



AgeSong

senior communities

Notes & Thoughts

"The goal of life is to become who you are," many a sage has pointed out throughout human history. This process of becoming continues as we age, grow old, become an elder.

While our elders continue in their process of becoming, we who assist them learn from their being, their process. We learn about their pace, their viewpoint, their different ways of relating and communicating, learn about different realities they inhabit, learn to remember about the full spectrum of life.

Through our emphasis on the emotional and spiritual side of aging, the AgeSong family is trying to set a different standard of caregiving.

We hope that this newsletter will inspire you and help you look at aging and growing old differently, will help you to reach out to those who have walked the path before you. ♥

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Pacific Institute
COUNSELING • EDUCATION • RESEARCH

AgeSong senior communities is proud of its partnership with Pacific Institute. Pacific Institute is a leading health-care organization specializing in providing mental health services to seniors experiencing symptoms of forgetfulness, commonly referred to as Alzheimer's and dementia. For over a decade, Pacific Institute has been caring for vulnerable and emotionally sensitive elderly who are often the most hidden and invisible people around us. Together, we have created a vision of innovative and caring communities for elders.

THE AGESONG WAY: Awareness

A guiding value of AgeSong is our strive for continued awareness. Making awareness important on a variety of levels has been essential to our growth over the past twelve years. To us awareness means that we are a *learning organization*. In a learning organization we understand ourselves as students: students



of our elders, of our own staff, of our community. We are learning new ways of giving care, of growing personally and professionally, of becoming aware of how to live a meaningful life.

In such an organization the well-being and development of the organization is intrinsically linked

to the well-being and growth of each of its members. Similarly, awareness is involved in how we serve our customers, our residents. Our basic philosophy is guided by serving the needs of our residents as well as those of their family members.

Awareness lies at the core of our Circle of Care, a philosophy that recognizes the need to care for everyone we encounter – residents, staff, visitors and community members – with compassion, kindness and respect. Included in the Circle of Care is AgeSong's commitment to elevate society's view of the caregiving profession.

We believe that we can have a positive impact on the quality of life not only of our elders, but on everyone whose lives we touch. We hope to continue our vision with AgeSong's expanding programs throughout the Bay Area including additional sites in San Francisco, Oakland and Emeryville. ♥

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Our Community of



AgeSong

senior communities

All for Art & Art for All

Through AgeSong's *Expressive Arts Program*, Clinical Director Anin Untigaard is finding new ways of supporting elders with forgetfulness and other

symptoms. Expressive arts give a voice to those who do not have the "normal" means to speak and in doing so, the program gives a different voice to those who are unable to speak conventionally.

"We are at the beginning of a journey to truly sculpt our vision, and with the space and permission to explore this with elders, it is a really promising journey," says Anin who is working with interns and staff from Pacific Institute in expanding the *Expressive Arts Program* at AgeSong communities.

Anin teaches AgeSong interns interacting with residents to be creative and look for nontraditional ways to communicate with residents. For instance, drama therapy can be used if a resident in the

program continually refers to an intern as his brother. To move them along in this train of thought, the intern might act as one. Through this approach, a story may develop and through that story

unfinished issues can be explored. Poetry groups, the AgeSong Choir, story telling, music, art and the use of color are also used to unearth deeper feelings.

Anin cannot stress enough that there are numerous ways to use expressive arts therapy. "It's like jazz," she says. "If you understand the theory, you can create a song that hasn't been created before. Similarly, if you know how to use the arts in a therapeutic way, you can mold an exercise or method specifically for an individual and his or her unique personality."

Some elders encounter difficulty forming and expressing linear verbal communication, but that does not mean that there are not other intelligent language forms that work. Without a mode of expression, a person's "voice" is lost. By exploring different ways of communication, such as through painting or being a member of the AgeSong Choir, the *Expressive Arts Program* helps elders be heard. ♥



A PROFILE IN EXPRESSIVE ARTS

HAROLD NORSE, POET

Memory may escape AgeSong resident Harold Norse, but words do not. Looking back on his accomplishments, Harold does not remember much because of his forgetfulness, but he believes deeply that if you know how to write, you will be all right. Expressive arts such as writing helps people understand themselves because ideas can come out, be explored and perhaps understood better. "Writing is my life," says Norse, acknowledging that we all have problems and feelings and that it is important to discuss them and get them out. For some people, drawing a picture or singing a song might be the key. In the case of Harold Norse, the key was a one hundred page poem.

As a young writer, Harold isolated himself, insisting that complete immersion in his work was a necessary part of his writing process. "The thing about writers, especially poets," says Norse, "is that the work binds you down, ties you up, and weighs on your being, because all your being goes into it." He credits his friends for lifting him up and bringing him to the famous



Beat Hotel in Paris, France, where Harold spent his twenties living and writing. In the 1960s, Harold could be found writing poetry at a small desk, where his roommates includ-

ed renowned poets such as William Carlos Williams, Williams S. Boroughs, and Allen Ginsberg. "Charles Bukowski

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ing him as one of the leading Beat poets. In the same year, Harold was nominated for the National Book Award. Soon after, the publication of *Carnivorous Saint:*

Gay Poems 1941 – 1976 and the success of the Gay Sunshine Press made Norse become one of the leading gay

liberation poets of the era. Harold continues to express himself as a poet and as an elder at our AgeSong Senior Community. His writings continue to inspire millions of artists, poets and readers to this day ♥

BECOME INVOLVED IN THE "AGESONG WAY"

There are many ways to learn more about the AgeSong Way, support our programs or be part of our family.

VOLUNTEER
your time to be with our elders.

PARTICIPATE
in a unique Pacific Institute one or two year internship program

LEARN
through our educational programs.

GIVE
financial and in-kind support.

EXPLORE
upcoming events and programs.

To learn more, visit
www.agesong.com. and
www.pacificinstitute.org.

A NEW BOOK FOR 2008

Deeper into the Soul: Understanding Dementia as Our Teacher



Programs and services offered by AgeSong are based on understanding life's challenges as a way of deepening who we are. Difficulties such as illness

are seen as being rich in meaning and possibilities. This idea is explored in Drs. Nader Shabahangi and Bogna Szymkiewicz's newest book, *Deeper into the Soul*.

In *Deeper into the Soul*, the authors write about the teachings that elderly people with forgetfulness afford us.

"If we pause long enough to understand this phenomenon of forgetfulness – not just its biological causes – we will discover something essentially human about those who experience this condition." Moreover, the authors insist, in being with people who experience forgetfulness, we caregivers are given the opportunity to deepen ourselves, are given the gift of remembering our essential humanity.

In *Deeper into the Soul*, the reader is asked to look for the hidden riches that can be found in people with dementia. Nader and Bogna invite us to truly value elders living with forgetfulness:

Deeper into the Soul

"We need to appreciate them for who they are and what they can show us... their forgetting can remind us of the complex essence of our humanity, something that is as much about wonder as about knowing, and as much about forgetting as about remembering." ♥



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creating
therapeutic
environments

*Specialized programs for
forgetfulness (dementia)
and mental health that
support complex behavioral
and physiological symptoms.*