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# The Midcoast Inquirer

Newsletter of Midcoast Senior College  
April 2014, Volume 9, No. 2



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## President's Letter for April

Greetings,

This past academic year, our second as a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization, has been quite eventful. Enrollment in both our spring and fall courses, as well as attendance in our Winter Wisdom, Summer Wisdom and Current Events Forum is at an all-time high, and our mailing list now exceeds 1600. Our growth has created increased time demands on our all-volunteer organization, as well as financial strains. As a result, your board decided last fall to initiate an annual fund drive. The results have been gratifying, for as of this writing we have raised approximately \$13,000, enabling us to hire a part-time employee for the first time in our history.

With the sale of 9 Park St., the building in which we hold most of our classes, we were forced to seek a new site for classroom and office space. I am pleased to inform you that we have concluded an agreement with Southern New Hampshire University, located in Cook's Corner adjacent to Wal-Mart, and will move our facilities there as of June 1 of this year. Our rental agreement provides us with enough classroom space for our present and potential future needs, and the cost is not a great deal more than our present rental. We will continue to use space in the three retirement communities with whom we have partnerships.

MSC thrives because of a large group of dedicated volunteers. We are constantly in need of individuals with administrative, technologic, development and academic backgrounds to carry on our mission. We also need students willing to be classroom liaisons, or to serve on our committees. We seek your expertise. Please contact our office or any of your board members if you wish to volunteer.

Thank you all for your continued valuable support.

**Richard S. Neiman**



## Aging and Learning

by Susan Mikesell

As we baby boomers begin to fill the ranks of senior citizens we are challenged again to change the status quo. We are testing the myths of aging. We don't feel old. We are happier than we have ever been. We are making new friends and trying out new activities. We are old dogs who are learning new tricks. Optimal aging, according to one expert in the field, is "function[ing] at the highest possible level in the context of inevitable limitations, [to get the ] best out of what is possible for as long as possible, physically, cognitively, socially, [and] psychologically". (Douglas Powell, 1998, *9 Myths of Aging*) Does this mean that we can avoid the natural decline of aging, both physically and mentally? No. What we can do is impact on the process. The field of neuroscience has given us a new understanding of how our aging brain works and what we can do to make the most of what we have.

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## The Midcoast Inquirer

is the newsletter of  
Midcoast Senior College which is hosted by University  
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Midcoast Senior College is one of eighteen autonomous,  
self-governing Senior Colleges in this State. We serve the  
area from Damariscotta to Freeport and inland toward  
Augusta. Most classes are held at the University College  
site at 9 Park Street in Bath.

**Our mission:** to provide non-credit academic courses and  
other educational events for people of 55 years and older to  
continue their lifelong learning.

## The DaPonte “Special Presentation”

**By Stuart Gillespie**

What does it mean when an announcement says a “Midcoast Senior College Special Presentation?” This was the lead off line to Senior College’s, DaPonte String Quartet performance called *The Battle of the Titans*. This demonstration-performance held at the Curtis Memorial Library on January 8th, was certainly special in every way and the *presentation* drew a record attendance of 156 enthusiasts. This event was also categorized as a special presentation because it was sponsored by the generous support of SOTHEBY’S, Joane Tait. And with great anticipation Senior College plans to continue offering performances by the DaPonte String Quartet every year.

This year’s 2014 performance called *The Battle of the Titans*, centered around the theme of a challenge made by philosopher Immanuel Kant to Ludwig van Beethoven in 1790. The challenge was to “revolutionize the art of music.” Beethoven responded by writing the *C-sharp Minor String Quartet Op. 131*, a piece which is considered by historians to be one of Beethoven’s favorite and best written string quartets. It is said that after listening to the piece Franz Schubert remarked, “what is left for us to write?” Robert Schumann is also quoted as saying that the quartet had a “grandeur that no words can express.” And it is a grand piece of about 40 minutes in length and in seven movements.

