

Creative Aging Symposium 2020  
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## Welcome

>> KATIE WADE: Welcome, everyone, we'll give it just a minute here for folks to join us. Welcome, welcome, welcome. Amber, do you want to kick us off?

>> AMBER: Sure. It's fun to watch these numbers growing with the symposium. Hello, everybody, my name is Amber Carroll, I'm the director of Well Connected and before we jump into this amazing day, our fourth annual Creative Aging symposium, I would like to just give you a little brief interview about who we are. Well Connected and Well Connected Espanol are both creative connection programs of Covia and through these programs over 3,000 English and Spanish-speaking older adults from across the country have the opportunity to participate and/or facilitate groups pretty much about anything you can imagine, poetry groups, writing groups, support groups, arts, science, history, technology, you name it, we do that on Well Connected, and we do it every day of the year.

All of these programs are free to individual participants, so if you're not familiar with Well Connected and you like what's happening today, which I'm sure you will, we really encourage you to join us as a participant and/or as a facilitator of a group. Before I toss it over, I just want to say that one of our most popular groups on Well Connected is gratitude. This is

popular on both the Well Connected and the Well Connected Espanol programs and with that I would like to express profound gratitude today for all of you who showed up for our inspired speakers, our very generous sponsors, and to the incredible team who made this event happen. With that, I'll turn it over to Katie Wade, the woman who once introduced to the idea of Creative Aging has never looked back and has made this incredible day a reality for all of us. So Katie?

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, Amber. It is lovely to be with you all today. I'm Katie Wade, I'm a Covia employee and a big fan of Well Connected. The program Amber just showed about and that we're on today. At Covia we have several different creative connection programs, so if you're on webinar you'll see behind me an invitation to join our current art exhibit virtually and bring inspiration and also classes through Well Connected to contribute to that art exhibit. There will be more on that later. This is our fourth year hosting the virtual Creative Aging symposium.

Symposium. This year, we celebrate identity. Our third age is characterized as a time of reflection, synthesis, and exploration of self. That is to say, a very creative time of life. Through creative demos and inspiring voices, we hope you discover new insights into the distinct gifts you bring to the world.

I'd like to start by sharing a quote that has been meaningful for me and is particularly important when considering the link between creativity and Identity for each of us. This is from Creative Care, an amazing book published Basting. Anne says

"The way that I adapt a recipe when I discover that the sour cream in the fridge has gone fuzzy is new and valuable to me (and to my kids who greedily devour the banana bread I made with yogurt). Deafening cheers at the end of a concert reveal a different level of value - one conveyed by concert venues, huge audiences, and cultural critics. In the literature on creativity, you'll find these two levels are commonly referred to as 'little c' or private creativity and 'big c' or public creativity, respectively. I am a firm believer that 'little c' creativity permeates the lives of all human beings, no matter how many times they might have been told that they are not creative. Whenever a person faces an unexpected obstacle, finding the way through (around, under, or over) a given challenge demands a novel solution and an adaptation in the person's routine. So I think that about that.

We all have creativity throughout our days. The outfit you chose today solved a problem Like it's cold outside and I need to wear clothes. It also has some specific flavor of you. The way you hang photos on your wall or arrange your refrigerator. These are creative tasks.

Recently, my sister, who I've known her entire life, and I approached a well-traversed topic in a new way, had a breakthrough conversation. This is creativity. So, I ask you this - what could spark more creativity than growing older? For the next 2.5 hours, I ask you to embrace that idea and see where it leads. With welcome us today, I'll introduce John Woodward who is with us, CEO of Front Porch for six years.

Front Porch is a nonprofit serving many older adults and families through a variety of residential communities and services. Front Porch is our Advocate level sponsor today. Thank you Front Porch and welcome, John.

>> JOHN WOODWARD: Thank you, Katie, thank you, Amber, it is an honor to be here. I am a big fan of Well Connected and especially a fan all the participants, you have my deepest respect. I have a few comments to morning on this theme, as we gather as individuals and communities in homes across the country to celebrate how older age prime us for growth and exploration including exploration of growth. Growing older is an inherent act, accumulation of joys, tragedies and everyday moments, and an opportunity to discover a deeper sense of self. As we face the challenges of aging, we might find ourselves with more clarity about who we are and the creative impulse that express that identity to others. Norman Lear the famous TV producer who continued to work well into his 90s was asked about

who influenced him. He responded, practically everyone. Somebody doesn't have to be a professor. Somebody can just be knocking on your door, or somebody can be selling you something on the street, or somebody can be pedaling ware -- peddling ware and you have a reasonable conversation and suddenly you hear something you hadn't heard before or something the person does suggests something that you haven't thought before. One of the advantages of aging is the ability to release creativity through the accumulation of influences, even those from unexpected sources.

I would also like to sponsor the sponsors supporting this symposium and the message of Creative Aging, in addition to Front Porch, sponsors include at the creator and dream are level, Curry senior center, community living campaign, living live an affiliate of the change companies and unlock. As Katie mentioned, I'm from Front Porch, Front Porch and Covia plan to affiliate to become one organization, with a shared mission of supporting people as they age wherever they are. I'm thrilled to participate in today's Creative Aging symposium and look forward to seeing what we can do together in the future. I turn it back to you, Katie.

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, John. Thanks for being with us today. All right. Well, let's get started. We'll do a little housekeeping here before I jump into it. So we're going to have

three speakers and two creative demos today and a quick break in the middle.

We will have Q&A with each speaker. If you'd like to submit questions for speakers, use the Q&A button in the toolbar and Submit questions for each speaker. If you would like to submit questions for speakers and you are in our Well Connected community joining by phone, you can

Submit a question by calling our office at 877-797-7299.

If you'd like to use Closed Captioning, click "Closed captioning "I'll put up on the screen how to do that. On the bottom right toolbar click CC and you can also adjust the size of closed captioning under subtitle settings.

## **Speaker: Gabri Christa**

This year, we are mixing it up a bit by having two other interviewers join us. So you'll get to hear a variety of perspectives today and I'll be here to emcee and submit your questions to those speakers. So let's get started. I think we have our two speakers that we're starting with here with us. So Calvin and Gabri, I welcome you to the stage.

Gabri's mission is to transform the understanding of humanity through the arts. Born and raised in the Caribbean island Curaçao, Gabri is a member of a crossroads culture, and her multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging work expresses the politics

and poetics of interchanging races, rhythms, and histories, through film, choreography, performance, curation, writing, and more. She will perform today and then be interviewed by Calvin Kai Ku, a Professional Variety Director at Medical Clown Project. Calvin has 20+ years experience in the art of magic, which he combines with circus and theater to create a completely unique performance style. They are both incredible performers and connectors of people. So Gabri, I will turn the stage to you.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Thank you so much for the beautiful introduction, and thank you, everybody, for being here. It's wonderful to be here. Do you see this little black doll? How beautiful. This little black doll, this one, was my mother's doll. And I've always loved this doll. And a few years ago, my mom gave me this doll. And it now lives in my living room, under a glass cylinder, it's right behind, right there. And you see the clothes it's wearing? Really old. This is like my mom made those, by hand. And I have a few other clothes that she made. And sometimes I change the clothes. But mostly this doll just sits in our living room when my husband, my daughter and I sit on the couch and watch television, or read a book. Now, I first met this doll at my grandmother's house, because my mother had left this doll when she moved out because she was afraid the doll would break if it would go with her. And I don't know if



you can see this, or hear it, but this is a porcelain doll.

Just gorgeous, I think.

So the doll lived with my grandmother, where I met the doll for the first time, and then my mother gave it to me. After she got it back, when my grandmother died.

Now, how did a little white girl from the Netherlands in Rotterdam, blond hair accident blue eyes, how on earth did she get this little black doll? Because Rotterdam, this is we're talking beginning fourths right after World War II, the world's worst bombed city, how did she get her hands on a black doll? There were absolutely no stores to buy it. There were no black people living in the Netherlands at the time. So how did she get her hands on a black doll? I mean, I never had a black doll growing up. I had white dolls with red hair. And they just didn't sell them. I mean, I had seen those dolls, you know, the ones that are cartoonish, blackface, in Curacao where I was born and raised, they sold them to the tourists, that's another story, but I had never seen a doll like this, the one that looks like a real baby, right?

So I asked my mom, Mom, how did you get this doll? Where did you get this doll? And she told me she had gotten it from her oldest sister Lanie, quite a lot older than her, my Aunt Lanie, Dante Lanie e as we say in Dutch. She had given it to my mom, but how did Lanie get it? Lanie was dating this older sailor,

he was married. My family, my mother's family was highly Catholic, so for my Tanta Lanie to have an affair with this married sailor was a thing and he brought her this back and they also had two children out of wedlock, two sons, so she couldn't give the doll to her sons, they didn't want it, so she gave this doll to my mom and my mom happily adopted it she was so excited and my mother when she was on a teenager she wanted to become a missionary nun in Papua New Guinea, the Dutch colonies, they had the Dutch West Indies, Suriname, Indonesia. Papua New Guinea, why that? My mom loved how the faces were so dark, like this face, and also looked like the aboriginal, Australia, they had these big girls. That's where she wanted to go. My mom never made it to Papua New Guinea, instead she married my dad and moved to the Netherlands the Dutch West Indies where my brother and I were born and where she raised us.

