

HOW TO LIVE TO 120



Author Irving Silverman with his daughter and coauthor, Ellen Beth Siegel.

Everyone has something to give and receive in the mentoring relationship, particularly in old age.

by Nancy Gertz
Health and well-being coach in Boston

At the age of 97, Irving Silverman is emphatic that he's not done with living. It's going to take much longer to finish "giving back," he proclaims.

Irving's list of accomplishments includes a 45-year career at the National Knitwear Association, establishing and leading the Long Island chapter of Parents Without Partners, serving as President of the NY Region of the United Synagogue, and in 1980, leading an effort to allow Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

"I want to be remembered as a philanthropist of ideas, as well as money. I hope to be appreciated as an example of what one person can accomplish in the short period of time we are privileged to inhabit this world. Living is wonderful, but leaving a legacy is even more wondrous," he explains.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Irving after a recent profile in the *Boston Globe* featured his new book, *Aging Wisely ... Wisdom of Our Elders*, a compelling collection of essays by 75 seniors and selected experts in aging.

I've always had a soft spot for the "older and wiser" folks in the world. Walking into Irving's apartment on a sunny summer afternoon reminded me of when I was a young 16-year-old, excited to be able to drive so I could visit my grandmother all by myself. For me, an older person is an overflowing treasure chest, spilling fascinating stories and lustrous pearls of wisdom, knotted one by one over years of living this one life.

Irving is sight- and hearing-impaired, so we sat unusually close together, and I used a microphone so he could hear me. Though I approached the interview in the normal fashion, I quickly learned that I would be asking less and listening more.

Q: What do you say to someone who is no longer able to pursue their passion — whether it's due to health, financial or other reasons?

Irving: All my life I have had to overcome obstacles — I was born

legally blind and needed an ongoing series of accommodations through school and onward. I've benefitted from all kinds of gifted mentoring, starting in my early years, as well as decades of skilled professional guidance. Everyone has something to give and receive in the mentoring relationship, particularly in old age.

Q: Why is mentoring so important in old age?

Irving: Loneliness and loss of a sense of purpose are common in old age. Mentoring provides a continuous loop of feeling emotionally attached and even important to others, something we all need.

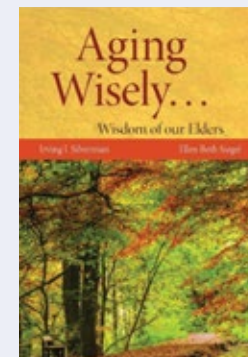
I moved into this retirement community when I was 90 years old, and I knew I needed to make new relationships with the others here so I would feel connected, but also because I wanted to feel useful. There are wonderful educational programs here, and we are invited to hear fascinating speakers.

When I first arrived, I attended some of the programs and was disheartened to not be able to hear and learn and, in turn, transmit to others. Then I realized that I wasn't alone — at least half of the others couldn't hear either. I researched the tools available through technology, and we introduced a looping process, so now the sound is transmitted to the hearing devices people are wearing. We can hear, learn the material, have conversations and teach others.

Q: What's your advice for people who are less motivated, who doubt the value of their contributions to others?

Irving: Everybody's life story is interesting and needs to be told. Tell your story. We have the technology to do this easily, and it is deeply gratifying to complete. Ask for help. Either do it by yourself or get a grandchild or professional to put the story into print or audio.

And everyone can listen. Be a listener so someone else can be heard.



'Aging Wisely' ... The Book

Irving Silverman has always been a "project person." And at 95, he decided to write about living long, soliciting contributions from other residents of his community for a book he tentatively titled *How to Live to 120*.

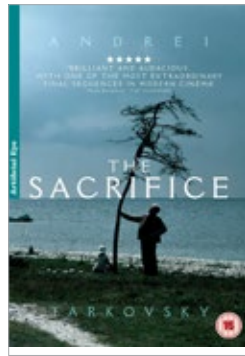
He persuaded Jones & Bartlett Learning to publish it; publisher Cathy Esperti pushed for a greater diversity of contributors and a shift of focus from "how to live long" to "how to live well." Along with his coauthor and daughter Ellen Beth Siegel, they sought out contributors from across the United States, asking them to write about what was important to them about aging, what they themselves had learned.