The DaPonte String Quartet held the audience spellbound as each performer explained, demonstrated and played their way through this beautiful work from beginning to end. And with a resounding and long applause they left us with much to remember and to think about. Mid Coast Senior College looks forward to hosting another fine performance of the DaPonte next year and for many years to come.

## 2014 Wheeler/Thompson Founders Award Nominations

To acknowledge in a meaningful way the contributions of the two co-founders of Midcoast Senior College, Nancy Wheeler and Jack Thompson, the Board of Directors established in 2009 the Wheeler/Thompson Founders Award. Presented annually at the Spring Luncheon, this award recognizes an individual who has supported the spirit and work of Senior College in significant ways.

Nominations are solicited each spring from among past and present members/students, faculty, volunteers, and others. The Board makes the final selection. Sitting members of the Board of Directors are not eligible. Nomination forms will be distributed to students attending classes later this spring. May 1 is the deadline.

Midcoast Senior College  
and Thornton Oaks Announce

**Summer Wisdom 2014 Lectures**

**Wednesday Evenings, 7 p.m. at Curtis  
Memorial Library, Morrell Room**

**JUNE 4**

**Bowdoin College Museum Of Art: Past, Present  
And Future - Anne Collins Goodyear and Frank  
H. Goodyear**

The two new co-directors of the Bowdoin Art Museum will address the history of the museum, one of the oldest in the United States; and will speak about their current projects and future vision.

Anne Collins Goodyear is president of the College Art Association. She is former Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Portrait Gallery and the co-editor of several scholarly articles on Marcel Duchamp. Frank H. Goodyear was formerly Curator of Photographs at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery and the author of four books dealing with historic photographs.

**JUNE 11**

**Explore The Arctic With Donald Baxter Macmillan  
– Mary Morton Cowan**

The presentation will consist of an illustrated discussion of Bowdoin alumnus MacMillan's expeditions, scientific research and cultural contributions, including his voyages in his specially designed arctic schooner "Bowdoin".

Maine author Mary Morton Cowan won the 2010 National Outdoor Book Award for her biography, 'Captain Mac: the Life of Donald Baxter MacMillan, Arctic Explorer', which has been a recommended biography by the National Science Teachers Association. Cowan first learned about MacMillan from her grandfather. Mac had bought sleds for his expeditions from the Paris Manufacturing Company, her family's business

**JUNE 18**

**Using The Tides: Then, Now And In The Future –  
Bud Warren**

Two centuries ago Midcoast Maine was a hub of industrial activity. Between Portland and Wiscasset over fifty sawmills, gristmills and other machines were powered by the regions' tides. All that is left of this early technology are remnants of tidal dams and posts in the mud at low tide. The story of Maine's use of tidal power, its technology and the mills of the Bath/Brunswick region will be presented, as well as current efforts to re-harness the ocean's power for the needs of the twenty-first century.

Bud Warren is a retired teacher, free-lance maritime historian and lecturer. He has been studying Maine's tide mills for over fifteen years, documenting over 200 of them. He has participated in archeological digs at the 1640's Phipps site in Woolwich and for ten years at the first English New England settlement at Popham. He has guided coastal tours for Smithsonian Associates, National Trust for Historic Preservation and is a regular Elderhostel/Road Scholar leader on a Maine windjammer. A co-founder of "Tide Mill Institute", he edits its newsletter "Tide Mill Times"

**JUNE 25**

**Thomas Brackett Reed: Forgotten Giant Of The  
House – Jane Fenderson Cabot**

Called "the most important politician you've never heard of" Thomas Brackett Reed was one of the most influential American political leaders of the Gilded Age and among a handful of men who might have been President of the U.S. As Speaker of the House of Representatives he ruled that body with an iron will. Not for nothing was he called "Czar Reed", as he singlehandedly broke the "silent filibuster", making the House a more democratic institution. But what makes him stand out from his peers and makes him relevant today was his unflinching integrity, which ultimately led him to resign his office on principle, an act of conscience almost unthinkable today.

