

Book Review

The Vintage Years: Finding Your Inner Artist (Writer, Musician, Visual Artist) After Sixty

Francine Toder; Palo Alto CA: Aziri Books, 2012.

Francine Toder headed into retirement after closing her psychology practice by taking a creative writing course and beginning lessons with her newly purchased cello. The Vintage Years evolved from her inquiry into the stories of others in later life entering upon new or renewed creative pursuits and from her psychological interest in the potential benefits to brain, body, and self of such endeavours.

After an introduction to ageing and creativity issues, Toder presents intriguing vignettes of creatively productive older adults. Learning a new art form or a new application of an art stretches and opens the mind, protecting the brain from cognitive loss. Engaging for long periods of intense concentration (flow) exercises the brain in ways typical of the working life.

Toder tells stories of late-blooming artists in several fields. John, age 88, has long been a patron of the arts and of young musicians. For 8 years he has been taking piano lessons; he is pleased with his progress in reading music, but frustrated by his slow progress at the piano. In the meantime, he has made a good friend of his piano teacher and experienced a boost in his ability to appreciate live symphonic music. Barbara's African drumming has led her to many intergenerational learning events as well as daring to trek to Africa to learn from experts within their own setting. Henry learned to play the organ in retirement as he expanded the woodworking and sculpture in which he still engaged in his late 90s. Seventy-four-year-old Julie, who is holding her second exhibit of botanical water colour paintings, especially enjoys belonging to her artists' co-operative. Marty, age 84, sees going to art class like going to the gym, a discipline to keep moving forward with his sculpture. Some of the artists knew specifically which art called to them-others took classes to explore possibilities until they found their passion.

Writers featured joined writing groups-early or late in their late life development of passion for poetry, nonfiction, or fiction. Kathleen writes every day, and also critiques fellow writers' work-her regular discipline: "I write for the pure joy of it – the joy of discovering what I have to say, of writing a sentence that sings, of finding the perfect word or metaphor. I write to find and record the extraordinary embedded in the ordinary. I write to surprise myself. "

This highly readable and engaging book invites adults at any age to expand their lives through creative arts. Toder closes her book with some practical advice for older adults on how to find their specific artistic passion.