And I can't help thinking, when I look at this doll, this little black doll, if this doll with this cute little face, if this doll made my mom fall in love with my dad, if it is this doll that instilled in her her lust for adventure and for travel. Thank you. Here are my parents. Engagement. So beautiful. And then I will show you quickly, if I can do, how my mom looked at the time she got this doll. That's my mom. This is her first communion, she had already gotten the doll, and somehow it looks like her eyes are brown here, but I think

that's the thing. All right. Hi.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Gabri, thank you so much. Thank you.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: You're welcome. I'm so excited to share this story.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: It's a beautiful story. It's so powerful to imagine what an object that one grows up with can potentially shape your perspective and your lens of the life that we live. I mean, the lens that shapes the way how we see the world and how we see ourselves, our identity. So I would love to hear from you. Now, this doll was made by this artist that got eventually into the hands of your mother, but it also has inspired you to use your creativity to share this story about your mother and about her experience maybe with memory loss. How did this whole experience of this doll and this object has inspired your creativity to share this, to share this story?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah. Thank you so much. That's such a good question. There are a few parts to it, really. One is that I just, well, when Katie asked me to do this, I thought, oh, I want to talk about this doll because there's also this idea of identity related to -- because my mom, my mom is very wise, and I say that, whenever she's -- you know, she's very wise, very blue-eyed, very blond, but her identity -- is very white, very blue-eyed, very blond. Her identity is not just that. The doll became a way of what shaped her, she comes from

a family with a lot of kids and then what choices she made. And the creativity just came by listening to her. She was starting, my mom lives with dementia, and when she started in this process and I noticed she was losing her memory, I started to just asking her questions about reading, you know, just ask her to talk to me and ask her questions, so it became this bond between us to just listen and learn more about her because I never actually asked this. And then I started writing it down. And she wrote me, she could still write, she doesn't write very well anymore. So this became part of my creativity and my imagination by just taking what she told me and made it in a little story, but it also allowed me to just question assumptions of people about identity of seeing this mother. I mean, I just was -- well, just, I haven't seen her because of COVID, but when I visited her, I gave her, I was with her in the store, she was in a wheelchair, and, you know, I kissed her, and then the woman said to me, oh, you people are always so nice. And I was like -- it took me a minute, and I was like, oh, she cannot understand I'm her daughter. Right?

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Wow.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Because -- and that's happened to me growing up, so it also relates to my identity and this connection, you know, with my mom, how, one, there was this assumption, right, and then the other part that was really about

my identity as her daughter, right? That sort of was taken away by that. So part of the creativity is also telling stories that maybe people haven't heard but also really even treating that woman with kindness and treating myself with kindness as somebody who has a blond white mother, who I love dearly, right?

So yeah, I don't know if that really answers it, but --

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Yeah, it does. It does. Thank you for sharing that. It sounds like, I mean, with this exploration of getting to know your mother, getting to be curious with these assumptions to discover more is a wonderful way to dig into the creativity of how you express what you're learning, what that interaction, what that connection is all about with your mother. Now, if anyone who is -- actually, let me go to this chat. Someone is saying Vincent Van Gogh said there's nothing more artistic, creative, than to love people. Thank you so much, Mark Lombard.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Mark Lombard, you just made me tear up here. I've never heard that, but it's beautiful, right?

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Beautiful sentiment.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah, because also you have a love, a love of people, and out of that comes a creativity, sometimes it's just to create understanding. I always talk about that but really create understanding comes from deep listening to whoever the person is, we all have eyes and ears, and really digging

into that. And I think what happens to me, how my mother's dementia helped me is that I really wanted to tell stories more than I did before because storytelling was a way to preserve her but also a way to hopefully create some understanding. And that's where sort of the Creative Spark came in. But then of course telling it in my way.

(laughter).

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Yeah. I love that. I love that so much. I love the idea of just trying to use that creativity to dig deeper, right, into these understandings. I'm going to go into the chat one more time. Someone is saying, Laurie S is saying that the questions of identity, what we feel internally and what is seen externally is important to me. Yeah. Absolutely. I'm going to go into another question real quick that I have for you, since we only have a couple more minutes, and for those who are maybe new to the creative process or maybe they're wanting to utilize their own creativity to explore whatever story or whatever love of someone that they may have, what advice would you give to them to just get started in tapping into their creative?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Thank you. You know, we're all creative, it's just do we allow ourselves to be creative? I talk a lot about this, it's like the process and don't go for the perfect thing, but enjoy the process of exploring creativity. And what

is that? That can be different for everybody. If we stay with storytelling, I'm a dancer originally, still, and there's sort of more of a nonlinear way of approaching storytelling through dance, through the body. But what can you learn by just exploring? And exploring to me is creativity. Exploring without a set result, right? You're going to explore, or maybe you see something that has no relation to something else and maybe you're telling yourself, oh, I can't do that because that would be weird. But maybe go into the weird a little bit, maybe just dig a little deeper and find something uncomfortable in what is comfortable or explore new things in your own house, right? See if you know something. Can you do something different with it?

>> CALVIN KAI KU: I love that. I love what you said specifically, Gabri, of exploring without set goals or set expectations. Really. A lot of times I feel that, even now, as I have spent so many hours on creativity, there's sometimes every now and then, you get this block of oh, that's not good. So it then hinders your creativity and the journey and the process, as you say. So anyone who is like coming up with that expectation, what would you say to them about getting into, as you said, uncomfortable with something that's weird or that exploration of creativity?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Well, what are we really talking about,

right? We're really talking about judgment and societal pressures to be "normal," to fit in. And we internalize that. We internalize the behavior, we internalize labels. Maybe your aunt told you you're not creative. Maybe you told yourself you're not creative because you work in a bank. But we all have fantasy and creativity, it all has to do with allowing ourselves, for me, to just explore and be creative and not worry about what people will say. Right? Not all creativity has to be shared outside, right? So find maybe safe space to share it, but maybe just share it with yourself. Maybe journal. Maybe paint. Write stories. And if had you have a safe place to share it, then share it, if that's meant to be shared. It's really healing to explore and just free yourself from the judgment. And then check yourself if the judgment is also towards yourself, if you internalize it, you start something and say oh, I can't do that. How many times do we tell ourselves we can't do something? I teach yoga too, so it's also like bring it back to your breath and just go with the flow and just see where it leads.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: That's beautiful. Enjoy the process, right?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah, totally. Enjoy the process of exploring. Creativity is all about exploring and connecting things that maybe normally are not connected, and it's also the



process itself about nonjudgment. And listening to yourself.  
Yeah, the nonjudgment is really important, I think.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: 100 percent. Yeah. The nonjudgment but also one thing that you said is find a safe space. So I encourage anyone who is out there who is wanting to get creative and wanting to express themselves, find those spaces with colleagues that you trust, that we can all keep a safe space to, to be creative without that bias, without that judgment. And even with yourself, as Gabri said, you can journal for yourself, with yourself. No one else has to read this book.

(laughter).

>> GABRI CHRISTA: You know, there's that, right? And, you know, it's not your job to judge yourself. It's your job to do the work. The job to judge yourself is from other people. And I always liked that, right? It's not your job to sit judging, because if you're judging while you're creating, then what's that, right? Weirdly enough those identity and creativity actually tap into each other because the judgment part of that, right? So if you are labeling yourself the way a society labels you, how does that stop you? And that's just a question to ponder. Does it stop you? How does it stop you? Is it maybe something that you think you need to behave a certain way because? Right? So that's really important. And it comes to kindness for yourself.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Beautiful. Gabri, thank you so much. I know that what you're saying really, as Marty says, the timing of this gathering is beautiful and what you're saying is beautiful because it gives us all an opportunity to use creativity to express ourselves receipt now in this time that we really need to really shear the connective tissue that we all are emotionally, socially. And I feel like you are giving us so many wonderful tools to tap into our own creativity and tap into our process. So thank you, Gabri, for that. I really appreciate that.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Thank you. Yeah.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Any -- what's our timing like? I think we are --

>> KATIE WADE: We still have is 5 minimum -- we still have fifteen minutes. 15 minutes.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Great. I'll tap into another thing, Gabri.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: I see the chat and I see the Q & A.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: This is the world we're in, right?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: You're in charge. You're in charge.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: I have a question for you that dovetails into what we're saying about today, and in terms of, in terms of this whole meeting that we're in, we're in Zoom as you talk about, we're looking at the chat, we're looking at the camera,

we're looking at all these different areas, and you brought in different slides and pictures. How is your creativity improved or changed in today's landscape of artistic expression?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah. First off, I don't really like the Zoom, but I'm also grateful for the Zoom, right? I wouldn't have been here if Katie hadn't reached out to me, so I'm the person that always looks at the positive side, right? I don't like this, however, I appreciate being in community today holding space with everybody who is in another place of the world or the country. I'm on Stanton island, New York, land of the Nowaki Hopi people and we're in communion, right, there is that part, the part of being able to communicate. I think what has changed for me is that I've been looking to see how we can connect through this medium, how we can still have some kind of real humanity, which is harder, I miss hugs.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Me too, Gabri.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: I miss hugs. But luckily I don't live alone, I have a nice husband and a child, so they get the brunt of that. But I think it also made me think about how we are connected more so than how we're separate and I'm an educator so teaching on Zoom a lot. I started learning how to read people on camera takes a lot of concentration and just taking being also kind to the amount of screen time I can have. I don't know, I think I would know better how it really has changed me

once we are out of this period.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Right. Right. It will be an ongoing process when we get back into the in-person, when we can do hugs again in person.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: I feel like we certainly have had to adapt, and I love what you said about that we are still all connected, there is still that connectivity that we are thriving for, that we are trying to find on this medium.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: What would you say would be the, if you were to boil it down, regardless of the medium, what is that connectivity that really keeps us together? And you can go back to talking about your doll story as well and how maybe that connection to people and your connection to materials and to objects that help us in our day-to-day life.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah, definitely. And then also, so there's definitely storytelling and listening to each other, and I'm not trying to do your job, but I just see the Q & A, I happened to see the Q & A. So I wanted to, someone was saying about if I know family pictures, you were saying, and I do and Thomas is a friend of mine and actually husband did all the work of his Vernon Read, if you don't know family pictures USA, a beautiful project from Thomas and also on PBS where he really

meets people and their families because we all have this interest in families, a lot of us. And Eileen asks if my mom was moved by seeing the doll. And did it evoke deeper sharing than before? You know, my mom wasn't remembering it at all. So when I got the doll in the beginning she did, but right now I said mom, this is your doll. She said really?