The result is a book that showcases the voices of a large group of elders and the professionals who work with them — 75 in all — with topics such as the biology of aging; emotional aspects of aging; interpersonal relationships as we age; the changes aging brings (and how to manage them using internal strengths and external resources); practical issues of retirement, housing, driving and money; finding fulfillment in older age; coping with loss; and looking at legacy, how we want to be remembered.

The central theme of the book is passing on the wisdom gained with advancing years.

Aging Wisely ... Wisdom of Our Elders is available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, direct from Jones & Bartlett Learning at www.jblearning.com/silverman, and at bookstores everywhere.

Live to 120: Continued on page 41



The Sacrifice (1986)

The mind-expanding Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky knew *The Sacrifice* would be his last film when he was making it, which may account for the film's extra layer of gravity. On a remote island, an aging writer (Erland Josephson, star of many Ingmar Bergman pictures) and his young son plant a tree on the man's birthday — a gesture of faith in the future. Then word arrives that a new World War is imminent, and this one will probably end it all for mankind. The writer makes a bargain with the Almighty, or whatever is out there: He will give up everything if only the war is halted. As is typical for Tarkovsky (*Solaris*), nothing is traditional about the way this story is told, from the long duration of the shots to the enigmatic resolution of the film's big questions. Puzzling though it is, this might be Tarkovsky's most accessible movie. Tarkovsky seems to be saying everything is at stake, our present and our future — not just in this fictional nuclear fantasy, but always. (Available streaming on Amazon, Fandor, Google Play, YouTube and FilmStruck.)

MUSIC REVIEWS

by John Pearson / Retired musician and lifelong enthusiast

“Death is very often referred to as a good career move.”
— Buddy Holly



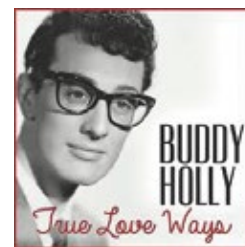
Songbird (Single) — Eva Cassidy, Eva by Heart, 1997

Released as part of the album *Eva by Heart* one year after her tragic death and later released as a single, this track is a fitting legacy for this talented singer. Sadly, at the time of her death she was nearly unknown outside of Washington, D.C. and surrounds and garnered international recognition only posthumously. Her work has since been released on several albums, selling millions of copies worldwide. Written by Christine McVie and first released by Fleetwood Mac, “Songbird” shines anew with Eva's spectacular voice, her razor sharp harmonies (via multi-track recording), and startling dynamic range. Her talent was not limited to her singing ability — as her recordings show, she was also able to attract some top-notch musicians to support her.



A Change Is Gonna Come (Single) — Sam Cooke, 1964

Released as a B-side single, this composition reached a peak position of #9 on Billboard's R&B singles chart soon after its issue in 1964. It has since been covered by dozens of artists and has been selected for preservation in the Library of Congress. While not among Cooke's series of upbeat popular hits like “You Send Me,” “Wonderful World,” “Chain Gang” and others, “Change” showcases his voice at its soulful peak. More importantly, it gives the listener an insight into his more serious side as a songwriter inspired by personal events. The number has a complex arrangement, as well as a darkly portentous tone — both factors in Cooke's decision to publicly perform the song only once in his short life. Unfortunately, the tape of that performance on *The Tonight Show* was not saved.



True Love Ways (Single) — Buddy Holly, The Buddy Holly Story, Vol. 2, 1960

Holly shares the writing credit for “True Love Ways” with Norman Petty, his recording engineer and first manager. (It was a fairly standard practice at the time for an engineer to add his name to a recording's writing credits, although Petty discontinued doing so later in his career.) The song was written by Holly as a wedding present for his wife, Maria, four months before the plane crash that took his life and the lives of Ritchie Valens and J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson. Rather than employing the so-called rockabilly sound predominate in his string of early hits with The Crickets, this now wedding reception standard uses an 18-piece ensemble behind Holly's unique voice. The surprisingly lush feel to the arrangement makes it a landmark tune for Holly, with the strings, saxophone, piano and harp tastefully supported by the rhythm section. The fill riffs by Abraham Richman on sax are truly memorable. ♦

“Your thoughts, words and actions create a ripple effect, much like a stone thrown into a pond. The quality of that ripple effect is your legacy.” — Kosta Stoyanoff

Q: What's ahead for you?