A native of Maine and graduate of Mount Holyoke, Jane Fenderson Cabot worked for eleven years for the late Senator Edmond Muskie and served in the White House as Director of Scheduling for First Lady Rosalynn Carter. She is currently co-president of the Maine Women's Giving Tree, a philanthropy that focuses on the needs of women, children and families in the midcoast area.



## In Search Of Lost Time: Reflections on a senior college course

By Nancy Zugehoer

“When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host.”  
-Marcel Proust

These words early on in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* led Ann Kimmage’s Senior College class into a concentrated exploration of the literary themes of time, memory, self. The class discussed masterpieces of three of the most acclaimed writers of the 20th century—Proust, Virginia Woolf and Vladimir Nabokov—in order to study how those artists used these themes to create stunningly complex works of art inspired in their rendition of the human condition.

Proust, often considered the originator of modern literature, turns his authorial eye on the interior life of his characters (one of whom acts as himself). The author frequently interrupts the plot chronology enticing the reader and narrator to elicit memories of another time and place. These digressions are full of atmosphere so finely defined that the reader tastes the madeleine and smells the hawthorn trees, acutely experiencing the narrator’s inner self as he floats in remembered sensations.

“...a past that had almost sunk into the ground, lying by the water’s edge like an idler taking the air.”

Woolf in her novel, *To the Lighthouse*, with its strong autobiographical undertones, is obsessed with memories, both her own and those of her characters. Like Proust, who strongly influenced her writing, Woolf employs stream of consciousness to draw us into the thoughts of her central characters. The losses they encounter compel the reader to confront the reality and fragility of life. At the conclusion, the

character of the artist comes to terms with her memories of times past and can finally complete the painting she has struggled with for years. “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there...it was done... I have had my vision.” And the memories that had stalled her life’s resolve fall away.

Our third guide into time and memory, Nabokov, in his elegiac memoir, *Invitation of a Memory* recounts his early years in pre-revolutionary Russia and his subsequent wanderings to construct a new life elsewhere. He is chastened by the knowledge that he no longer has a country or home where he can evoke the memories he cherishes and mourns the loss of a favorite window in his distant family home:

“But of all the windows this is the pane through which in later years parched nostalgia longed to peer.” -Vladimir Nabokov

At the heart of the class were our discussions including recognition of how specific personal memories reverberate when viewed through the lens of our own time passing. For me, the ultimate pleasure was our immersion in the resplendent writing of the authors:

“He began to search among the infinite series of impressions which time had laid down, leaf upon leaf, fold upon fold softly, incessantly upon his brain; among scents, sounds; voices, harsh, hollow, sweet; and lights passing, and brooms tapping; and the wash and hush of the sea...” -Virginia Woolf

This experience in Ann Kimmage’s absorbing class heightens my appreciation of the faculty of Midcoast Senior College and the courses they teach.

Nancy Zugehoer has been on the Board of Directors of MSC since 2009.

Faculty Profile:

## Howard Whitcomb, MSC'S "Dean of Faculty"

Howard Whitcomb is very well known to us at Midcoast Senior College (MSC) as the chair of the Curriculum Committee. He began working on this committee originally with Jack Thompson and Libby Irwin. For the past 12 years he has also served on the Board of Directors. In fact he is now our longest serving Board Member. Yet in all these years he has never written his own profile, only writing brief profiles of the one hundred or so faculty members he has organized to provide us with our wide ranging courses. Once again Howard declined to write this profile, so I will try to summarize this interesting and dedicated volunteer.

Howard earned his BA at Brown University in 1961. While at Brown, along with a group of other students, he mentored a young student in an orphanage one afternoon per week for two years. He earned his PhD at Rockefeller College, University of Albany in 1972 in Political Science. He spent the next 30 years at Lehigh University and from 1992 to 1996 he was an Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. In that capacity he oversaw faculty personnel matters in 16 academic departments. He retired and moved to Georgetown 15 years ago.