(laughter).

You know. So there is that. And then Amber was saying, asking how my approach to creativity evolved with age. I love this question. You know, I think I'm more creative now that I'm getting older. I also think I'm less judgmental, some people get more judgmental, but I'm really less judgmental with age, and I think the way it has evolved that I've become much more interested in stories than before and not just my stories. In this case it was not just my story, it was my mom's story, and finding things that connect us, what has changed in age is really looking for connection always in whatever I take on and also more, let's say, hopeful and compassionate spin on it. I hope that answers that. I speak five languages. I'm not bilingual.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Name them. Which five languages do you know?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Well, my native tongue is Dutch, in Curacao we speak a language called Papiamentu, English, Spanish

and French. In Curacao most people speak four languages, so that's not uncommon. That's a whole another thing.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: That's incredible. Language is another way that we connect and the more languages we know, the more connected we all can be together. So that's really, really cool. Another person put in, for love and art partners museums around the world and showcases beautiful master paces while engaging people to share their creative experience while viewing. That's great.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Yeah, and I think that one of the things that can happen with just storytelling but also, you know, when we talk about identity is really deeply thinking about how they are connected. And I dare say that they are connected. Right? How were you brought up? What stories are in your culture or your specific culture? What do you know about -- what do you know about your mom? Your dad? If you're adopted. What do you know about the people that adopt you? So curiosity and identity are highly linked.

What do we assume about people, right? For me it was so interesting moving to the U.S. because people would ask me, are you black? And I would say no. What do you mean I'm black? Like I couldn't understand this question. For years. And I would fight it, and people would get -- black people would get mad at me because you don't want to identify as black, you're

obviously black. And now I would say I'm black if they ask me, knowing the history of this country that one drop makes you black are right?

But what blood is in you, what bloodlines are you following? And then who do you connect with? To me, that's an important question about identity.

So for me, I have Jewish, my mom is 500 years white. Right? We can't even go -- they didn't even go over the border. They didn't even go to Belgium. All Dutch.

But my dad -- and we've tried, we've tried to like go through the whole tree, we cannot find any French people, nothing, so just Dutch. From both sides.

And then my father is mixed race, and my grandmother is half Chinese, half black, and then my grandfather is half Jewish, half black. So those are also in there, and I tell those stories because they also talk about how we actually always have been traveling the globe and how that started, right? How my great grandfather came to Suriname which is former Dutch Cayenna to work as a contract worker after abolishment of slavery, there are such amazing stories in lineage.

And I think it's important not just because of the history, it's important to understand we've always traveled, we've always fled war. We've always moved. Right? We just talk about this now as if it's only happening right now with refugees and

immigrants. But we are all immigrants in this country, right? Unless you're Native American. So there's so much richness and so much proof to actually unite us instead of not, to me.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: That's beautiful.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: To me, that's how it is, you know.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: I think that's a -- I think that's beautiful for you to feel that way, and I feel that way too, and I hope we all can find ways that we can unite ourselves even more.

Katie has a question of objects and our relationship to objects and the storytelling around objects. If we were to do an exploration, all of us having an exercise of sorts today or tomorrow, what tips would you give us in finding an object and being able to tell stories based on those objects, as you so beautifully did with your doll?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: I would say look around to things that maybe you inherited. Could be a simple rock that you have on your desk because it has a memory so there are things that you have that you can tell the story about why you have that object. And the other is really about oral history and listening, right? So if you have, say, a rock, and you took that rock, you picked up that rock when you were with your partner when you had this great hike, and it was this magical day, and that was the day you for the first time kissed. And this rock comes from these



woods, in a protected area. And this rock is not just a rock. This rock is connected to your relationship, to that wood, that rock can lead you into talking about the woods, it can lead you into talking about a relationship, you know, all those associations. Associations is something really important that are connected to maybe a rock.

Or maybe you're inherited -- maybe you inherited a teaspoon, I have teaspoons that I inherited too, and that somebody in your family connected and they passed them on. What did those teaspoons mean to them or that teaspoon? Who gave that? What do you know about the person that gave that? And then start asking questions, and please, if they're alive, have a phone conversation. Write it down. Have the gift of deep listening to your aunt who gave you that spoon. Ask about her life. Ask about when she got the spoon. Why the spoon landed up at your house. What is the connection from you to your aunt that she gave that spoon to you? Or did you beg for that spoon and she finally gave it to you? And why? Right? So those are a few things on just start by listening and writing down all the associations that an object brings. And then fill in the empty spots, if that makes sense.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: That's beautiful. Allowing your curiosity to find the questions about the object that ultimately brings us more connected to each other through the storytelling, that's

lovely. Thank you so much, Gabri, and I'm so grateful that I got a chance to interview you and learn more about your story and your background. So thank you for this time.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Thank you so much. And thank you for having me here. It's really an honor, and I see Katie pop up.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: So I guess it's time.

(laughter).

>> KATIE WADE: I hate to stop this flow, it's so beautiful. You both are treasures. I'm really glad you exist in the same universe, at the same time that I do. I feel just honored to get to know you both, and I just want, before I move on to our demo, I want to ask where we can find more of you both? We'll start Gabri, where can folks find more of you or your work?

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Well, I have a website, and there's some stuff there. Not everything, because I actually frankly don't have time to put everything on it. I'm trying really hard to have more on the website, and I'll put it on the chat. The story I told is a little different. Live storytelling I allow myself to flow with the story, so it's pretty much the same. Yeah, and that would be a good way of getting in touch with me. There's an e-mail, feel free to e-mail me.

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, Gabri. So we have Gabrichrista.com and a text version of that story up there for you all. Thank you. And Calvin, where can we find more of you?

>> CALVIN KAI KU: You can find me on various social media platforms, @calvin Kai Ku which I'll type in the chat and also most of my time has been spent with a nonprofit, artistic director of called the medical clown project, so we've been going into hospitals virtually these days, performing and building connection with all of the older adults in memory care, different facilities throughout the Bay Area, so if you want to check out that, go click on the link in the chat.

>> KATIE WADE: Perfect. Thank you both so much for being with us today.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Thank you, Katie.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: Thank you, Katie, thank you, Calvin.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Thanks, Gabri, talk to you soon.

>> GABRI CHRISTA: I have to go teach. Thank you, bye.

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you both.

>> CALVIN KAI KU: Bye.

## **Creative Moment: Wheel of Joy**

>> KATIE WADE: All right. Next up, I'll welcome Jessica McCracken here to the stage with you.

>> JESSICA McCracken: Hi, Katie. Wow, how amazing was that?

>> KATIE WADE: I know.

>> JESSICA McCracken: I'm so excited for this transition.

>> KATIE WADE: Yes. We're going to dive deep into ourselves

in a fun way. So let me just say a little bit what the demo is that we're about to do while people grab a writing utensil or two or three and a piece of paper. If you can or are able.

Wheel of Joy is an engaging experience designed to deepen our understanding of what brings us joy and how we sustain those meaningful moments in the midst of extraordinary changes and hardship. Facilitated by Jessica McCracken, Director of Creative Spark, a Covia Community Service that we work on together.

Creative Spark

Generates inspiring and energizing direction for aging service professionals, fostering new programs, elevating current ones, and ultimately, creating lives better lived. Jessica herself brings decades of experience in theater, education, and creative engagement programs. so get us started, Jessica.

>> JESSICA McCracken: This is such a wonderful way for us all to kind of reflect on what we just experienced with Gabri's amazing story. We can dig into our stories. The Wheel of Joy is super-fun. It's an easy exercise that you can do on pen and paper or you can even do in your mind's eye if you don't have pen and paper handy. It's an opportunity to tap into what brings light to our lives and offers us a venue and encourages us to share those things with others because it's really by connecting with what's inside of us and sharing that with others is what builds collective resiliency and healing. So we do this

exercise in your trainings and classes with Creative Spark, but we also bring it to staff meetings. I do it with family calls and happy hour with friends, you know, this is an opportunity to take a moment to reflect on joy. So with your pen and paper or in your mind's eye, what you want to do is you want to draw a big circle on your sheet of paper, right in the center. When I say big, I mean like chocolate chip cookie of your wildest dreams kind of big. So I'm going to just put one on my page right now in a Sharpie marker so you can see kind of the size I'm talking about. Big like a chocolate chip cookie. Ooo! Lovely. Right through the center of that circle you're going to put cross hairs, so intersecting lines like a big plus sign. I'm really inspired by the Native American medicine wheel and the Celtic cross. I like the intersecting lines to go through the circle and into the infinity of that white space on the page. Did it! It's not perfect. Come on. Okay. So I like to grab multiple markers for me. I always have these handy. On the top of your page or in your mind's eye and in your heart, you want to think about four things that bring you joy. Four things that bring you joy. Now, these could be activities like cooking and gardening. If you know me, you know I love it. Or it can be items, like Gabri's doll. Or this necklace I'm wearing that my dad gave me. So four things that bring you joy, take a moment and write them on the top of your page. The cool

thing about this exercise is that every -- is that every time you do it, those four things can be different. I've done it I guess more than most people, and every time it's different. So I want you to think about those four things, and, you know, you have your circle with your crosshairs, making these quadrants, like slices of a pie. Big slices. In those four quadrants, you want to place a word that is the essence of that thing, the essence of that joy. You have four joys, you have four slices of pie. For each slice, capture the essence of that joy and put it in the pie.

