

Creative Expressions

Inspiring vibrant and positive aging ∞ Promoting participatory arts ∞ Engaging civic stakeholders

The Official Newsletter of the Creative Aging Calgary Society

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Singing for community, joy & survival

1 **Calgary Jewish Seniors Choir offers second chance to sing**

WRITTEN BY MELISSA MOLLOY | MMOLLOY@CJOURNAL.CA



Amalia Tauber, a Holocaust survivor, says that the choir helps her to "forget everything that bothers (her)."

“I was in Auschwitz.”

Chorister Frieda Plucer says, holding up her forearm to reveal a set of faded tattooed numbers marking her registration into the notorious concentration camp.

“To live after the horror I went through,” she says of her role as a chorister, “I come here to be alive.”

Plucer is only one of several Holocaust survivors that pepper “Voices,” a choir for seniors mostly comprised by members of Calgary’s Jewish community. The five-year-old group meets every Wednesday at the Calgary Jewish Community Centre for rehearsals and tonight the room is packed with singers. The excitement among them is palpable.

It takes the choir’s director and creator Karina Szulc a bit of effort to get the group to quiet down. Members are much too busy laughing and catching up with each other after a week apart. The vitality among the choristers is contagious and if one were to close their eyes they’d guess they were in a room of 20-somethings.

Six years ago when Szulc moved to Canada from her native Argentina, the music therapist who specializes in gerontology immediately immersed herself in the Jewish seniors community.

“I moved to Calgary and went to work for Jewish immigrant services,” she says. “I realized that there were a lot of programs here for seniors but there were none with music.” Szulc says that she began to develop a plan for a choir with “very specific goals in mind.” For one, the choir was going to be all-inclusive and non-competitive – members of any vocal ability would be able to come and sing, even if they had been told earlier in life that singing was not on their repertoire of talents.

Secondly, the choir would aim “to revive and to keep alive Jewish music,” while members formed bonds and relationships with each other that would effectively “decrease isolation” in the senior’s community.

But despite the group’s inclusivity, Szulc is very clear that this is not just a “sing-a-long” for seniors. These folks

rehearse with performances in mind and have been asked to sing in front of the Prime Minister of Canada, clergymen and women of the Calgary community and Mayor Naheed Nenshi.

Szulc says that the performance aspect gives the choristers much more than singing practice.

“A choir has a purpose,” she says. “When they perform in front of an audience there’s a sense of accomplishment and pride, and also a sense of purpose in life that they are sending a message.”

Chorister Amalia Tauber makes it very clear that Szulc’s intentions for the choir have been realized.

“When we are here we forget everything that bothers us,” she says. “We are just here together and it’s a camaraderie among us. For me the choir is so much, and I couldn’t live now without the choir.”

“I wait every week for the day we get together.”

Back in the rehearsal room the choir sings songs ranging from “Thank You for the

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SPECIAL INTEREST

- **Creative Aging Calgary Society AGM ~ September 12, 2012**
- Submissions to our newsletter are welcome! See page 4 for details.
- Watch for our next issue in December 2012!

Calgary Jewish Seniors Choir offers second chance to sing ... continued from p. 1

Music" by Swedish group, ABBA, to the traditional Yiddish song "Oyf'n Pripetshok and Nacht Aktion" made popular by Steven Spielberg's film, "Schindler's List." When the group sings one can see, and feel the absolute ecstasy in the room. Heads sway and lyrics are belted out with passion –if the song is upbeat members clap in tandem, some even get up and dance. Szulc, with guitar in hand paces in front of the group singing with as much gusto as the rest. She is accompanied up at the front by the fabulous pianist Arlein Chetner, who volunteers her time and 40 plus years of music expertise. All together, the room feels as though it is bursting with emotion.

Later on, Szulc explains that the near-tangible emotion of the choir and their music is due in part to the history of some of its membership. "There's a lot of Holocaust survivors," she says. "There is something about using music to send a message: That they survived –that they are here and they are alive and they are strong and vital. "The same reason that they survived in the prison or were tortured in a concentration camp for being Jewish, now that is something they can express openly. So they sing those songs with a lot of feeling. To honour their relatives that passed away and to keep the music alive makes them feel that they are delivering a message."

For Plucer, her role in the choir is part and parcel with her life as a survivor of one of history's darkest eras. "I've been through hell," she says earnestly, but her face quickly changes into a delighted smile. "Now I'm living it up!"



Be A Part of It!

