

VILLAGES of San Mateo County

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Volume 2020, Issue 2

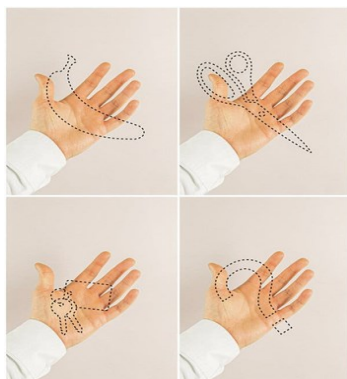
March/April

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

**EVERYONE
KNOWS 'MEMORY
FAILS AS YOU
AGE.' BUT
EVERYONE IS
WRONG**

**Even 20-year-olds
forget the
simplest things**

I'm 62 years old as I write this. Like many of my friends, I forget names that I used to be



Credit...No Ideas.

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Sequoia Village and Mid Peninsula Village are two local villages under the umbrella
501(c)(3) nonprofit called Villages of San Mateo County

able to conjure up effortlessly. When packing my suitcase for a trip, I walk to the hall closet and by the time I get there, I don't remember what I came for. And yet my long-term memories are fully intact. I remember the names of my third-grade classmates, the first record album I bought, my wedding day. This is widely understood to be a classic problem of aging. However, as a neuroscientist, I know that the problem is not necessarily age-related.

Short-term memory contains the contents of your thoughts right now, including what you intend to do in the next few seconds. It's doing some mental arithmetic, thinking about what you'll say next in a conversation or walking to the hall closet with the intention of getting a pair of gloves. Short-term memory is easily disturbed or disrupted. It depends on your actively paying attention to the items that are in the "next thing to do" file in your mind. You do this by thinking about them, perhaps repeating them over and over again ("I'm going to the closet to get gloves"). But any distraction — a new thought, someone asking you a question, the telephone ringing — can disrupt short-term memory. Our ability to automatically restore the contents of the short-term memory declines *slightly* with every decade after 30. But age is not the major factor so commonly assumed.

I've been teaching undergraduates for my entire career and I can attest that even 20-year-olds make short-term memory errors — loads of them. They walk into the wrong classroom; they show up to exams without the requisite No. 2 pencil; they forget something I just said two minutes before. These are similar to the kinds of things 70-year-olds do. The relevant difference is not age but rather how we describe these events, i.e. the stories we tell ourselves about them. Twenty-year-olds don't think, "Oh dear, this must be early-onset Alzheimer's." They think, "I've got a lot on my plate right now" or "I really need to get more than four hours of sleep." The 70-year-old observes these same events and worries about her brain health. This is not to say that Alzheimer's— and dementia-related memory impairments are fiction — they are very real — but every lapse of short-term memory doesn't necessarily indicate a biological disorder.

In the absence of brain disease, even the oldest older adults show little or no cognitive or memory decline beyond age 85 and 90, as shown in a [2018 study](#). Memory impairment is not inevitable. Some aspects of memory actually get better as we age. For instance, our ability to extract patterns, regularities and to make accurate predictions improves over time because we've had more experience. (This is why computers need to be shown tens of thousands of pictures of traffic lights or

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(Memory/continued from page 2)

cats in order to be able to recognize them.) If you're going to get an X-ray, you want a 70-year-old radiologist reading it, not a 30-year-old one.

So how do we account for our subjective experience that older adults seem to fumble with words and names? First, there *is* a generalized cognitive slowing with age — but given a little more time, older adults perform just fine. Second, older adults have to search through more memories than do younger adults to find the fact or piece of information they're looking for. Your brain becomes crowded with memories and information. It's not that you can't remember — you can — it's just that there is so much more information to sort through. A [2014 study](#) found that this “crowdedness” effect also shows up in computer simulations of human memory systems.