This is hard. I'm asking you to dig deep, peel back. What is it about cooking? What is it about that doll? You know, the connection to mom. The history, the story. What is it about it that brings you joy? I'll let you take a moment. I already broke my own rule, I wrote two words down for each one because I felt like it really needed to -- I needed more words to capture it. As you can see with my sheet of paper, I have four words on the top of the page. There you go, Katie, that looks great. And I have words inside the circle that are the essence of those joys. Now I'm going to ask a different part of your brain to EngAGE, I want you to adorn the outside of this circle with lines and shapes, doodles, if you will, you know, by changing from thinking about the words to thinking about images, you're engaging a different part of your brain, and as you're doing

that, and just free yourself. Sketches. Doodles. As you're doing that, I want you to consider these joys, these four joys, your four inner muses. You know, consider how you have connected with those things throughout your life. Have these joys always carried you on your journey? And has the way that you've connected with these joys evolved? Have they changed? I know mine have since this sheltering in place. Going out dancing with my friends, that brings me great joy. I've had to connect with it in a different way. But that's why tapping into the essence of that joy is so important. I'll give you a moment. So just doodle and sketch and ponder.

This is a wonderful thing to do in staff meetings, to do on calls with friends and family, to bring to your work however you work with others. You know, by tapping into your own joy and sharing that with others, you really are creating a bond that can build community, increase compassion. It's beyond creativity. I love these words that I'm hearing from Gabri and Calvin, it's curiosity, it's identity, you know, creativity is one singular word that we use to encapsulate so much. Please activate the chat. We would love to hear, you know, today what are your four joys? Maybe pick one joy and share what the essence of that is. Katie, I would love to hear from you. You know, what are your joys these days?

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah, it's funny that you mention like every

team I do Wheel of Joy, it's a little bit different or a lot different, which is just a good reminder that we find joy in a lot of places, if we're looking for it. So I had two that were totally different, sparked by Gabri talking about objects and how they can be meaningful. I had never put an object as one of my joys before. But I have these bright pink banana earrings that I recently acquired, and they bring me so much joy. They're like, you know, it's just a tiny part of the day, and I thought what is it that makes me smile so much about these earrings? And part of it is that they're silly, like, you know, it's like permission to just be silly. And part of it's that it's unexpected, and I think, you know, one thing that's been hard or challenging with COVID sheltering at home is there's just less variety, there's less moments that you didn't expect, right? Because I'm not out and about, being confronted with chaos of the world, you know, which is so fun. So it's like I'm having to sort of capture that and make it for myself, you know, through things like these banana earrings.

>> JESSICA McCracken: You know, it's interesting that you say that because another thing that the wheel of joy by doing that and sharing it with others, every time, it's like I had that too! In these groups. Which is wonderful, because you're connect with she's shared joys. And I had surprises as one of my essence, this aha, this wow, you know. And I think yeah, I'm



gravitating to that right now with each day kind of, you know, the groundhog day that the pandemic has created. And I see Trace in the chat mentioned kayaking. Oh! And the water bringing peace to your soul. Yes. I had the rain is out my window right now, and the rain is one of my things that bring me joy, being a girl of -- being a girl of northern California, and the washing away that that water can bring, connecting with that.

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you for sharing in the chat, it's so fun to read about other people's joys and how we adapt them as we need to because of life.

>> JESSICA McCRACKEN: Yes, health brings me joy. Yes. Health brings me joy. It's great tapping into those things. And if you want to explore this more, we can put links in the chat. We have enduring inspiration. Oh, it feels good to say that again out loud. Enduring inspiration, I always say it like that. It's a virtual exhibition on Ruth's Table website. Creative Spark was borne out of the magic of Ruth's table. So that's Ruth's table.org, for those of us on the phone, ruthstable.org, it's in the chat. From there you can make your way to Enduring Inspirations tab on February 4 we'll have an event to celebrate artwork that has been created through Creative Spark classes and worksheets and kits delivered to affordable housing. It will be an amazing event. We'll do

Wheel of Joy and take it to another level.

So if you enjoy this exercise, please come to the event. I just want to thank you all for participating in the Wheel of Joy. Please share it with others, and enjoy the Creative Aging symposium. Congratulations on your fourth year!

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, Jessica. Thank you, everyone. We hope you join us through Creative Spark on your event on February 4 which you can see some examples of the art that's been created behind me. All right. I'll take just a minute to thank our advocate level sponsor Front Porch and then we'll take about an 8 minute break, be back at 10 after the hour. What I'll do now is share my screen with just some thoughts and music for us all for about 8 minutes, and then we'll see you for our next speaker and interview combo. Thank you all.

(music).

(music).

### **Speaker: S. Renee Jones**

>> KATIE WADE: All right. We are back. Thank you all for being with us this morning. We're going to jump into our next interview with two folks that I'm just so thrilled for you to meet I'll ask for Jeremy and Renee, for you to turn on your videos, so we can see you a bit. I'll welcome, Jeremy, our interviewer.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Hi.

>> KATIE WADE: And let you say more about Renee. Jeremy is our interviewer and Renee Jones is our artist the. Jeremy's creativity

Comes in many forms but one prominent one is his ability to draw out stories from others and then tell them in compelling ways. He is a journalist that uses photography, storytelling, and entering viewing and I have to say -- and interviewing, and I have to say, what I would want you all to know about Jeremy is that he and Renee actually share a pretty critical trait, which is that they have curiosity about others, what makes us human, so they both have different lenses to share that. So I invite Jeremy to take it away.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Thank you. Hello to everyone out there. I'm on the East Coast, so I've been up and about. I have to say from the outset, and Katy will communicate with me, it's all a bit hit and miss with this technique, I have to say that the challenge that Katie sent me was we want you to interview someone you don't know, get to know her story and is about her life and her art and how experiences in her life has affected her art and what she's known as she's grown older. I said, how long do I have? She said you've got about 20, 25 minutes, and then there will be a few minutes for questions. So please understand that obviously all we can do in this limited time is just provide some snapshots of Renee's quite remarkable life and

her artwork, and he thought the best way to start this process was to go through kind of little potted history, obviously Renee will fill in all the information, about certain events in her life that maybe give you a sense of heretic experience, and that will sort of enable you to look at her art, which we'll do the second half of this session, with a kind of more knowledgeable informed mind about how her life has impacted the artwork that she's created. As opposed to just using images to tell her story, which is only part of her life.

Let's just start with a little bit about Renee and heretic life. Maybe Katie, you could put up the first image, which is coming up, which will give up quite a -- there you go. Now, that's a great setup for Renee. If you could take it away and tell us just what your childhood was like, how you would describe it from your early days, obviously, up to when you left for college. Just give us a sense of the experience you had growing up in a large family.

>> RENEE JONES: Well, hello, Jeremy and everyone. Hmm. So my life definitely has been unusual in that I was raised in a very large family with a single parent father as the head of household. I was born in Denver, Colorado, but we came to San Francisco when I was between one and two years old. So this photograph that's here is a photograph that was taken when somebody nominated my father as Father of the Year and gave us

this piano. So the piano is sitting outside our house, and he hoisted us up on the piano and surrounding my father. And then they took the picture, and it was in the local newspaper.

So when we came out here to San Francisco, my mother came with us at first, but she didn't like San Francisco, and she was having a lot of emotional problems, one, because she had been raising us by herself as my father went to seek work, and so she was, I guess, outdone by us or something. So she went back to, she actually moved to Chicago, and at the time she was pregnant with my youngest brother. And when she gave birth to my youngest brother, my father went back and got him. So the reason why my father chose San Francisco was because he was a chef, and his claim to fame was that he was one of the cooks for Harry Truman when he would ride the train to visit dignitaries. So he always likes to tell people that.

So when we came out here, he was looking for work as a chef, and he was known as the lobster tail king of the Sunset district.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Can I jump in Renee? Because one thing that I think everyone should know, and you're so self-effacing that people won't get it, because you're one of the most humble people I've met, is that you believed, even though you grew up relatively let's say economically strapped situation, there was a tremendous amount of wealth in that family, and you didn't

know that you were, technically speaking, poor, am I right in saying that? That you had a good upbringing, and let no one take that away from you.

>> RENEE JONES: Yeah. It wasn't so much that I didn't know that we were poor, it's that it didn't matter as much because everyone around me, of course my brothers and sisters, were, you know, having the same experience. And there would be times in school when we would be given clothes, and there would be times when, you know, we would be given food and stuff, but it didn't seem to impact me in the way or I didn't experience it in the way that I would see on television. But I definitely knew we were poor, but that was just a word, and that was just, you know, it looked like something different than what other people experienced.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: And that, I would think, because what we're trying to communicate in this session is a lot about not just aging but about identity and how identity impacts your whole approach to life, including in your case your art. Would you say -- you were the eighth out of ten.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: So big family and you were on the younger side. How did being number eight or growing up in a family of ten of you impact the way you saw treating other people? What lessons did you learn about a large family and your

responsibilities to treating everyone equally?

>> RENEE JONES: Usually, like people have a certain place, especially when you have a nuclear family, within, it seems the older children take on a certain spot and the younger children are usually considered the baby and things like that. And I actually was considered the baby for a short time. I was my father's little girl.

(laughter).

But at some point, it got to where, because there wasn't this kind of nuclear family like mother and father and kids, then I sort of slipped out of that role, and the only place that I could actually fit was to become almost like the mother figure, even though I was on the younger end.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: And I think you become being the mother figure weighs heavily on some of the decisions you made later.

>> RENEE JONES: Oh, most definitely.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Please forgive me for jumping in, I'm just very conscious of Katie, our stern taskmaster, that we don't go over.

>> RENEE JONES: No worries.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Think of me appears -- think of me as the tour guide. Growing up in the 60s and 70s and probably you can go off that picture Katie or stay on it, it's up to you, but we weren't going to talk much about that, would you say that

growing up in the 60s and 70s you experienced a lot of racism? You're obviously on the West Coast and there must have been a heavy degree of protests going on. Tell me about your view of what you witnessed and experienced.