Howard's specialty in Political Science is American constitutional Law. While he was at Lehigh, he was chosen as one of four Supreme Court Fellows in 1973-'74, (they were then known as Judicial Fellows). He worked for Chief Justice Warren Burger's administrative assistant, Mark W. Cannon. These were the years of Watergate, but unlike some others, he was in the right place at the right time. He has not yet done any memoir writing regarding this experience, but "infused into my courses Watergate content for the next 25 years" at Lehigh and in three Watergate courses here at MSC. In addition to teaching political science courses, he and his wife, Annie Merrill, gave a Winter Wisdom lecture on their trip to the sub-Antarctic entitled, "In the Footsteps of Sir Ernest Shackleton."

While MSC has required about a third of his volunteer time, the rest he has spent on Percival Baxter's papers for Friends for Baxter State Park. Percival Baxter (1876-1969) was the



53rd. Governor of Maine and served from (1921-1925). He was also responsible for donating vast acreages of land to the people of Maine to form the state park now named Baxter State Park. Howard organized both the 4 volume set, "Percival P. Baxter's Vision for Baxter State Park: An Annotated Compilation of Original Sources" (2005, 2008) and "Governor Baxter's Magnificent Obsession: A Documentary History of Baxter State Park, 1931-2006" (2008) which were published by Friends of Baxter State Park. With John Neff, Howard published "Baxter State Park and Katahdin" (2012), a photographic history.

During Howard's tenure at MSC over the past 8 years the numbers of MSC students has risen from 400 to 800, the numbers of classes per semester have doubled to 20-22. The average size of classes has not changed, remaining within the range of 18-20 students per class. Each year the Curriculum Committee tries to identify 3-4 new faculty to try to draw into our program.

If there are threads in Howard's life which tie these experiences together, it is a love of the Maine outdoors, and like Percival Baxter, looking out for others. Beginning at age 9, he and his sister attended the Wavus Camps on Lake Damariscotta. He continued to spend summers there as a camp counselor until 1965. During these years he made numerous trips down the Allagash River. He once briefly met Percival Baxter who was visiting his camp, and Howard had the presence of mind to personally thank him for Baxter's gifts to the people of Maine. This provides a nice opportunity to thank Howard for his lifelong role of mentoring others, and for now mentoring hundreds of seniors in midcoast Maine.

## Thinking about Whitman's poem, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*

By David McKeith

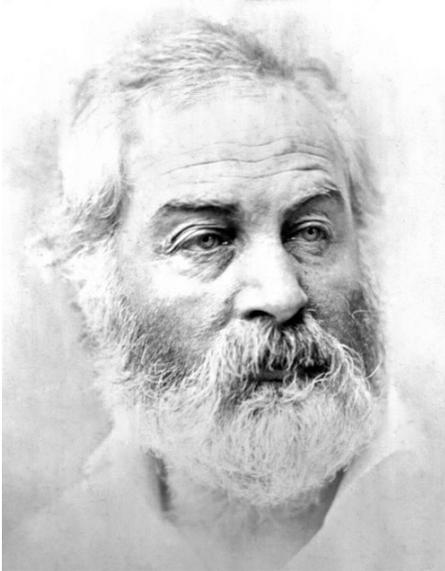


Photo of Walt Whitman in 1865

In this sesquicentennial of the devastating war between North and South, we read together, in last December's issue of *The Inquirer*, Walt Whitman's beloved *O Captain! My Captain*, in which the poet expressed his grief at Abraham Lincoln's death. At the time the President died on April 15, 1865, fragrant lilacs were blooming in Whitman's yard. The President's body lay in state in Washington until April 21st, then traveled by slow train to its internment in Springfield, Illinois, on May 4th.