Recently, I found myself in an office elevator in which all the buttons had been pushed — even though there were only three of us in the elevator. As the elevator dutifully stopped on every floor, one of the people standing next to me said, “Looks like some kid pressed all the buttons.” We all laughed. I thought for a moment and offered, “I *was* that kid about 50 years ago,” and we all laughed again. And then I thought: My memories of being 10 years old are clearer than my memories of 10 days ago. Shouldn't that seem odd? But in the warm, familiar privacy of my own mind, it didn't seem odd at all: I am that same person. I don't feel 50 years older. I can see the world through the eyes of that mischievous 10-year-old. I can remember when the taste of a Butterfinger candy bar was the most delectable thing in the world. I can remember the first time I encountered the grassy smell of a spring meadow. Such things were novel and exciting back then, and my sensory receptors were tuned to make new events seem both important and vivid.

I can still eat a Butterfinger and smell spring meadows, but the sensory experience has dulled through repetition, familiarity and aging. And so I try to keep things novel and exciting. My favorite chocolatier introduces new artisanal chocolates a few times a year and I make a point to try them — and to savor them. I go to new parks and forests where I'm more likely to encounter the smells of new grasses and trees, or new animal musks. When I find them, these things I remember for months and years, because they are new. And experiencing new things is the best way to keep the mind young, pliable and growing — into our 80s, 90s and beyond.

~ by Daniel J. Levitin, a neuroscientist and the author of “Successful Aging: A Neuroscientist Explores the Power and Potential of Our Lives,” from which this essay is adapted.

Message from the Executive Director: Linda Burroughs

Dear Members, Volunteers and Friends,

Villages of San Mateo County continues to build on our record of success. We are embracing the growth of our community and expanding our member ranks. We have been successful in recruiting new volunteers with a special focus on making it easier for volunteers to connect with requests that yield a sense of making a difference. By doing so we are boosting confidence and increasing social interaction for our members.



Growing Partnerships: VSMC has made substantial progress in partnering with others who serve the seniors in our community. The result has been an expanded capacity to address the needs of our members in a more comprehensive and efficient manner. Yes, VSMC has moved well beyond service requests. HIP Housing, Center for Independence of Individuals with Disabilities (CID), Mission Hospice, our area Senior Centers, San Mateo County Commission on Aging, Fall Prevention Task Force and many other nonprofit Coalitions across the county have helped Village volunteers deliver more comprehensive services, elevate member activities and appreciate our volunteers more than ever.

Growing Impact: VSMC is taking major strides in registering positive impact as we accelerate intergenerational activities and thanks to Clare Gardella and her team we've also pumped up the volume on our social events. VSMC not only has a Coffee Connection every month, the anchor of our lifelong learning component, but we have a monthly excursion as well. In 2019 Village members had the opportunity to go to museum exhibits, interactive cooking classes, ballet, musical events and much more.

Growing Our Future: In March, VSMC will move forward in our Long-Range Strategic Planning process. Our entire leadership team will participate in a retreat to determine our priorities, implementation strategy and resources needed to embrace the next five years. Our focus on active aging drives us to look ahead and be prepared to welcome our future. We aim to be recognized county-wide as a creative and comprehensive resource for redefining aging. In 2020, we are off to a roaring start as our robust growth and committed volunteers are gaining recognition community-wide. I invite you all to share the good news of VSMC to your circle of friends and family. We stand ready to receive.

Thanks to each of you for lending your voice, your talents and your commitment.

With much appreciation,

Linda

LET'S BE PREPARED!

With two years of severe fires in California, and the power outages of late 2019, we've had our share of disasters. So we're going to be talking a lot about emergency preparedness, and we might just designate 2020 as "the year of being prepared!" Let's start by discussing the "**Go Pack.**" It's an emergency pack that's ready to go, in case you must leave home quickly. Imagine the valuable time you lose in evacuating by having to stop and hunt for your medications or other important items. The Go Pack should have critical items for each member of the household. And don't forget your pets!

What kind of bag? It could be a backpack, a duffle bag, or a small suitcase. Remember, you are hurrying away with it, so keep it light!