Irving: I want to live to 120 so I can continue to contribute to the world — I'm not done giving back. Recently, I learned that my new book is going to be recorded as an audiobook! I have been listening to recorded books for years as a blind person, so this is deeply gratifying to me.

The way in which one lives has to be determined by establishing commitments and goals and then working doggedly until they are achieved. This has been the key to my success. All of the proceeds of the book I've just written with my daughter will be dedicated to charities that help other people. I am traveling a long road, and I'll continue to transmit helpful information as long as I can and feel driven to do so. If I can reach 10 people, and they can each reach 10 more, by the time all the roads have been traversed, I will have helped many hundreds of people.

Irving shifts in his chair and looks more intently at me, and I wonder what he really sees.

“There may be another person who you interview 10 years from now. You are young, capable and smart enough to continue this journey that I've designated as my life's work. This was a magnificent interview. I might not be Warren Buffet, but we have both gained something here, and I hope others will also be able to benefit from this interview and your column, and my books, in the years ahead.”

With that final stroke, Irving masterfully steps into his familiar mentoring role, offering me inspiration and positive reflection on my work, expressing his gratitude for the connection, and engraving his lessons for those who benefit in the future. ♦

Built a Bridge: Continued from page 33

“Being pen pals with our older friends gave a purpose and meaning for our writing, but the true gift was the meaning and purpose it gave to our community.”

Beginning in October 2016, Ms. Hillhouse-Shokes' second-grade students from Ivey Ranch Elementary School began writing pen pal letters to 22 residents at neighboring Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch in Oceanside, California.

Topics such as “What is your favorite color?” and “Do you have any pets?” were some of the initial focus of conversation. As the relationships evolved, students delivered holiday cards to their pen pals and went caroling at Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch. In January, Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch hosted their young friends at a pizza luncheon, where for the first time the pen pals had the opportunity to eat and visit with each other. As the relationships deepened even more, they exchanged Valentine's and Easter cards and continued to keep one another updated through letters.

For the children in the program, the pen pal project was a learning experience.

“It made me feel really happy (to have my pen pal), because I got to spend time and have fun!” said 8-year-old Annabelle, pen pal to resident to Loretta Brown. “We learned how to write better, and I got more practice.”

As spring rolled around and the letters continued, the school invited the pen pals over to read out loud with them for Dr. Seuss National Read Across America Day in March. Later that month, Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch reciprocated, hosting a read-aloud with resident reader, Ms. Julie, at the recommendation of Leisure Care President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Madsen, who had visited the community that spring.

For the resident reader Julie Terrel, time spent with her pen pal Taylor was a gift. “Her enthusiasm was a-typical for a second grader; I would say she was a lot ahead in most social situations,” Julie explained. “Spending time with Taylor was nice too, because it gave me something to take my mind off myself and my problems.”

As the school year drew to a close, Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch hosted an end-of-the-year BBQ luncheon on the patio. The residents and their pen pals were given all the materials to plant seeds in the garden and watch them grow all summer, just like their bonds of friendship. There were also lawn games for the kids and even a tear or two shed as the pen pals exchanged addresses

so that they could continue writing to friends over the summer months.

According to Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch residents Stan and Nancy Kulkawka, it had been a long time since they had a chance to interact with an 8-year-old.

“We haven't been in a primary classroom for many years and were amazed to see all the computers and new technology,” Stan explained, who shared a good book with his pen pal Ayden.

“We are very lucky to be near Ivey Ranch Elementary School,” said Kathi Keene, Program Supervisor at Fairwinds – Ivey Ranch. “There are so many positives in the intergenerational relationships of our residents and the children. Our residents teach them empathy and character, while the children offer joy, renewed hope, and for some a ‘second chance’ to make a difference in a young one's life.”

Ms. Hillhouse-Shokes, the teacher who began this cross-generational adventure, added, “Being pen pals with our older friends gave a purpose and meaning for our writing, but the true gift was the meaning and purpose it gave to our community.” ♦