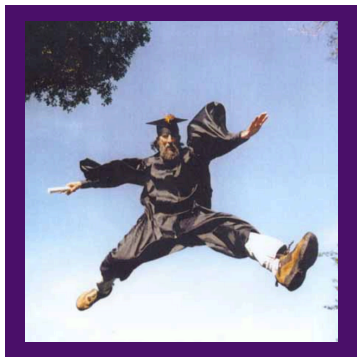


A Lifelong Learner Who's Dedication Persists



Joel was inspired to connect with the Sebastopol Area Senior Center while watching his father's almost daily engagement in his local Senior Center. "My dad was 100 years old and lived independently in his apartment in Brookline, Massachusetts. He spent much time taking classes and ate lunch 5-6 times a week at the Senior Center. That was a great lesson - watching my father age in his community," Joel shares.

Looking forward to each visit, Joel joined his father in a memoir class, sang with him in the center chorus, and ate at the senior center together. When Joel returned, he started sharing brochures and fundraising ideas at his local senior center, the SASC. "I just wanted to help. I know about nonprofit challenges from my many careers, and I saw how a community center can positively impact and provide social interaction," he remembers.

Years later, Joel partially retired. Deciding to keep his position as instructor and librarian in Agriculture and Natural Resources at Santa Rosa Junior College, he became a member of the SASC. Joel signed up for Suzanne Sherman's memoir writing class. "Suzanne was a great instructor. She got me to write - which I hadn't done for a while," he shares with a smile.

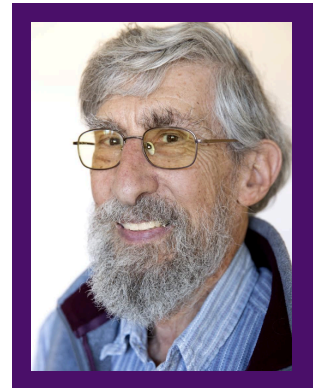
After three years of weekly writing classes, Joel learned of Suzanne's departure. Still teaching at the local junior college, Joel was invited to assume the instructor role. "I started as a student and now am the teacher," he remarks. "This class has been going on for over thirty years; it is important to many people."

Joel speaks highly of Lifelong Learning. He explains that what began as an experiment in 1962 at The New School, studying "learning in retirement," has become incorporated in most US junior colleges. "I have witnessed what happens when you get old. People you know die, and you get more isolated. That is why these classes are important. Classes connect people, and it works!" he shares.

Joel grew up in Chicago, and upon his brother's request not to join him at MIT, he went to UC Berkeley. "I had only two colleges I would consider, so I moved to California," Joel chuckles. After one year as a forestry major, he decided that English was better suited to his skills. Upon graduation, Joel joined the Peace Corps and served as the director of an agricultural cooperative in the Republic of Niger in West Africa. The Peace Corps offered helpful French classes, allowing Joel to communicate with the farmer's children, but not helpful in working with the farmers. Seeking to connect directly with the farmers, Joel hired a local 14-year-old boy who taught him Hausa, which allowed Joel to deepen his connections to his work and support the farmers.



After returning from Africa, Joel and his wife set out on their honeymoon in Israel. Turning it into an extended adventure, they lived for several months on a kibbutz. Building on his childhood education in Hebrew, Joel got a side job translating the poetry of an Israeli poet. Having failed to master Russian in high school or German in college, Joel explains, "I had perfected two new languages in two years, French and Hausa, along with increasing my Hebrew, so I got very interested in languages." Having experienced other cultures and lifestyles, Joel and his wife decided to return to California, where they began a family.



Joel's desire for lifelong learning and commitment to community transcends to his classrooms. He recognized some participants' financial constraints, established a memoir scholarship at SASC, and created a memoir class fund with the local copy store to ensure students could copy their stories to share in class.

Joel shares that his father told stories, a big part of their time together. He remembers him saying, "Memoirs are for when you are on the downslope." Although disappointed that his father never wrote his memoir, he shares that he moved to Los Angeles at 103 years old. "I am glad my father spent time with my grandchildren during his last year. Not many young people can say they knew their great-grandfather and heard his life story."

Joel recently discovered that his granddaughter treasured the stories he had written and sent to his son. "I was surprised when my granddaughter recently asked me why I stopped sending my stories. She had been reading them all and storing them in her notebook." This revealed an unexpected and enduring legacy Joel is happy to know.

Believing we all have multiple memoirs within us, Joel shares his teaching process. "After a short check-in, I give 4-word prompts, and everyone writes for 10 minutes. Afterward, those who wish to share read their story out loud. It is remarkable what I hear each week." Joel's memoir class is a safe classroom space for personal exploration. "I have never met any participant who can't write; we all can write. I see repeatedly that the stories students decide to write about are the ones that they believe define who they are."

Thank you, Joel - for sharing your story and helping so many students share theirs!

To join Joel in Memoir Writing:

LL 502 section# 8596 TUESDAYS @ 1-4 pm - Sebastopol Area Senior Center
in person and on Zoom.

LL 502 section# 4527 THURSDAYS @ 1:30-4:30 pm - Santa Rosa Junior College
on Zoom.