What's in it? The things that will keep you safe and comfortable for a few days. Let's assume you already grabbed your phone and purse or wallet as you prepared to leave. Now pick up the Go Pack that's near the front door, and it should have:

- **Personal needs:** such as toiletry items, backup eyeglasses, and a small multi-purpose tool.
- **Medications:** a several-day supply plus copies of prescriptions, and a small first aid kit.
- **Basic electronics:** phone charger, battery-pack, flashlight, portable radio.
- **Clothing:** include a full change of clothing, sturdy/lightweight shoes, a jacket, and a blanket.
- **Food/water:** lightweight snacks and a couple of small bottles of water.
- **Documents:** photocopies of driver's license, birth certificate, S.S. & Medicare cards, and credit card information. Contact info of your friends and relatives!
- **Cash:** Enough for a few days, mostly in small bills, plus a roll of quarters for machines.

Stay tuned for more information as we all do our best to be ready for the emergencies we may face. We're planning guest speakers at Coffee Connections, more articles in Newsletters, and special mailings with more suggestions for being prepared.

~ from your Village Emergency Preparedness Committee



VILLAGES OF SAN MATEO COUNTY DONORS

VSMC extends its sincere thanks for the generous financial support and in-kind gifts received from the following major donors:

- *City of San Carlos*
- *Dignity Health Sequoia Hospital*
- *PAMF Community Health Care Endowment*
- *Paula Thompson Legacy*
- *Peninsula Healthcare District*
- *Redwood City Parks and Recreation*
- *Sequoia Healthcare District*
- *Trinity Presbyterian Church of San Carlos*
- *West Valley Federated Women's Club*

LEGACY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Paula Lynn Thompson

October 26, 1954 - July 11, 2019

Paula Thompson was an exceptional member of the Villages of San Mateo County (VSMC). She was a generously gifted and passionate individual who, given her academic prowess, had many options. She liberally shared her art skills



with family, friends and acquaintances. Paula enjoyed writing and illustrating children's books. She chose to work with special needs children and passed on to her students the magic of art in calming the soul and generating deeper and more effective communication.

Her mother and four surviving siblings agree that Paula's natural grace and concern for others remained intact even as she battled cancer. She always had a quiet smile for the Village volunteers and chose to express her unwavering concern for others by leaving a generous and thoughtful Legacy Gift via her IRA to VSMC.

Paula passed away on July 11, 2019. She inspired all who had the privilege to know her and all viewed her as a quiet warrior with a compassionate spirit. Paula chose to ensure that VSMC will continue to be available for other seniors in our community who may need home modifications, transportation to medical appointments or maybe just a little helpful encouragement. Villages of San Mateo County is most grateful.

~ by Linda Burroughs, Executive Director VSMC

VILLAGERS ON THE ROAD!

Once a month a flyer goes out to our VSMC members inviting them to “go on the road with Clare” to tour a Bay Area place of interest followed by a meal. We are so fortunate to have Clare Gardella, a VSMC member and volunteer, as coordinator of these interesting and fun excursions.

Clare’s passion and energy are very much appreciated by those who have participated on these outings. In fact, the buzz among our members has been how much they have learned from the tours, how they were excited about making new friendships, and how they looked forward to the enjoyment of eating at some delightful restaurants.

~ article and photos by Victoria Kline, VSMC board member



VSMC members waiting for the curtain to rise

Forty VSMC members on their way to attend the San Francisco performance of Smuin Christmas Ballet



After the ballet performance, the group visited Union Square and the St Francis Hotel to view the festive holiday lights and decorations

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Clare Gardella checks out culinary artifacts at the WHITE HOUSE OF HALF MOON BAY



Looking into the women's sitting room at the WHITE HOUSE OF HALF MOON BAY, once owned by James Johnston, the 49'er pioneer



A visit to Grace Cathedral



A docent-led tour of San Francisco City Hall