Though Whitman did not say so in this poem, we know that a major cause for his intense devotion to Lincoln was that he believed that in many ways democracy had failed, that too many people remained voiceless. And Whitman had high hopes that Lincoln still could be a great reformer. Overwhelmed by his beloved leader's death (note that he referred here to Lincoln as "leader"), Whitman's elegy, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*, is a long, tender reconciliation of the poet's emotional responses to the assassination.

Lincoln was killed at Easter time, the time of resurrection, by

coincidence the moment Nature comes alive again in springtime. The poet realized that every year he would be confronted by the contradiction of Nature's rebirth and recollections of the President's death.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the West,  
And thought of him I love.

The trinity here refers to the lilac bloom as symbol of spring, the western star (Venus) representing Lincoln from Illinois, and Whitman's own love for the slain President, never mentioned by name in this poem. As the coffin moved slowly westward in Section 6, with draped flags and somber mourners, Whitman laid upon it a small sprig of lilac. And in section 8, the poet watched the western star disappear beyond sight.

O western orb sailing the heaven,  
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I  
walk'd,  
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,  
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night  
after night. . . .  
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how  
full you were of woe,  
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool  
transparent night,  
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward  
black of the night,  
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad  
orb,  
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

Whitman's great challenge was to become reconciled to this death. As he listened to the lovely song of the hermit thrush, he began to hear the bird's acceptance of death as "a dark mother always gliding near with soft feet." The concluding lines of the poem:

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,  
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

With the bird's "carol of death," the poet concluded that death can be seen as "soothing" and "lovely." Whitman moved to a triumphant climax in which he celebrated death as an escape from suffering. Note especially the last three stanzas in section 14.

Thus Whitman carefully wove together his three motifs: the lilac as symbol of resurrection with its heart-shaped leaves

representing love; Venus, the evening star, falling in the western sky; and the thrush singing of its own deep grief. For the poet, this bird's song became one of reconciliation with death; that out of dying will come rebirth, new life. And Whitman knew that lilacs would bloom again in the next spring.

*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* is one of four poems Whitman wrote about the President. They are found in his famous book, *Leaves of Grass*, whether your copy or one from a library, or found easily on your Web browser.



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## Books On The Train

By Judy Smith

I have a friend who is a voracious reader, 2 or sometimes 3 books going at one time. She says her best gift would be for someone to give her a stack of books and a remote cabin to stay in for a week, perhaps a little wine for the evening and off she would go. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Well, over the holidays, we took the train to the Washington State to spend Christmas with our son and his family. The trip entailed 7 nights total on the train. Besides packing clothes and gifts, we had to decide what books we wanted to read on that long journey, a journey with no appointments, no chores and the only interruptions were meals and watching the incredible scenery across the plains. Except for the rhythmic clicking of the train on the tracks, it was similar to my friend's wish. So I thought it would be interesting to write about the

picking and choosing of books for my husband and me as well as some of our fellow travelers.

Some of the travelers had digital books, but many more had "real" books, ones which they could hold in their hands, and as my 13 year old granddaughter says, feel and smell. My husband and I like different genres, so we did not have any books in common. However, a couple who traveled with us from here to Montana were both reading *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. They said they could not put it down. Like *The Girl With the Pearl Earring* of many years ago, this book is based on a painting. People have been flocking to the Frisk Museum in NYC to see the painting since the book became so popular. After a bombing at the museum, Theo, a young boy, is told by a dying stranger to save the painting. One reviewer describes Donna Tartt's writing as "catnip for educated people who want to read entertaining but not difficult things about lofty topics and cosmopolitan people."

I too picked a longer book, knowing how hard it is to read such books with distractions at home. I picked *Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert of *Eat, Pray, Love* fame. But before you judge, I had read a long review in the NY Times and it is a botanical novel of a generation of characters. The amount of research Ms Gilbert did for this book, is astounding. I finished it and left it for my daughter -in- law who is a botanist. She too found it a fascinating read.

