

It's a
New
Year!

TO YOUR HEALTH

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A NEW YEAR FOR CREATIVITY

By Barbara Chenoweth, NP

For reasons that are becoming clearer, people in the second half of their lives become more creative and display a greater potential for creative expression. The blossoming of creativity in later life has not only produced notable artists and writers but has proven to increase mental clarity and growth. Indeed in her book, *Art and Healing*, Barbara Ganim proposes that a growing number of "artists and non-artists are using art to heal the body, soothe the mind, and transform the spirit." As another new year unfolds, each of us has the chance to look at our lives through new eyes and to find ways for the expression of our own creativity.

Underlying all creativity is the ability to look at life in a new and different way. Whether one is an artist or an admirer of art, the eye and the mind must be open to "seeing" in new ways. Even the most everyday art, the art of cooking, sewing, gardening or even problem-solving, requires a flexibility of mind and spirit. As we grow older, some research suggests that we use both sides of our brain, merging the logical, analytical left brain with the creative right side of the brain. This merger may allow us to better use our talents and skills, (*Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing*, November 2007).

With age comes improved social skills and an emotional stability that may come from weathering many emotional storms. The flexibility and resilience that can result from experience, practice and life-long learning can provide fertile ground for

creative expression. For many, years of experience with problem-solving gives a firm foundation for creative solutions. And having the emotional freedom to explore talents and abilities that may have been put aside during busier years can ripen into unexpected, creative adventures.

Yet we often prevent ourselves from exploring new horizons because of our reliance on routine, not wanting to go "outside of the lines" of our usual ways of doing things. In writing about creativity in *Life is Short—Wear Your Party Shoes*, Loretta LaRoche says that the death of creativity comes from:

- Sticking with what works
- Fear and stress
- Being a control freak
- Always seeing what's there versus what's not there
- Being too logical, not playful
- Too many *don'ts*

She believes that creativity is more likely to occur after one meditates or has some form of aerobic exertion. She recommends simple breathing that focuses on the breath, using the repetition of a prayer, or a word such as "peace" or "calm." As the mind becomes distracted, gently return to the breath, prayer or word. This quiet re-focusing of the mind clears the mind and elicits the "relaxation response," (Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response*). Practicing the "relaxation response" for 10–20 minutes each day can help free the mind for creative expression.

Loretta LaRoche suggests ways to exercise our minds by brainstorming novel so-



solutions to ordinary situations. For example, a group of friends could try brainstorming a 100 ways that they could entertain themselves if they were stuck in an elevator: reciting poetry, singing etc. Her main point is that one can be creative without being a great artist, but by being an inventive, creative person.

Creative expression can bring joy and meaning to our lives. And it can heal the mind and body. With the new year we have another chance to explore new ways of self expression and creativity.

"When you come to the edge of all the light you know, and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown; faith is knowing one of two things will happen: There will be something solid to stand on, or you will be taught to fly."

— Barbara J. Winter

HEALTH EDUCATION LECTURE

On Wednesday, January 23, Erin Whalen will give a health education presentation on "Participation in Research: Expectations, Initiatives, and Outcome." Ms. Whalen is the Associate Coordinator of the HOPE Study at Boston University Alzheimer's Disease Center. She will discuss the array of research studies that BU is conducting and describe opportunities for Carleton-Willard Village Residents to become involved in research. Please join us in Auditorium Center from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

YOGA: A FLEXIBLE PRACTICE

By Muire Lindahl

In the spirit of creativity and flexibility, yoga is a less traditional form of exercise than walking, swimming, biking and strength training. The latter activities emphasize training the muscles through actions that engage the musculature for the purpose of improving cardiovascular endurance or muscular strength.

Yoga is described in the book *Yoga for Beginners* by Mark Ansari and Liz Lark as a practice that opens the door to our full potential as individuals through a system of conscious exercise that trains the body, breath and ultimately the mind.

Yoga engages the muscles in a breath coordinated manner. Asanas or yoga postures are performed dynamically for a few cycles of breathing, then held statically for a few breaths. As a posture is sustained, the mind and spirit are linked with the body in a meditative way.

From the physical point of view, when a posture is held, some muscles contract isometrically while others relax and lengthen. Balance is required to move in or out of standing yoga positions and to hold them when in a seated position.

For many years in this country yoga was thought of as a weird practice that required strict discipline, putting the body into impossible positions holding them, and chanting strange words like OM. Yoga really is a time to use the body while becoming present in the moment to benefit the mind and spirit.

Consider the new year as a time to try the yoga classes offered at CWV. A seated class is held on Friday's at 1:00 in the Fitness Room and a new series of 8 classes will begin on January 10th at 2:00 in Auditorium Center.