The Creative Aging Calgary Society is thrilled to have the **Calgary Jewish Seniors Choir** join us at our upcoming AGM on September 12, 2012 at Garrison Green Seniors Community. This special event is part of the Creative Expressions Showcase and "Edutainment" being offered by the Creative Aging Calgary Society to its members. Please be sure to join us on September 12! Reception & Registration starts at 6:30 pm with light refreshments. The Calgary Jewish Choir will start its program after our brief AGM agenda (see page 3 for details). Please RSVP by September 8 to info@creativeagingcalgary.ca. For more information: www.creativeagingcalgary.ca or 403.836.5631.

Doing Good Like a Medicine

by Joanne Morcom

A merry heart does good like a medicine. Proverbs, 17:22

The therapeutic benefits of humour and laughter have been known since ancient times, while the origin of modern laughter therapy dates back to 1976. That's when Dr. Norman Cousins published *Anatomy of an Illness*, an account of how he used laughter to help himself recover from a serious illness. He later established a humour task force at UCLA medical school that does clinical research, and the results indicate that humour and laughter have a very positive effect on the body and the mind. Benefits include the promotion of an overall sense of well-being, with a corresponding reduction in stress, anxiety and tension. Laughter itself exercises respiratory muscles and is believed to lower blood pressure and reduce heart disease. It may also improve immune function, fight infections and increase longevity, although these claims have yet to be scientifically proven.

The contagious quality of laughter lends itself to social bonding. In other words, when we laugh together, we feel more at ease with each other. This sense of bonding improves interpersonal relationships and builds group identity, solidarity and cohesiveness. All of these benefits are especially important as we age, to help us stay physically fit, mentally healthy and socially active. And unlike traditional medical treatments for aches and pains, humour and laughter have no unpleasant side effects. Plus they cost nothing to put into practice.

So how do you promote humour and laughter in your life on a daily basis? You can start by developing or enhancing a positive, light-hearted attitude. You need to find what humorist Joel Goodman calls, "the elf in yourself" and change your perspective to "the eye of the be-ho-ho-holder." To this end, try not to take life too seriously and accept that nobody's perfect, including yourself. Be willing to poke fun at your little problems and remember that while you can't control everything that happens, you can control how you handle it. If problems seem to pile up, have a "plus-conversation" with yourself. Write down just one positive thing that's happened for you in the last 24 hours.

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Esther, You're Looking Very Well

by Esther Harris

(excerpted; full article can be found online: www.creativeagingcalgary.ca).

In 2004, two weeks after my 77th birthday, I left B.C. and moved to Calgary to be near my family. I had been told a few months earlier that I had Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and furthermore, the specialist continued, drugs would not be helpful at my age since they would probably kill me. However, here I am in 2012 at 86 still alive and enjoying my life, thanks in large measure to all the wonderful people at Tom Baker Cancer Clinic whose oversight over the years since I arrived in Calgary has kept me going through three chemotherapy treatments for the Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, surgery for colon cancer in 2008, and two courses of radiation treatments of head, face and neck for squamous cell cancers from November, 2011 to the end of March, 2012. A life-changing experiences? Well, yes.

Last summer I read Lewis Wolpert's newly published book: "You're Looking Very Well: The Surprising Nature of Getting Old" (Faber & Faber, 2011). He is a British retired medical biologist and also in his eighties. I, too, have been constantly surprised at my own ageing and its goings-on amid the various demands this stage of my life has made, and keeps on making, on my physical, intellectual and emotional strengths in the process. It was inevitable that the fact of getting old, together with my cancer experiences, would change my outlook on life. So, despite the dire early prognosis that I would not live beyond 77, I am inclined to agree with Wolpert when he says: 'Please keep remembering that research world-wide has shown that we are least happy in our mid-forties and happiest in our late-seventies, and even older.'

In recent years I have become a member of the Creative Aging Society Calgary whose aim is to foster connections between older adults, artists, professionals and interested community members. They encourage submissions for publication in their newsletter and participation in their programs at various senior community centres. As they point out, we don't have to be a Picasso or a Shakespeare to paint or write our stories. Of course, one of the mainstays in coping with a lot of things is humour which is often expressed when people get together for whatever reason. When I go down to the lobby where a lot of my neighbours have gathered to drink morning coffee and to chat, some will say to me: Esther, you're looking very well. I simply point out that this is in part due to the surgeons who have removed cancers from my face and who have, in the stitching process afterwards, "lifted" certain areas of my face so I now have a smooth brow with no wrinkles and no crowsfeet round my eyes. Another benefit resulting from coping with cancer in old age. Who knew?