On the way home, I read a book that she gave me about the ancient civilization in Iran and a woman ruler in the 1500s. It was called *Equal the Sun* by Anita Amirrezvani. I might never have picked it up, but enjoyed reading about an era I know little about.

My husband had an interesting choice suggested to him last summer by a bookstore owner in NH. He enjoys mysteries and the suggestion was a series by Craig Johnson with a recurring character, Walt Longmire. He was advised to start from the first one and read on. The first was entitled *Cold Dish* and from there he read all 10. His little bookstore on the train, actually his NOOK, allowed him to do that. When we arrived in Washington and went to our favorite bookstore there, he negotiated all week with the owner about buying the series which he had on the shelf. Along with this series, he had a couple of his treasured poetry books, Glyn Maxwell's *On Poetry* and Russell Libby's *What You Should Know: A Field Guide to Three Sisters Farm*. The inspiration of the

scenery out our window also inspired him to write some poems for his poetry group. That group grew out of a poetry class with Gary Lawless at Senior College.

As I talked with others on the train, their choices of books and how they picked them for this journey was both fun and enlightening. At the end of the sleeper car, a little lending library developed with people leaving books and picking some up to read. Some picked what our son calls "popcorn books", fast reads, good stories. Others picked books that have been sitting on their shelves for a long while waiting to be read. Several of those were classics or nonfiction books that just seem to require, for many, more time and fewer distractions.

So, not all of us will travel on a train across the country, but many of us will vacation away from this digital world, appointments, and volunteering. I have a little stack of books that are at the ready for just such a time. Or maybe I will grab one of them that has been sitting on my bookshelf or beside my table and pretend I am away. There is meditation music for my Ipad, maybe there is one with railroad sounds. Happy reading!



## *Aging and Seniors*

*continued from Page 1*

A little brain physiology may be helpful here. The brain physically changes as a result of learning. A pattern is set up in the brain when particular neurons fire together. If that pattern is stimulated repeatedly we learn. Watch small children as they discover something new. They do it over and over again. This is also true throughout life even though it may not be as obvious. If we attempt to learn a new language or play bridge as a senior, the frequency of the repetitions continues to be a factor in our learning. A stimulating environment causes an increased production of dendrites, the information branches to neurons, brain cells. Recent research has shown that new brain cells continue to be produced throughout life. The brain continues to be reshaped in the

second half of life as a result of new experience and learning. The brain's emotional pathways become more developed and balanced as we age and the two hemispheres of the brain are used in tandem. This knowledge of the aging brain has spawned numerous books, articles and entire industries focused on stimulating and maintaining our brain capacity.

Our aging brains do have some limits. Barbara Strauch (2010) in her book *The Secret Life of the Grown-Up Brain*, describes some changes. The first she calls **The Swamp of Lost Names**. We all know the experience of being able to describe endless details about people we know but not be able to retrieve their name. This is not a memory problem it is a storage problem. Names are only stored in one area of the brain, information and concepts connected with the name are stored in many different areas of the brain and thus give us more options for retrieval. She suggests using the "neurological elf - WW Web" rather than fretting.

The second is **The World of Distractions**. Walking into another room and noticing something other than what we were intending can throw us off track. We notice more around us that enriches us but also interferes with our focus. Biographical material and motor and muscle memory is not affected by our increased distractibility .

**Episodic Memory** changes. We cannot remember what we had for breakfast, what we have read in a book we put down for a day, or the last minute change in a meeting with a friend that we forgot to write down. This does not get better with age no matter what we do. As we get older the brain's ability to weeds out what is irrelevant decreases. Daydreaming is more a part of the mind as we age and harder to switch off. If we want to recall something just seen we need to use more of the prefrontal part of the brain. This part is less engaged when we daydream. We also process information more slowly as we age. This means the new information may not stick before we go on to something else or back to our daydreaming state. If it is important, we will need to take notes or use some other external memory device.

