

Successful Ager: Kathleen (Kay) O'Neil

UC San Diego

Center for Healthy Aging
Stein Institute for
Research on Aging

Welcome to the UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging and the Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging e-newsletter!

Know a Successful Ager?



At the Stein Institute for Research on Aging we like to highlight the stories and lives of successful agers in our community. Successful agers are those that continue to engage in activities that are meaningful and have found ways to adapt to challenges as they age. If you know of someone that you think we should spotlight please email Sasha Weiss at saweiss@health.ucsd.edu to nominate them!

Successful Ager: Kathleen (Kay) O'Neil's

Written by Lucia Rivera



The passions that fill Kathleen “Kay” O’Neil’s days at 96 have shifted from those that guided her earlier careers, but continue to bring her joy on a daily basis. Born in 1928, Kay started singing at an early age. Her training and performance of opera took her across California and the rest of the United States, where she performed into her early 40s under her professional name, Kathleen De Spain.

After Kay’s professional opera performances came to a close, and the eldest of her two sons entered high school, she decided to pursue her interests in advocacy and

politics. After going back to school full time to study urban studies and political science at California State University Northridge for two years, Kay was hired as the director of Los Angeles' (LA) Fair Housing program under Mayor Tom Bradley's department of Housing and Urban Development. Kay's work in the LA government focused on senior housing, initiating the beginning of her efforts to help support elderly communities.

However, Kay also served in fundraising and other positions with a range of organizations, especially enjoying work with children. After Kay moved to San Diego in 1984, she found her way to White Sands La Jolla, a senior living facility where Kay directed activity programs for residents, now working under her given name, Kathleen O'Neil. "If I had enough of them [residents] out, we went to operas, we went to theater, we went to museums, we went to ball games; we just had a blast. And I was in that job until I was past 70," Kay shared. "It consumed a lot of my life, of course, because I was often out in the evening, as well as my full time job at the Sands. But that was one of my major efforts down here."

After retiring from White Sands, Kay found herself back in the opera and theater space, but this time supporting the visually impaired through audio describing. For the La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego Opera, and Broadway / San Diego, Kay provided audio descriptions for visually impaired guests during "several plays each season until I was 90." For over 10 years, Kay also volunteered reading for the blind with KPBS.

While physical limitations have changed her day-to-day activities, Kay's interest in the news and certain causes have kept her active and engaged as a writer. Just a few months ago, Kay published another article in the San Diego Union Tribune (SDUT), sharing the friendship and experiences she has shared with her long-time caregiver, Irma Martinez. "She and I just have a blast. We shop, we antique, we go down and walk on the OB pier when we could. And just generally we're active and busy in the community," Kay said. "That has been all the difference in the world having that support system. I still drive when she's not here, I take myself out to the mall or to the store or whatever, but it's more fun when there are two." Along with Irma, Kay's old and new friendships serve as her steadfast supportive community. "I'm fortunate, I still have maybe seven or eight really good friends and I hear from emails, telephone calls, visits. All of that has been such a joy for me and we have had purposeful activities in our lives together, [we] have long histories. I have friends that I'm still communicating with every week, and who come by," Kay explained. "They have been friends for 20, 25 years. So I've been very, very lucky. I also have a couple of really, really young friends in the neighborhood who come and visit. I do art projects for them and it has also been a great joy."

As a critical part of her day, Kay also walks for 30 minutes, as her definition of successful aging includes “still being physically able to get around and do things more than anything.” However, the most valuable factor for her mental health is “being in touch with people,” as they “make all the difference.” The third essential component to Kay’s understanding of successful aging is “being able to know what's going on” and staying engaged with the news, which Kay also does by writing regular letters to the editor to the SDUT.

While challenges over the years have affected Kay’s hearing and walking abilities, they have been faced with determination and innovations, like installing a chair lift in her home. Her own guidance over the years serves as her advice to others on their aging journeys: “keep moving and don’t accept where you are in the moment.”



**"The Dementia Whisperer" training session for
RN's & LVN's at Belmont Village Senior Living
April 3rd at 8am**



THE DEMENTIA WHISPERER

BELMONT VILLAGE SENIOR LIVING
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WEDNESDAY • APRIL 3, 2024
8:00 AM - 12:30 PM

FREE 4 HOUR CEU's for RN's & LVN's!



SPEAKER: Laura Wayman
Author and Dementia Expert

Laura Wayman's mission as "The Dementia Whisperer" and as an internationally recognized dementia care expert, consultant, educator and author is to change the world in how all dementia and cognitive care services are provided to those who suffer.

Join us for an engaging and enlightening training session with Laura Wayman, The Dementia Whisperer, as she shares her valuable insights and expertise in the field of dementia care. Be part of this insightful seminar where you will learn affirming responses, dementia awareness tips and strategies. As a care provider, you will better understand the dementia world, and learn how to guide a patient's feelings to a cooperative and positive outcome.

Light continental breakfast will be served.

For more information, contact events1j@belmontvillage.com.



RSVP online at bit.ly/DementiaWhisperer0424

4 Hour CEU for Nurses provided by Laura Wayman.
Ms. Wayman is a CE Provider approved by the
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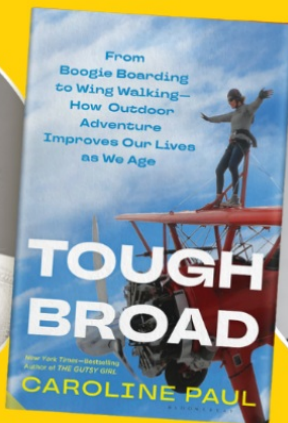
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Join us at Warwick's Bookstore in La Jolla on April 3rd at 7:30pm with Dr. Anthony Molina

Dr. Anthony Molina in conversation with New York Times bestselling author Caroline Paul about her new book *TOUGH BROAD: How Outdoor Adventure Improves Our Lives as We Age*

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3
at WARWICK'S



CAROLINE PAUL
in conversation with **Dr. Anthony Molina**

Co-Presented by the UCSD Stein Institute
for Research on Aging

7:30pm PT

Warwick's
7812 Girard Avenue
La Jolla, CA 92037

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Upcoming Public Lectures



2024 Upcoming PUBLIC LECTURES

Wed, May 15

**MARIA ROSARIO (HAPPY) G.
ARANETA PHD, MPH - ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR**
TBA

Wed, July 24

**COLIN DEPP, PHD - ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR**
“SOCIAL CONNECTION AND HEALTHY
AGING”



🕒 4-5pm

📍 Zoom



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