>> RENEE JONES: We definitely experienced a lot of racism, and even though we are on the West Coast, you know, it was quite different. The way that we acquired the house that I grew up in was because a white man shot my sister in the face with a bee gun, because she touched his car which was blocking the sidewalk where she needed to walk. So, you know, out of the suit, the lawsuit that came from that, well, then, we were able to acquire our house, even though my father could not purchase it. He had to have somebody else purchase it.

But the other ways that it was different was because I grew up during the time when, you know, women's lib was coming in and, you know, of course the 60s black power and all that stuff was very important. And to this day, it's why I personally use the term "black" to describe myself, as opposed to African American. And I know that that kind of drives white people crazy because they don't know which one to use, you know, to be politically correct and everything. But yeah, I use that term because I feel like I earned it, like I fought for it and things like that and I know what it means. So I think when the women's lib movement came in, that was a little more difficult because



they just assumed that black women were the same as white women and they just assumed that black men were the same as white men, so I had difficulty with how much black men were being put down and how much white women were being called sister, in such a way that it didn't feel like that.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: So what is remarkable is that as we're going to see, your photography is not protest photography, the glib phrase that that is, it's very human, and there's tremendous empathy and sensitivity to the human condition, which leads me to ask you, when did you first get into photography? How did that present itself to you and you said oh, that's something I can really get into? I think I'm going to go with that.

>> RENEE JONES: Yeah, well, so when my father came here as a chef, he couldn't really afford to work as a chef because that required steady specific hours, and he couldn't raise his -- and he couldn't raise his children and not have a flexible schedule, so he became a handyman. So he would be cleaning people's basements and -- and attics and he would find all kind of treasures, and a lot of times we would go to the dumps with him and find all these treasures. So a lot of times there would be cameras. So even though I didn't have film, I gravitated towards the camera because it allowed me a way of looking at everything, paying attention to everything at the same time as

hiding and staying out of the way of my older brothers and sisters or learning any and all of those things.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: What was it -- but obviously it had its sort of protective device, you know, you could get involved in something and get out of the presence of your difficult siblings. What was it that it empowered you to do that you said this is touching a part of me that I find just fulfilling and rich? How did it make you become more Renee?

>> RENEE JONES: Well, it allowed me to realize that the world was being told things about my world were being told by other people, and I wanted not only my world but the world of black people, the world of black women, the world of black men to be told by somebody who is black. I mean, a lot of times I would see these images, and of course they, because I didn't have a mother -- because didn't have a mother, a lot of times it set me in such a way that I thought that's what I was supposed to do or that's how I was supposed to be. And so the camera just allowed me to ask the questions of, you know, whose eyes am I looking through when I take these pictures? And am I portraying black people in the way I know them to be? So that was a lot of what photography did for me.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Great answer. Yes. So when you went to college, which you paid for yourself and you worked through it, you went to is it San Francisco state and you studied primarily

art therapy, why did you choose art therapy?

>> RENEE JONES: I kind of stumbled into it because I was taking psychology, which seems like every girl just gravitates towards psychology and I of course loved art but photography was a big thing then and you couldn't get into photography classes unless you were a junior or a senior, so I would find classes in other departments under other headings like there was a photography class under journalism, there was a photography class in the humanities department and there was this class titled the impact of photography on third world communities so I took that class and I loved it and I came to understand more things about the impact of photography and also in taking psychology classes that had to do with teaching young people and understanding young people from the earliest age possible how they could see themselves, how they could find themselves and be themselves, so it was just because I wasn't able to get into the regular classes that I kind of stumbled into it.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Well, it served you well, as we're about to see. If we can fast-forward to, from college, to a period I think in your 40s when you developed some quite serious medical issues, I think some cervical spinal issues.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: I don't know when you also got Graves' disease. So you're dealing with challenges to say the least and

got to a stage where you couldn't work with your disability and found yourself homeless and without getting into too much of the details, can you just describe what you learned in the homeless process that may have, in fact, impacted your creativity, your view of the world, how that experience was for you? Because most of us are privileged enough not to have gone through that unbelievably wretched state.

So what did you experience and how did it inform you going forward?

>> RENEE JONES: Well, first being homeless, I didn't realize how much I didn't get the opportunity to see nature when I was growing up. So when I was living in my car, of course, I was driving all over, and even though it was still in the city, it was greenery and water and, you know, we have this ocean out here that I rarely went to and the zoo and things like that. So I just realized how much is in my own backyard. And I also realized how people experience homelessness in so many different ways, and I totally love the creativity that they say necessity being the mother of invention kind of thing.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: You wouldn't recommend it, would you?  
(laughter).

>> RENEE JONES: But it definitely, I found ways of empowering myself by realizing that just because somebody says that it's not there, something is not there, you know, or you

can't have this or whatever, that doesn't mean that that's true. And so I went on this journey of trying to figure out my own reality and figure out, you know, explore fact and truth and things like that. So I just gave myself a bunch of assignments that would allow me to find things that you wouldn't think you could find in the city.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: So for you, it was a creative opportunity borne out of necessity.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Two more questions before we move on to your artwork. One is, during this period of homelessness and once you got out of that situation, it led to you changing the way you photograph. You had become sort of more comfortable with determining I'm going to determine what I capture and how I capture it. Can you talk to that? You talked about shooting people from the waist down and you also wanted to capture the beauty of black people from the perspective of a black person who has far more insight inevitably. Can you talk to that?

>> RENEE JONES: I went for about five years where I said that I would not photograph anybody else other than a black person or a person of color. And when I would be in a situation where I really wanted to take this photograph, but it wasn't a black person, I would photograph them from the waist down or photograph them in such a way that you could not see or tell

what race they were. And that made for some interesting photographs because a lot of times it might have been at, say, a parade or something like that, and so I would end up focusing in on the instrument, or I might end up focusing in on the shoes or, you know, a particular outfit somebody was wearing. And that really, I was surprised at how much that opened me up to paying attention to how absolutely beautiful black people are. And it's not that I didn't know it before, it's that there was such a variety and such just a richness in everything that I found after that five year experiment. Yeah.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: My last question is, you talked about what a black person could bring to the photographic or probably any creative format when it's capturing the black experience, in a way that a white person couldn't. I mean, it makes sense, obviously, but could you define what you could bring to that process that maybe I couldn't? And I don't want to personalize it, but, you know, do you understand where I'm going?

>> RENEE JONES: Yes. Well, I think that even I'm more drawn to photograph things in a stereotypical way, but having worked to not do that has been, of course, a great thing. I don't know that white people look to do that, to not photograph things a stereotypical way, and partly it's because they only know things in a stereotypical way, even if they have close friends, even if they have family members, they still will know it in that

stereotypical way. And I just found that people would more often than not just completely just add to, I don't know how to say it other than that.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: A white person's instinct, however well intentioned, is often it resort to the stereotype, to present to people informed by movies, you know, journalism, white journalism and so forth, and so, you know, black people were not portrayed in all their humanity, in all their richness, as fully evolved humans, you know, with emotions that cover the gamut. So I'm sure that's right, you know, obviously.

>> RENEE JONES: Yeah.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: And they're the ones with good intentions, not the ones with, you know, negative.

>> RENEE JONES: Right.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Let's start with, there are going to be five pictures that we're going on see and we'll whiz through them because I think Katie will be very angry otherwise. We'll start with the first image which is brothers and talk to everyone about what's going on in this picture.

>> RENEE JONES: So these are my two nephews, and my sister made this canopy chair. She just liked the idea of that. And my youngest nephew was struggling because everybody was leaving his life. His older brother was gone away to school. And his mother was having some mental health issues, so she was sleeping

a lot, and I was there watching her kids. And so when the older brother would come home, well, then, the younger brother just had to be around him at every moment. So the older brother is eating cereal behind the curtain and the younger brother just has to climb up in his lap and be with him. So when I went to take a picture, he had to pull the curtain back to see what I was doing, of course.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: What was so moving, I think you said the younger brother was who was probably not fully articulate, but he said brother gone.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Breaks your heart when you hear it, and it takes it out of the black/white tribal difference into human, into a sort of everybody can understand what's going on in this poor boy's mind.

>> RENEE JONES: Yeah.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: And the light is astounding, the black off to the side and the bright white behind the light. Just a magnificent picture, a special moment.

>> RENEE JONES: Thank you.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Let's move on to the next one, which by way of change, called Camels. Tell us what your thinking was behind this one.

>> RENEE JONES: So when I was telling you earlier about



trying to figure out my reality and just because somebody says that it's not there, that doesn't mean that you can't find it there, so I had been watching this thing on television about camel races in Las Vegas, and I just thought, hmm, I would love to see some camels walking down the San Francisco street, so it took me three years to figure out how I could find them, and I didn't want to go to the zoo, of course, because they had to be walking down the street. And so I realized that for 70 years, the circus comes to town, and in San Francisco they come by train and they have to take them off the train and walk them up to the arena, which is known as the Cow Palace. So at this point, they're actually going back to the train, and you kind of can't make out the fact that there are people on the other side, but I took the photograph in a very specific way and in a very particular place that sort of just gives that casual walking around.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: People should be aware that you were going through Graves' disease at the time.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: You had lost 89 pounds in two months, quite a challenge.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: It was a photograph that was empowering, it wasn't just I love camels, I'm going to photograph them, it

was your way of setting yourself a challenge.

>> RENEE JONES: Yeah.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: My medical side might be out of control but I'm going to make sure that my artistic side is fully under my empowerment. Is that fair?

>> RENEE JONES: Very true. Yes.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: And by the way, I just looked it up, they're not camels, they're what's called dromedaries, camels have two humps, dromedaries have one.

>> RENEE JONES: Yes, I was being casual.

>> KATIE WADE: Jeremy, this is Katie coming up with a time warning with one minute left.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Oh, I see. Let's go to shall we dance? The fifth one.