Another related change is the **Power to Focus**. The frontal lobes of the brain mature last around age 25. At this point our brains have the best ability to inhibit irrelevant details. As we age the speed of the inhibiting elements slows in these lobes, making it more challenging to focus. The aging mind much prefers returning to the default position of daydreaming, allowing distracting information to throw us off focus before the inhibiting mechanism takes hold.

All brains age but not all brains age the same. There is a great deal of variability in how these changes impact the individual. Distraction may help us to see the bigger picture. We may be slower at deliberate behaviors but quicker at producing new solutions. The brain that blocks out less tend to have more creative ideas.

Gene Cohen, a well established researcher in the field of aging, defines, in his book *The Mature Mind* (2005), five ways to maintain brain fitness as we age even in the face of the likely declines just described.

First, **Exercise Mentally**. Participate in challenging new learning. By choosing something that is appealing and stimulating you are asking the brain to form new connections and develop new brain structures. This activity also improves information processing and memory storage.

Second, **Exercise Physically**. As well as an overall sense of wellbeing, aerobic exercise increases well oxygenated blood flow to the brain, produces endorphins and better filters waste products. In many studies with physically active older persons cognitive decline has decreased.

Third, **Pick Challenging Leisure Activities**. These should include the incorporation of one or both of the previous two activities. The five most effective behaviors are **Dancing, Playing Board Games, Playing a Musical Instrument, Doing Crossword Puzzles and Reading**. The more frequent the activity the better the effect.

Fourth, **Achieve Mastery**. Older persons who learn new activities where they experience a sense of control or mastery are healthier both physically and mentally. This sense of accomplishment and positive emotion is connected with a boost in the immune system.

Fifth, **Establish Strong Social Networks**. Friends, family and an active social network are associated with lower death rates and reduced blood pressure and stress. Social involvements combat loneliness which has a negative impact on mental and physical health.

Both the physiology of the brain and the psychology of the mind adapt and grow as we age. Learning continues to be an integral factor in optimal aging. Midcoast Senior College provide us with a laboratory for this pursuit. Teachers and students bring their challenged and evolving brains together to produce a stimulating environment for each other. We soften the task of remembering names by asking all students to write their names in big letters on a card that sits on the front of

their desks for everyone in the class to see. The only prerequisite for a class is interest in the topic. Discussion of the new thinking that arises is as important as the information that may be imparted. Friendships evolve. Other adult learning situations may offer opportunities to learn a language, to master a new form of exercise, or develop a skill in writing and other creative endeavors. Redefining these third and fourth chapters of our lives is made easier with Life Long Learning institutions in our communities. Take advantage. Keep those brain cells growing.

**Susan Mikesell** is a retired psychologist. She continues to be interested in life transitions, particularly those related to retirement. She has taught a course at Midcoast Senior College on the Mature Mind. She also serves on the board of directors of MSC.

## Bob Pring, 2013 Poet Laureate of Maine Senior College Network

Bob Pring, who is on the faculty of MSC where he teaches courses on philosophy, has been named Poet Laureate for his poem *Benediction*. He has kindly allowed us to print his poem.

### Benediction

When last we stood beside this mountain pond,  
Spring's warm breezes bristled with the rapid calls  
Of waxwings; brash blue swallows swooped upon  
The air in sweeping arcs of rise and fall.  
All through the new green shoots of meadow grass  
Grew pale pink strawberries; blueberry blossoms  
Drooped from burgeoning branches. A beaver passed  
Its morning on a sunny bank across from  
Us. But now it's November. The wind is cold  
And damp. The sun's shadow on the pond  
Is brighter than the sun itself, all rolled  
Up in clouds. The berries and swallows are gone.  
Deep in the hemlocks a late robin plays  
A grave postlude amid the wraiths of May.

