

We all have reasons for what we do in life

My grandmother had an enormous influence on my life.

She passed away in the fall of 1994, but not a day goes by when I don't think of her.

Her name was Margaret, like the queen of Denmark. She was larger than life in every sense of the word and taught me the most valuable lesson of all: how to spread love.

I know it may sound trite, but her love really was boundless.

I mention her because we all have reasons for doing what we do in life. If we believe strongly enough in something, there is always a significant story or event that helped form that belief.

I realize — now that I'm fortunate to work within the Senior Center for six months — that she is the main reason I believe so strongly in what the center is all about.

Since our development work began midsummer, I've had countless conversations with community members about the Senior Center. Yet, every time I try to express or interpret all of what I've observed so far, I'm at once humbled and overwhelmed to understand the extent of care that emanates from there.

Anyone in Sheridan who needs to find a way to elevate life beyond adulthood (also often referred to as elderhood) — for himself or for someone he loves — can find it at the Senior Center. And as Dr. Thomas, founder of the Green House concept of care, said when he visited Sheridan last week, “When we learn how to make a good life for elders, we learn how to make a good life for everyone.”

I think this in a nutshell is what the Senior Center does, and it's a fine distinction: caring for families and Sheridanites of all ages by first elevating the lives of those in elderhood.

This sounds good, doesn't it? Of course it does. Who would not agree that we must care for and lift up those who happen to need even just a little bit of help with daily tasks?

One day, we will all be in this boat. And this is where I find my sense of urgency these days at the age of 40:



Center Stage

Sonja Garber



How can we collectively — now, today — begin to alter the conventional notion of what it means to grow older? Why do so many offer only a declining view? It must not be the only viewpoint we talk about.

From my vantage point, it is not true, it's not what I see at the center, and certainly not what I grew up knowing.

And one thing is for sure, by the time I, and certainly those younger than I, have lived half of our lives, we too will be ready to live out what I now see literally every day: the notion that getting older is in so many cases a fantastic thing. It's a time in which we finally allow ourselves to be simply complete, just as we are.

Let me again share one of Dr. Thomas' many affirming quotes: “Older adults are happier, emotionally more stable, more resilient, and more flexible.”

So my challenge to you, regardless of your actual age or the age in your mind,

is to free yourself from the presumption of decline. Only then can we all begin to see next ideas about what age means for everyone in the future.

This kind of change in viewpoint is what the Senior Center and its partners around the community are leading and affecting. And it begins with conversation, as simple as it sounds.

As my friend and author Jim Lord always says, “It makes a big difference what we talk about.”

On that note, I'm reminded again of my grandma Margaret, who said and lived out so many positive things in her life.

I clearly remember her saying that the traditional notion of going downhill wasn't something she understood — because isn't that where we pick up speed and strength?

“Center Stage” is written by friends of the Sheridan Senior Center and was formerly titled “Silver Threads.” This weekly column of insights and stories is written for the Sheridan community to illuminate issues related to living well at every age.

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