>> RENEE JONES: Sure.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: All right. Talk. Tell us about that. You've got a minute.

>> RENEE JONES: This one I really love just simply because it was so matter of fact. The hippy is just, he just loves to dance. And I was at an art and soul festival, so he just would take the hand of various people and dance, and this woman, he was just twirling with her, and I just love the dress and the fluttering eyelashes and the hair style. And then his -- and then his look as well. So it was just this soft and matter of

fact way of people, a way that, you know, people can exist and do exist.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Right. Got you. Katie, do you want to ask the question about aging, how it's impacted Renee's artwork? Or I can?

>> KATIE WADE: Yes, let's do that in our one minute here. Renee, perhaps you could tell us a little bit about how growing older has affected your creativity. Are you as creative now as you ever were?

>> RENEE JONES: Well, because of the pandemic, I have to say yes. I mean, you know, I've taken a lot of Zoom classes, drawing, writing, painting. I made a coffee table, built a coffee table. I got a bike, a new bike that is rather unusual because it's a walking bike. If you imagine a treadmill on wheels, well, then. So the way that that's opened me up to creativity, it's mostly because I'm more -- even though I have a lot of limitations with some physical issues, I feel more free to try new things and just, you know, go for it.

>> KATIE WADE: I love that. Thank you. Thank you both for being with us today, sharing and guiding the conversation so beautifully. Renee, I put your web page up in the chat so people who have said I want to see more of this work, can go find Renee and her website, [sreneejones.biz](http://sreneejones.biz) and see more of this beautiful photography and others. I want to echo one of the

comments that came if about you Renee that said what a beautiful way to reflect about identity and how identity and role shift with time, you've done a great job of that. Jeremy thank you for guiding us today and for folks that want to hit up a little more info on you ask your current project, I'm going to put the connectery.com in our chat. Jeremy give you was a one sentence blurb about what that is.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Sure. I met Katie because I was doing, am doing a podcast with my partner on loneliness, and obviously everyone is talking about loneliness during these terrible times we're in. But we started it and started to plan it before the pandemic. And of course once the vaccine is in everyone's arms and so forth and loneliness is not the hot subject, it's going to be every bit as much an important fascinating terrible situation after the pandemic as it is during.

So if you're interested in -- an optimistic and practical solution based approach to loneliness, maybe you would like to go to the connectery.com and sign up for the podcast. And if not I wish you all much social connection.

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, Jeremy, and thank you Renee. Have a good one. See you later.

>> RENEE JONES: Thank you.

>> JEREMY WARSHAW: Thank you so much for the privilege.

Thank you.

## **Creative Moment: Greg Pond**

>> KATIE WADE: All right. Well, let's move into our next demonstration by Greg Pond. I'll ask Greg to join us on the stage here.

I'm truly delighted to welcome back to the symposium stage, A recurring artist we have. Greg was born in Brooklyn and has written four books of poetry,

Afternoon - Blackened Blue - 4:00 a.m. (DARK) - 4:00 a.m. (LIGHT), is a member of Revolutionary Poets Brigade and volunteers as facilitator of Poetically Speaking, a weekly program he runs through Well Connected so you can join by conference call or online.

Among his literary influences: Langston Hughes, e.e. cummings, Gwendolyn Brooks. He currently Resides in San Francisco. I have to tell you, it really gives me such pleasure for you to experience Greg and his poetry today because it is such a gift that you bring to the world and that I've been the recipient of. So welcome, Greg, and I'll turn it to you to share.

>> GREG POND: Thank you. Thank you, Katie, and welcome, everybody. It's an honor to be here and it's an honor to be able to share poetry and to share issues and things of identity. I've selected some poems that deal with identity, some in a

general way and some maybe more specific. I'll start off with a poem entitled I am not who.

We're sent here with many gifts, and time to hone our skills.

We're blessed with freedom of thought, as well as given free will.

We are assigned to express the divine.

To live in truth.

To rise and shine.

But exactly who we are is not something that's easy to prove, for I am not really who I think I am, and neither I think are you.

The next poem, kaleidoscope.

Looking through the kaleidoscope of life

I see bits of my reflection

In each multi-colored section

Asking the same old questions:

Who are you

Where are you headed

And why?

There are times when i know who i am

What i want and need to do

But then there are other times

When my feelings are like broken glass

And i'm easily cut and bruised

My lens shifts a bit out of focus

And my vision gets compromised

Those are the times when i look

Deep in the kaleidoscope's eyes

All i find is an

Empty sheet of black

And when i see

Nothing looking at me

Then

I look nothing back

I'm going to just stop after those two and maybe give a little reflection on those two poems and the thought behind it.

Taking the first one, I believe that there are three different ways in which we present ourselves. I think one is how we see ourselves. I think then the other is how people see us, and the third is how we really are. And I think that how we present ourselves in a world is somehow at the intersection of those three. So that's part of what the first one spoke about.

And the second one, kaleidoscope, talked very much in the same way about that feeling of identity. However, in the second one, a little more dark because those are the times when the identity is difficult to grasp, and you find that you're looking, hopefully you're thinking you're looking at colored pieces of light, and you're really seeing just a sheet of black.

And those are the times of emptiness and sometimes deep introspection. So that's kind of where those two poems come from.

The next poem I would like to share with you is a poem that talks about an individual, and this is somebody who I don't really know, but I've seen this person many times. And this poem is entitled: I'm tired.

He said, I'm tired. Old and black. But not necessarily in that order.

Seeing more blues than the indigo sky and royal sea put together, but they never got the better of me. I've been struck by white lightning, I've been beat up more than once by the system, by daily living, by policemen's club. I've been stoned by hail and burned by the sun, done lost more time than you ever could believe, and all that I've won is a temporary reprieve.

A moment to rest and catch my breath before the winter's breeze tries to steal this flimsy cardboard that provides my only shield. Covering me for one more night, as I try my best to survive these cold and homeless nights.

Born in a mirror.

Born in a mirror

In the middle of the mix

I stand transfixed

By the image i see



Which has most of my features

But i don't think looks a bit like me

Born in vulnerability.

The truth lies on my face

I lose my place

Too often and easily

Giving up then giving in

All the time wearing

The discomfoting grin Born in a window, seeing me as I see you. Looking glass through the prism of egotism. A crystal heartbroken in pieces and parts, no longer immune nor shatter-proof.

Born in reflection. I've wasted precious time as my youthful features fade, a middle age embraces me like a warm blanket cape, and despite all I may have lost, I still can find my way. Born in a mirror, in the midst of mystery. No one observes, no one discerns when I become the watcher and there's no one watching me. Sometimes I have to wonder, who is this older guy I see, what has become, and what has he done with young Gregory?

For my last poem I would like to share a somewhat autobiographical piece that is entitle the home alone.

I'm a solo homo sapiens

A star slowly fading from sight

I'm home and all alone on the range

A stranger in the middle of night  
I'm a slow game of poker  
Trying to decide which cards to play  
Holding a royal flush and joker  
Hiding my hand with deadpan face  
I'm a cool shower or hot soak  
A clear statement or murky riddle  
I'm an up-after-hours, stay at home  
One and only homie in the middle  
I'm an endangered black man  
I live with a bull's-eye on my back  
I'm a break-a-few-rules, old school papa  
I got the fever and a brand new bag  
I'm a bitch, a fairy, a fruit and a fag  
I'm all the taboo names they say  
I've been homo, sissy and butch queen in drag  
Marching in the rainbow flag parade  
I'm a black cat, poet activist  
I'm a senior seeking change  
I'm a seasoned homo sapiens  
Burner of the midnight flame  
I'm a hometown, homegrown, homebody  
Hanging home alone on the range Thank you.

>> KATIE WADE: That was beautiful, Greg, as always, I

especially loved your energy in that last one. Thank you so much. Folks are blowing up the chat. They are loving you, as always. I'm not surprised. And I just want to do a couple of things as we wrap up our time together. One perhaps I can offer a reflection, I've read, so Greg, a couple of recent works, you have four total books, the folks have been asking in the chat, Blackened Blue, aftermoon, 4:00 a.m. light on the screen and 4:00 a.m. dark on the screen. Perfect. So folks can find those online for purchase. Is there anywhere you would want to direct people specifically?

>> GREG POND: Yes, I can put the links to Amazon. They're all listed on Amazon.

>> KATIE WADE: Okay, great.

>> GREG POND: I'll put that in the chat.

>> KATIE WADE: One thing I noticed in reading 4:00 a.m. Light, because I'm almost done, and I'm bookmarking poem after poem, you know, at some point it's not even worth bookmarking, my whole book is all marked up. But I noticed there's this theme that really spoke to me throughout your writing, there's this poignancy in the very small moments of existence, you know, you have this one poem seasoned change where there's this line.

"and how much of our journey

Still remains

Can only be measured

By things that most matter  
The people we treasure  
The leaves we scatter  
As the seasons change"

And when I read that, that just blew my mind thinking about, you know, the smallness of my existence scattering the leaves, you know, that little moment like I'm here. And you have such a thread throughout your work about like I'm here and I matter in these small moments. And I want to thank you for that.

>> GREG POND: Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, that's one of the gifts I think of poetry is that it allows you to take those small moments in life, those very mundane things that just kind of take for granted, and you can really highlight them, you can really put them in a different frame, they're seen in a different way.

>> KATIE WADE: It's really impactful for me as a reader and absorber of your work. I think we might have to have you back for a longer time next time. I have many questions about identity, growing up in Brooklyn, your parents, there's so much more people want to know about you.

And folks are invited to join you each Wednesday for poetry readings through Well Connected. Check Greg out there as well as his books. Then we'll have you on again. We'll dig in a little bit more.

>> GREG POND: Thank you so much.

