

{ AGING with an Attitude }

Step On It!



By Dorie U. Sugay

Dorie Sugay is the Executive Director of Visiting Angels, a company that provides living-assistance services to seniors and adults-in-need who wish to stay in their own home or receive one-on-one care within a facility.

Losing three people I love in one year made me face my own mortality. It compelled me to step back to look at how I live my life. As a result, I have decided to shift it into overdrive – take more risks, do more things out-of-the-box, stop over-analyzing and enjoy life more. I am, my dear readers, “steppin’ on the gas and runnin’ over alibis, excuses and obstacles and you should too!”

Initially the changes I made were “safe.” I experimented with color in my home, consulted with a local design expert (Debbie Hoey) to give pizzazz to my surroundings. I let Sue Thurman, Gilroy Chamber’s “whisperer” inspire me to “shop Gilroy.” I left my hairstylist in San Jose after 8 years and now go to Lorena at Essence of Beauty. Now you know that when a woman does that, she is taking risks!!! I even kicked my rules aside and allowed myself to be vulnerable, to “let go.” And, I am happier for it. The little changes – they create a subtle rippling life-giving effect.

As we age, we can get comfortable. We get used to a certain lifestyle — a certain routine, not realizing that habitual living erodes at one’s quality of life. When you take risks or make changes, something happens — it’s like opening the windows to your house and letting the fresh air in. You get new energy. And that energy multiplies with action. So, why did I have to lose three people to realize I needed to breathe new energy into my already good life? Because, like many, I’ve been comfortable. Because, “if it’s not broke, we don’t fix it”. (Sadly though, even those whose lives are “broken,” don’t do any “fixin” either). Sometimes OK is good enough. No! No! No! If you get complacent, your creative juices harden like lard, passion dies and you (and your relationships) spiral down to a compromised existence.

Even the physically-challenged can spice up their lives in many ways. Doing something, anything, helps. MOVE! Go for coffee at a place that is vibrant with

people’s energy. Have your caregiver take you to Syngenta Flowers where they allow visitors to enjoy their gorgeous landscape. Check out a local winery. Have a movie night with popcorn and invite a friend. Eat your simple soup dinner by candlelight. Use your antique silver tea set for that afternoon cup of tea. Drink juice from the champagne glass you reserve for special occasions and toast to memories. Resist the temptation to eat on the kitchen counter or in front of the TV. Treat yourself to a sit down dinner. Seasonal decorating spices up the same old look even if you don’t expect company. Do for yourself what you would do for others. You deserve it! Research suggests that our environment truly affects us. Step on it already!

It’s about how you see life and choose to live it that dictates how yours will be.

Even little changes stir up LIFE. I purposely capitalized LIFE because it should be “capitalized,” it should be maximized, lived – with gusto. Think of throwing a pebble in still waters. It causes ripples. The ripples you make can put a smile on your face. A smile can do your heart wonders. If you don’t want to see others for some reason, learn to video call. This is a great way to still stay in touch. Isolation zaps life out of you. Watch a comedy – especially if you are depressed. Watch football at a sports bar – the energy is contagious. Go to the park, the kids’ laughter will touch you.

“But I’m getting old,” you say. Let me tell you about Lucy Gori, owner of Town

and Country Fashions in Gilroy. She’s a magic maker - you can look like a duck when you walk into her shop and when she is done helping you, you cannot help but look gorgeous. She is “way over 21,” she looks fantastic and will proudly tell you how long she has graced this earth. Then there’s John Albaugh who, together with his wife Marge, started St. Joseph’s Center. He is in his 90s and is having the time of his life. (It helps that the ladies line-up for the Albaugh hug). It’s about how you see life and choose to live it that dictates how yours will be.

“Let it go” – set aside your musts and your rules once in a while. Do something you’ve been wanting to do. Little pleasures can turn sighs into smiles.

Dare to make changes. Take “can’t” out of your vocabulary. “Can’t” is a choice not

to do what it takes to make something happen. A Visiting Angels client was told she may not walk again. All her life, she was the one who beat the odds. So, secretly, our caregiver helped her with her physical therapy exercises. Eight months later, she walked from the living room to the dining room at Thanksgiving. If someone who has no fingers can play the piano with her toes – you can do a lot of things, before you can justify “can’t.”

Focus on others rather than on your aches and pains. Rotary International is still raising money to finally eradicate polio, the schools and charity organizations around you are struggling –help out. If money is tight, \$4 to cellphonesforsoldiers.com gives a soldier a 2-hour prepaid phone card; \$7 buys a week’s worth of food for an abandoned animal at a shelter (aspca.org); \$11

plants 11 trees in Alabama which was devastated in April 2011 (arborday.org). Make it about others.

It is never too late to work on your health. It’s easier to be happy when you feel good. If you start to exercise at the age of 70, sure there is less toning but it still helps! And please, don’t say you can’t. Start with a 5-minute regime, increasing by a minute and in time you will be doing 20-30 minutes of exercise and eat healthier!

If you’re in an unhealthy situation – do something about it! A friend of mine was in a 35- year old unhealthy marriage. “It was not bad all the time.” In her 60s now, she has realized she deserves better. A huge undertaking can overwhelm you into paralysis – take baby steps, divide to-do’s into multiple smaller tasks. No one is too old for happiness!

Imagine if all who read this “stepped on it” going into 2012! I say – if you want a better life, make changes, even little ones. If you are going to breathe anyway, why not breathe in LIFE! STEP ON IT ALREADY!

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