To read more of Esther's writing and to join in on some creative activities around Calgary please visit:

www.creativeagingcalgary.ca

CACS 2012 AGM

The Creative Aging Calgary Society will hold its 2012 AGM on Wednesday **September 12, 2012** starting at 6:30 with light refreshments at the Garrison Green Seniors Community, 3028 Don Ethell Blvd SW.

Annual reports will be presented based on the 2011-2012 operating year. Directors will stand for election (see *Call for Directors at www.creativeagingcalgary.ca*) or re-election.

A special presentation by the **Calgary Jewish Seniors Choir** will follow the AGM (see pgs 1-2).

RSVP by September 8: info@creativeagingcalgary.ca.

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Tell somebody, and ask about their plus events. Speaking of lists, make a joy list by writing down everything that makes you smile, laugh and just feel good. Refer to it often, and keep adding to it.

Dare to be playful and childlike now and then, knowing that while most adults laugh an average of ten times a day, children generally laugh much more often. Approach every task as if you're doing it for the first time or modify your routine so that it's no longer routine, if only for one day.

Reflect on what kind of humour you prefer and what makes you laugh. Collect jokes and cartoons, as well as funny articles, books, movies, etc. Identify and associate with people who share your positive outlook. Think and act like someone with a good sense of humour and you'll be that person.

Another effective way to add fun to your life is to participate in a unique exercise routine called laughter yoga, which was developed by Dr. Madan Kataria in 1995. Laughter yoga is based on the scientific fact that even if you laugh as an exercise your body can't tell the difference and you receive the same benefits, e.g. increase of oxygen supply to the body and brain.

Laughter yoga exercises take place in group settings called laughter clubs, and today there are an estimated 600 such clubs in 60 countries. A typical laughter yoga session is led by a trained leader, who explains each exercise, and guides participants to start and finish the exercises together, for an improved group dynamic. Sessions focus on enjoyment rather than forcing out laughter, yet the exercises are designed to elicit prolonged and hearty laughter, all without joke telling. In the words of Dr. Kataria, anyone can laugh without humour, jokes or comedy. Seriously!

So whether you're interested in adjusting your attitude or experiencing some belly laughs, you'll be doing yourself a lot of good in a lot of ways, whatever your age. Just remember that we don't stop laughing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop laughing.

Joanne Morcom is a Calgary registered social worker, certified laughter yoga leader and published writer and poet.

Creative Aging Calgary Society

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Strategic Priorities

Advocacy

Enhance awareness of participatory arts and aging programs with a variety of stakeholders

Practice

Foster connections between older adults, artists, professionals and interested community members

Research

Clearly communicate cutting-edge research specific to arts participation

Education

Share information about local arts-based programs and opportunities for learning

Governance

Generate an effective Board with membership that reflects our diverse community

Membership Info

Memberships are available at no charge online:
www.creativeagingcalgary.ca.

Members receive event and information updates as well as quarterly newsletters.

Creative Expressions

Creative Expressions is the official newsletter for the Creative Aging Calgary Society (CACCS). It is published four times a year and distributed electronically (www.creativeagingcalgary.ca). Questions regarding article / photo contributions should be directed to the editor at editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca or 403-836-5631. **Please note**, the information and opinions in this newsletter are subject to change, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the publisher, the editor, or the CACCS Board of Directors. **Disclaimer:** Any advertisements, businesses, or other parties listed in Creative Expressions should not be interpreted as recommendations or endorsements by the CACCS, the editor or the publisher. Re-publication of the Creative Expressions Newsletter (in whole or part) requires the expressed written permission of the article's author and the publisher. Please direct republication requests to editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca

Volunteer Here

The Creative Aging Calgary Society is relatively new group and is seeking volunteers to help with our various committees. Please contact: info@creativeagingcalgary.ca for more information related to *Education & Programming, Communications, Membership, Sponsorship & Funding, Marketing & Promotion or Research*.

Submissions Welcome

Articles, book reviews, event and special interest items related to Creative Aging are all welcome. Please contact the editor at editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca for more information. Next issue: September 2012. Submission deadline August 15, 2012.

Your Business Ad Here

Business ads are welcome: \$20/issue for 40 words (first ad free for members). Graphic ads, 1/8 page size, also welcome for \$75 per issue (members receive 20% discount). Please contact the editor at editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca. Next issue: December 2012. Submission deadline: November 15, 2012.