## **Speaker: Tim Carpenter**

>> KATIE WADE: Thank you, Greg, and have a great one. All right. We'll move on to our next speaker today, which is Tim Carpenter. So Tim, I'll invite you to join the stage with me. Hello. And welcome. And actually, go ahead, Tim. Oh, capability hear you. Is that --

>> TIM CARPENTER: Can you hear me now?

>> KATIE WADE: Sure can. Perfect. Well, and before we get started, I have to do one thing to my background.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Hold on one second.

>> KATIE WADE: While Tim works on his audio, I'm going to do a little introduction.

Tim Carpenter founded EngAGE in 1999 because he envisioned a society with transformative opportunities for older adults; spaces filled with enthusiasm and beauty, with creative programs and multi-generational housing. Tim's pioneering efforts have garnered multiple leadership awards, including the prestigious Stanton Fellowship from the Durfee Foundation. You can find his enlightening conversations with leading thinkers at his Experience Talks podcast. I'll put more info at the end in the chat about that. Welcome, Tim. And happy birthday! As you can see, I have a birthday celebration on the screen. I brought

some virtual presents for you.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Tuesday I turned 60 years old.

>> KATIE WADE: Yes.

>> TIM CARPENTER: I've been aging in place in my own job.

>> KATIE WADE: So tell us about that, about 60. How are you thinking and feeling about that?

>> TIM CARPENTER: I feel great. I feel like I'm back to that place as a child where you, instead of saying you're seven, you're seven and a half, approaching your eighth birthday because for the last year I've been telling people I'm almost 60. So I've been looking forward to it. And it's nice to pass a threshold like that working in the work that we do, you and I.

>> KATIE WADE: That's right. It's a real milestone in our work, a place of privilege to make it to the 60 mark. So that's exciting. Yeah.

Well, let's see. Today we're going to just explore a little bit about your experience with creativity, both from a work lens and what you've done to bring creativity to others, as well as, you know, how it has impacted your own personal life and identity. So we talked before and there was something you said that really stuck with me that I thought maybe we could start with, if you're okay. Unless you have somewhere you want to start.

>> TIM CARPENTER: No, go for it, I'll follow you wherever

you go, Katie.

>> KATIE WADE: All right. Let me jump in. You mentioned arts programming and senior living serves as a mirror that we can hold up to that older artist, and it really to me, it tied into this concept that Anne Basting has in her creative care book the idea of proofing what it means to be seen and heard. Can you speak a little bit what that means, holding at that mirror up to that programming?

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah. I think for me, one of the things that brought me to this work was some of my personal journey, you know. I grew up a red-headed freckled overweight shy kid, and I didn't always feel seen by people myself. And my grandmother, my father's mother, always saw me, and it was something that meant a lot to me. And then when the tables were kind of reversed and she was an older woman, she was a very simple but kind of Mark Twain-wise woman, that I spent the first two years of college at UC Santa Barbara, which as you probably know and back then especially is kind of a Backenall club med surfer dude kind of school not known for deep thought, and my grandmother would send me letters about her life, and they were simple but so pure and filled with wisdom that I read them. I would take them into the lounge on my dorm floor at UCSB and I would read them aloud and at first just a couple of close friends, but it became this thing where people wanted to hear

what my grandmother had to say, and she would pass on pearls of wisdom, she would talk about corn, and corn in my family, she would talk about when you pick a stalk of corn and you jog to the kitchen and the water is already boiling and you drop it in, that's fresh corn, but if you trip and fall, you have to throw it away because it's not fresh anymore.

And so my reading these letters aloud was for me this celebration of holding up a mirror to my grandmother. And I was shocked at how well received it was. And truthfully that kind of became the work that we do, you know. The first thing did I running this organization, I've been a writer my whole life, and I graduated as a journalist. I knew how to teach writing. It was the only thing we had. We had me and nothing else in the organization. So I started a writing class at a two-story garden walkup senior apartment community in Duarte and went door-to-door and cajoled and conned people into coming to a writing class I wasn't really sure how to teach. But we immediately started telling stories, writing down stories about people's personal truth. And then we put it on stage. We got a community center and got people to read on stage and invited family members and the mayor and community members and residents, and it was kind of transforming because no one was really doing that at the time. So that idea of Creative Aging and holding up a mirror to someone is really about our truth,



our story, you know, and kind of getting rid of all the magical hoo-haw about being an artist, not being an artist. Being an artist has all this baggage associated with it that that you have to be special or magic, and I think all of us have art inside of us. We just don't call ourselves an artist yet is the way I think about it.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah. I love that reflection, and actually I have quite a bit of questions and thoughts on that as well as we get into some things later. But I love the idea of this young guy coming in and holding up a mirror, you know, to the older adults that you were working with and probably yourself in the process as well. An audience member asks, what prompted you to create EngAGE at a relatively young age? You've answered that part. Anything else you want to expand on that?

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah. I was working in healthcare. I worked in senior healthcare before I got into housing, I met a housing developer, and he brought me to one of his communities and said, you know, what would you do to change this place? And I came at it first from more of a health kind of perspective and I went in by myself and there was one older man sitting in the community room. By himself. So I went and sat down next to him and just asked him, you know, what his life was like there, you know, kind of like the journalist inside me just being open and curious about who he was and what he was doing there.

And he was Preston Tucker's lead salesperson for a car called the Tucker Torpedo which was portrayed by Francis Copella in a film called Tucker, by Jeff Bridges and this wild story, John Bahari was his name, I'll never forget him, and I thought holy cow I just walked in and the first guy I talked to was this walking myth. And I asked John what are you doing here? And he went over to the wall and he pulled the calendar down from the wall. And he said, you know, this is what we're doing here, and we're dying here. And there were two things on the calendar. There were bingo on Tuesday nights and donuts on Saturday morning. And that was the moment where I thought, you know, one, it's not a huge bar to jump over, so I think I can do better than bingo and donuts.

And two, I wanted to do something about this man. And again, my grandmother, try to find some way to get people to notice them and take off the cloak of invisibility that we put over the older people in our society.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah, that's right. It's so apparent now more than ever living through a pandemic about that cloak of invisibility over older adults in our society. What's interesting is its stories have the power to lift that cloak, right? It really was on my mind -- it really blows my mind when I think about all the stories around us, they're like bits of gold. They're so valuable. And there's something happening at

EngAGE with the writing group throughout the pandemic, I believe, that's doing a little bit of this work?

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah. Yeah. So artist colony which is one of our communities, there's been a writing class taught by one of our master teaching artists, Sarah Jacovis and it was really around the idea of writing at the pandemic and really journaling and writing stories and poetry and all kinds of different styles of writing, and the group got together every week via Zoom, and Sarah put together this class in a book called 20/20 vision -- 2020 Vision and we published it and the show you mentioned Sarah was on there and talked in general about what it's like to one go through this thing, because we're all going through it. It's not just older people. You know, I think everyone has this sense of isolation and loneliness, you know, and we've been told to physically distance from each other.

I can't stand the term "social distancing" one, I think it's incorrect factually. We need to stay physically separated from each other, but I think we need to do everything in our power to socially connect.

And so, you know, it was this great way for real people going through something real to tell their truth. Again, you know, we own our truth. We own our story. And to put that forth as our art form to connect to others, it's really the only way that I

think is real. I was so inspired by the work of Renee and Greg, and it speaks to the same thing, the idea that our creativity and our art form can help other people connect in times when we really need it more than national intelligence.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah. I think that concept is so beautiful and true. And it's one of the reasons, you know, we even have the symposium and all the work that you and I both do is really to encourage that as much as we can, that everyone has the potential to express themselves creatively, and it's a portal. People want to see who you are, you know, and it can really change the world. I don't think it's melodramatic to say that.

>> TIM CARPENTER: No. No. I think, I mean, timingwise, we've just gone through a period where someone did that in one of the most master full ways I've seen in the person of Amanda Gorman, Amanda Gorman, she's an Angelino, she's from Los Angeles, she's from where I live and one of our master teaching artists was a mentor to her, Ohay Luzia who came out of Watts himself and got out of gangs because he was so good at words and so good at spoken word performance and performed at gang members and funerals and they let him out because they needed his words. And Amanda stood up there and stole the show. She had a speech impediment just like Joe Biden did, she found her voice, you know, she went to New Roads high school here that was founded by one of my friends. She went to this writer's program called

Write Girl and was coached by older writers to find her voice. And, you know, her poem, The Hill we climb. There is one light. There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it, if only we are brave enough to be it. That's a moment where a young 22-year-old poet just stood up and stole the show because that's what we needed to hear. We don't need to hear political platitudes right now, we need to hear people's art. And she's going to speak at the Super Bowl, of all places, a place that's, you know, Budweiser owns, you know, we're going to hear these wise words from this 22-year-old. I think it's just a beautiful moment in time.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah, just totally speaks to the need we have in our society. There's a yearning a craving for something that art and creativity can fill for us.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah, I don't think so there's anything else.

>> KATIE WADE: No. Those moments of connecting to ourselves and others, that's what creativity encourages, the process of it, just encourages such a deep connection. And that is what is life giving, you know, especially right now.

You've mentioned before and this is a pretty common refrain, I certainly believe this, that creativity, art, it's about the process, not the product. And again now more than ever that is so true. And maybe tell us a little bit about that, like

personally for you, about that sentiment process not the product.

>> TIM CARPENTER: I know that that's an important part of teaching creativity and art to older adults because, again, societally we're taught to worship the product , and if there's no product, then there is no purpose.

