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The Elderly—Our Future?

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The elderly our future? That's what New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote in a recent column. He was referring to politics and his opinion that change will not be led from Washington but from oldsters who arise and force change. He says the elderly have the time, energy and, with Internet, the tools to organize.

Now that I'm over 55 and see "the elderly" as maybe someone over 90, it's hard to wrap my mind around that statement even though supposedly, at my age, I have less brain cells to wrap with. Contrary to what we all thought and what science told us, researchers now find that the brain is capable of creating new connections and even new neurons through all of life. Crossword puzzle folks probably knew this all along.

It's all the more reason to stay actively involved and engaged with life, I say. According to Jane Knapp, Director of Adult Education at North County Recreation District, people of all ages from 21 to 90 participate in their various programs. Art Night is available for those who want to try sculpture, paper mache and other art media. Culture Vultures meets once a month for a video presentation of a performance, play or opera. Great Decisions, a foreign policy discussion group, meets weekly to discuss foreign policy topics. In addition, they have weekly ping-pong, cards and Mah-jongg groups. They even offer a radio controlled helicopter group in the gym on Sunday afternoons. Walkers meet weekly for guided hikes, and a book discussion group meets every Friday. Three times a year the Riverbend Players put on a Readers Theater production. Road trips are ongoing and take in everything from Vienna Boys Choir and Mariners games to Cirque du Soleil. Who said there's nothing to do in a small town?

If one wants to get physical, whatever their age, there are a plethora of fitness activities in our villages according to Kathie Hightower in her article on fitness. She tells us about Tai Chi and Ecstatic dance, Spin class, hoop dancing, yoga, hiking trails and plain old beach walking on what most of us consider one of the most beautiful beaches on the planet.

A study by psychologists Mara Mather, Turhan Canli and others reports that as people age, they pay less attention to negative emotional stimuli. Now that's something I can relate to. After a lifetime of caring so much about what others say and think, most of us just don't care any more. Ask any of us women over 50 whether we're into comfort or style as to the shoes we buy and see how many of us go for the pointy-toed high heels. Other studies reveal that people become more outgoing, self-confident and warm with age and that personalities often become more vivid as we become more of what we already are.

ENCORE (Exploring New Concepts Of Retirement Education), is a local member run Learning in Retirement organization for individuals who are 50+ years old. They work

closely with Clatsop Community College to offer short-term courses and activities usually led by members at no charge. Offerings for the 2010 winter schedule include: [Biological Anthropology](#), Classical South Asian Thought, World Heritage Sites, The Limits of Power, Climate Change, The Magical World of Orchids and Beginning Calligraphy. Open to retired and semi-retired adults 50 and over ENCORE charges \$50 per year, which allows members to enroll in any of the ENCORE course offerings. Classes are held in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside, on and off campus.

It's interesting to me that Encore's book group recently chose Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited*, a novel published in 1958 as a sequel to Huxley's 1932 work, *Brave New World*. In it, Huxley covers morality, overpopulation, complexity and propaganda. One could argue that these issues are still troubling society today. Huxley's statement rings true for all of us despite our age:

"Life is short and information endless."

The elderly our future? Our youth? What about the disillusioned middle-aged? Regardless of whose shoulders we rest our hopes on, one thing is certain:

Life is short. Stay Awake.