming of Age*, Greater Philadelphia's 50+ civic engagement initiative. The initiative is a partnership of Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning, WHYY (Philadelphia's public broadcasting station), the United Way of Southern Pennsylvania, and AARP Pennsylvania. Seniors can log on and with a click of the mouse find lots of interesting and original opportunities for civic engagement. They can search by zip code or by area of interest.

A recent *Coming of Age* e-mail to seniors asks, "Think voting is important? Want to help prisoners build skills? How about doing some photography or speaking to help Habitat for Humanity?" *Coming of Age* works with local nonprofits that send their freshest and most compelling volunteer opportunities to the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania. United Way puts them on the web along with pertinent information like distance, transportation, commitment required and training offered.

I found this a simple and direct way of connecting seniors with meaningful civic involvement in their geographic area. They can choose something they have a real interest in and want to pursue in retirement. And it's all at their fingertips. To check it out go to: www.comingofage.org/highlights/351

4. Bill Clinton Turns Sixty

The Boston Globe (August 20, 2006) reported that Bill Clinton hates being so old, and he says, "It's no consolation that 60 is being touted as the new 40." But although a recent survey indicated that almost

80 percent of Americans born in 1946 were satisfied with their lot, Clinton said being 60 was no dream.

“I hate it, it’s true,” the 42nd president told the International AIDS Conference in Canada. “For most of my working life, I was the youngest person doing whatever I was doing. Then one day I woke up and I was the oldest person in the room.”

“Now that I have more days behind me than ahead of me, I try to wake up with a discipline of gratitude every day.”

5. Memoirs of the Soul

Nan Phifer has authored a how-to book on memoir writing titled *Memoirs of the Soul* (Walking Stick Press, 2002). It’s a book on writing a personal story that goes beyond the biographical facts to encompass one’s times of wonder, transformations, connections to special people and places, and path of spiritual development. The reader is guided in simple steps in how to write a memoir, preserving the special moments that express who he/she has become over the years. It includes 24 short chapters, which provide strategies to help one to complete the project of writing one’s life story.

One exercise, early on, is to draw a large heart on a page, and fill it with people, places, activities, things, and experiences you “hold in your heart.” You may draw a second heart if the first one is overflowing. Excerpts from others’ memoirs help to guide and enliven the way. Phifer has a special gift for encouraging a habit of writing that will be inspiring to the author or listener in you. The book is full of methods to help one see life in new and dynamic ways and to capture these feelings in a text that can be shared with family members and friends.

Phifer also presents her ideas at workshops. See www.memoirworkshops.com or email nanpfifer@mac.com Thanks to the *Positive Aging Newsletter* June 2006 for this information.

6. Make It Happen! Postcard mailing

If you would like to receive my fall postcard mailing describing some contemporary aging issues that Make It Happen! is now addressing just send your name and address to etkimball@aol.com.

If you do not want to continue receiving this newsletter please push the unsubscribe button below.