And to me, the purpose of engaging in creative adventure and expressing our truth and putting ourselves out there and being vulnerable with the way we see the world, that's the process of it. And at the end of the day, the thing to fall in love with is the process, not the product. You know, there was a study done by a wonderful doctor named Gene Cohen out of George Washington University, the first study on creativity and aging, and Gene was a friend of mine, fantastic guy, he passed away a few years ago, he would do presentations on brain chemistry, and he would use a lightsaber from the Star Wars movies as his pointer to just get out of people's heads, so to speak. And he would say something that always made me smile. He said that you fire the same neurons in your brain, you have the same Ladybug brain chemistry connecting neurons to each other when you write a limerick or a haiku that James Joyce experienced when he was writing Ulysses, so the product was taken out of the picture, the idea of just trying to in your own way practice creativity and art. And that is the key thing, you know, and I

try and do it in my own life. You know, I have such huge respect for Greg Pond and his poetry. I've been a writer my whole life and poetry is not my weapon of choice, and kind of scares the hell out of me and for the past year I've been taking writing lessons from this David White amazing poet out of the Pacific Northwest and one of the gifts of the pandemic is you can be inspired by somebody at that level and do what we're doing now just connect by Zoom and not have to fly somewhere and, you know, it's been amazing to me. And it feels, you know, like a risk, you know, creativity is also about risk taking. And it's about trying something new, and again, laying yourself bare. You know, what we're trying to get at is the meaning of life, and there's no other way to do that, that I know of, that's like art, any form of art, you know. Own your story. Own your song. Own your dance. Be in your garden. Cook creatively. Whatever form of creativity floats your boat, it all makes you feel like you're doing something that's elemental to being a human being.

>> KATIE WADE: Absolutely. Oh, my goodness. We could just put a bow on that right there, you know. It's so true. And it echos earlier Gabri was our first speaker, and she just talked about exploring without judgment and how that's so critical to the creative process, and I'm hearing that, you know, if you can remove that judgment of yourself, you know, or maybe those

voices you have about not being creative, you can take those risks that you're talking about.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah, we talk all the time about getting rid of the inner critic. I mean, I think that the inner voice is one of our best friends and biggest enemies at the same time no matter what that voice is talking about. So the ability to kind of listen to one and not the other is an important habit to form.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah. Being selective there. Well, and something else you said reminded me, when we last spoke, you gave me a couple of tips which were actually incredibly impactful for me because you said, I think you had a writing instructor once talking about your gift, what your gift to the world is. Do you remember saying that?

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, his name was Steve Maizer and taught a graduate course in screenwriting and he talked about screenwriting in a way you don't really hear in Hollywood, this idea that connecting to the gift of the story is your way to approach how you create character and try and move people, and what you really want is to try to understand what emotion you want people to carry out when you're done with your story. You know, I remember him talking about, and I've stolen this and used it at classes and things like this trying to inspire people, is you think about your gift and your story or



your art or whatever it may be as a diary that you keep about what you think about yourself, the way you see yourself, and think about it as what if your great granddaughter found that diary hidden away in the attic someday and opened it and read it and was able to connect to someone in their family that they didn't know? And what that might mean to someone. So this idea that using your art is not just for you, it's also about giving your story to others and seeing the value in it. And again, you know, allowing someone else to see you in a way that people normally don't see you, again, another thing that I only think that art can do.

>> KATIE WADE: Yes. Yes. Amen. I love that. Perhaps, you know, it leads me into thinking about those kind of tips you gave me about writing particularly, but really the act of observation, you know, through these tips. And one of them was a book that you've been reading by George Saunders: A swim in the Pond in the rain. Tell me a little bit about that.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Yeah. So a week from Tuesday, a week from my birthday on February 9 I'm interviewing George Saunders on Experience Talks on my Zoom cast, so I'm very, very excited about that. George Saunders is one of the greatest living short story writers. He won the Booker prize for novel Lincoln and the -- and teaches a great class at Syracuse University and it's all about exploring how to write through looking at the great

writers of short stories in the Russian tradition. So a swim in the Pond in the rain is a line from a book called goose berries by Anton Checkoff and the subtitle of the book and I happen to have it here because I've been reading it and kind of getting ready for my interview. The subtitle of the book is called: In which for Russians give a master class on writing, reading and life. And the thing I love is, you know, it's really about looking at these short stories, there's several short stories by four great Russian writers, and then he talks about how do you look at a story, how do you read a story, how do you write a story, and every step of the way make it better.

So on the one hand it's a guide to writing, it's a great guide to, you know, one of the core principles is how do you get from one line to the next and get people to keep reading and not quit. I always thought that was like the simplest, greatest idea. But it's not just about writing. It really is a fantastic glimpse into life and reading and the beauty of reading. And he's this incredibly kind, giving man. He gave a convocation speech at Syracuse University several years ago. And instead of talking about what people should do with their life in terms of career and you've graduated and now what are you going to do, all he talked about was kindness. And he said, you know, the only regret he's ever had in his life are the moments where he lacked kindness. And so if we go out and be

kind and in introduction to the book he talks about the fact of this avenue towards reaching our own highest selves, and that literature to a certain extent great words can save us and create a pathway towards just being better humans, and I couldn't agree more.

>> KATIE WADE: Yeah. I loved that. I read through the first book, I mean, short story that he reflects and I'm into the second, and I thought, I'm so glad you recommended this because it is really tangible useful things about writing, which I super appreciate, but it also weaves in, he'll have just one line about loneliness that blows me away. I'm like, we're not even talking about that, and just boom, huge chunks of inspiration there. So I loved that tip. I put it in chat for everyone to check out that book. I think it's excellent. You're right. It's an excellent just avenue into being a better human. Yeah.

Yeah, you gave me another tip that I want to share in our last minute here, which is about I think a process, I don't know if you had this before COVID or not about taking walks every day. Yeah, when did that start?

>> TIM CARPENTER: The idea is really around just creating daily practice and creativity and even just in small ways. So during COVID what I've been doing, I live in Los Angeles, which has been the epicenter of the pandemic for, you know, at least

the last month or two, so taking walks, I do it safely, I take a walk around parks and masked and I pay attention on what's going on around me and I try to find ways to experience beauty in whatever it is that I'm seeing, and then when I get done with my walk, I try to write it down, I take photos, I listen to music, and it is a very easy quick way for me to enter and just hold creative space. And anyone can do it. It's like Gene said about the difference between Ulysses, just starting with small creative practice and challenging yourself to experience beauty and again something that only art can do, just listening to Greg and Renee, the beauty of his words, the beauty of her images, that's available to all of us. So the idea of just trying to create creativity to that in small daily practice, it's like church to me.

>> KATIE WADE: I like that a lot, it is like church. After you mentioned that practice, I started doing it, because I was already taking walks but it was like a call to observation on those walks that it really spurred something in me, and so I just, these walks are no longer for exercise because I can't stop walk and go oh look at that light hitting that branch and this old growth and this place and I think once opening yourself up to just noticing that beauty that you mentioned, it just cascaded for me, and I found myself, you know, afterwards you mentioned writing down, just jot down some things you notice,

no pressure, and that was turning into poetry for me and just what a cleansing practice to start your day in that way. So I really appreciate that tip for anyone who can give that a go, I really found it impactful for my life, and my writing.

>> TIM CARPENTER: It makes you feel good. You know what I mean? It's so easy to link that to feeling good, feeling optimistic, being healthy, I think they're really connected.

And at the end of the day I think art is a solution that a lot of people have mentioned around loneliness and isolation, you know, what people want is to belong, they want to not feel lonely, they want to feel meaning and community and neighborhood in their lives and I think art is the easiest way I know to get there.

>> KATIE WADE: Right? Take that shortcut to connection through art. Right. Thank you, Tim, it's a pleasure speaking with you and thinking about how these small tips and ideas can impact us all and thank you for your work. You were a pioneer that has changed certainly my job and the lives of many people so we appreciate you.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Same with you. Thanks for doing what you do and I'm going to tune into Greg's class on Well Connected, I'm looking forward to hearing more of his words.

>> KATIE WADE: Awesome. Thank you, Tim, and have a good day and happy birthday.

>> TIM CARPENTER: Thank you. Thanks, everybody.

## **Conclusion**

>> KATIE WADE: All right. Well, we have arrived here at the end of our time together for Creative Aging symposium, as inspired, I tell you, every year I am so inspired by what people are doing out in the world. Hang on for a minute, I have two challenges to leave you with as we write up. As I think of how create activity is a expression of self, I get an idea of a sense of being rooted and get an idea that the deepest part of ourselves is an anchor to hold onto, a childhood experience of creative freedom, role model, who showed us what it means to explore, someone who sparks your imagination, I think of Gabri's mom and her doll and how a small object might have sparked this big new way of viewing the world. I think about Renee and finding her place in her family and her community through the camera lens and in adulthood she helps us see all the full humanity and the beauty there. It's the will of joy that calls us to claim our imagination, joy to find ourselves in a moment of awe and share that with one another. It's Greg reminding us that we matter, our very existence has altered the world, what would it mean to own our ability and our creativity and make those small and large ripples of impact. It's Tim who teaches us that gentle observation of the world makes us powerful. It

gives birth to imagination and new ways of seeing, as only art can do. So the first wrap-up challenge told is to sit in that feeling of rootedness, remember the anchors in your life that have called you into creativity, our imagination, and bring that forth in yourself. Bring you, fully you, into the world. Lean into your unique expression of self. That's challenge number one. Challenge number two is to continue this conversation with us, join us at Well Connected for a multitude of weekly conversations that are inspiring and certainly bring fresh perspective and we also host Creative Spark, classes on Well Connected and Well Connected Espanol so in English or Spanish you can join us and you can submit your creative work to the enduring inspiration exhibit you see behind me, whether or not you join a class, we welcome everyone's creative expression into our virtual gallery. So I thank you all for making this event possible, and I certainly cannot wait to hear how today's celebration of Creative Aging changed, you know, the way you're thinking about something. So I'm going to just put up on the screen for folks who want to hang around for a minute just how you can get in touch with us more at Covia and at Well Connected. So you can see that now. It's Covia.org, for those checking into us. Here we go. And have a lovely day and week.