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50+Living our best lives now and in the future!

Leading the Way on Her Lifelong Learning Journey

In February 2020, Marisa Fink, Ed.D., became the first Executive Director of the [Oregon Alliance of YMCAs](#). "The YMCA is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community by



connecting all people to their potential, purpose, and each other. We focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities."

Marisa provides a wealth of YMCA leadership experience in her new position. She also brings a communication background, a passion for health and well-being, a clear sense of purpose, and a love of lifelong learning.

After college, Marisa served as the aquatics director and day camp director for the YMCA in Queens, NY. "I lived on Long Island, so the commute was a train ride, car ride, or an 8-mile bike ride. I preferred the bike ride, but with the long and unpredictable

hours of a nonprofit position, it was most often a train ride as a NYC commuter."

Over the years, Marisa held various leadership positions with the Y, such as serving as the Management Resource Center Associate Director in Rochester, NY, and as the Associate Executive of the Madison County, Indiana YMCA. She moved west in 2009 and became the CEO of the YMCA of Douglas County, Oregon.

In her current role, Marisa is responsible for connecting with all 11 Oregon YMCAs to "carry out the Y mission and cause, speak with a unified voice, and establish a strong statewide presence." She directs the state YMCA Youth and Government program and is the Y's lead state and national public policy advocate.

A Lover of Learning with an Adventurous Spirit

Marisa chose to teach as part of her lifelong learning journey. She served as an Associate Professor of Communication at both Ball State University and Marist College. Among many other courses, she taught public speaking. "Everyone can benefit from the competencies you develop in this course."

Marisa enjoys learning new languages – at least "enough to travel and be polite." So far, she can do so in Japanese, Thai, Spanish, German, and French.



She takes her bicycle on nearly all of her travels. "I can ride all day in Europe, exploring the scenery, the bakeries, and cafes, and trying to

make myself understood while buying fruit, vegetables, and cheeses in grocery stores."

TEDx Speaker & TEDx Coach

In 2017, Marisa shared her love of adventure in a TEDx Talk, ["Not All Who Wander Are Lost...."](#) Her talk was about letterboxing, an activity "that combines elements of puzzle-solving, orienteering, and art—while enjoying a hike and exploring new places." Her compelling presentation has allowed audiences everywhere to discover this engaging recreational activity.

In 2021, Marisa coached a couple of speakers for the Roseburg TEDx event held last month. "Since I'm on a lifelong learning journey, the two TEDx speakers that I coached taught me as much as I taught them. I used and highly recommend Cathey Armillas' [How to Rock a TED Talk](#). For others interested in giving a TEDx Talk, Marisa also suggests getting a good coach and "practice, practice, practice!"

Favorite Activities

In addition to bicycling, letterboxing, and travel, Marisa enjoys walking. "I can walk all day—and I love to listen to Latin and South African cardio for short 2-5 km walks every day." One of her other outdoor activities includes gardening. She refers to herself as "an eclectic gardener" and says she's "crazy for ornamental grasses."

"While traveling in Italy several years ago, I told my husband that I would love to have an oven outdoors

at our home where we could make artisan-style pizza to share with friends and family; he made it a reality!"

Marisa appreciates cooking along with her husband. "Marty and I have good cooperative and creative skills in the kitchen. "A friend taught us about baking in cast iron Dutch oven, and we have become quite good at multi-grain seeded loaves with millet, chia, and nigella seeds."



For Relaxation

Marisa claims washing dishes is relaxing. Reading is also a form of relaxation for her. "I read several books a month and have been in the Roseburg Book Gang for over ten years." She particularly enjoys reading historical and literary fiction, including *The Red Tent*, *The Help*, *World Without End*, *Life of Pi*, *Water for Elephants*, and *The Alchemist*.

Advice for Others

"It's never too late to write your personal mission statement. Few people have created one and are living their purpose in life. I wrote mine - *I'm on a lifelong learning journey, and I want to take as many people with me as I can* - more than 20 years ago and have helped hundreds of people write theirs. If you're interested in finding out more about yourself and writing your own, I recommend you read [The Path](#) by Laurie Beth Jones."

Marisa also suggests that anyone wanting to live longer, better lives apply the [Blue Zones](#) principles: Move naturally, have a purpose, downshift to shed stress, eat only until you're 80% full, eat a plant slant diet, enjoy wine with friends/food, belong to a spiritual community, put your family first, and find the right tribe—social circles that support healthy behaviors.

Following Your Path

“Forgetting your mission leads, inevitably, to getting tangled up in details that can take you completely off your path.”

The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and For Life by Laurie Beth Jones

The Little Free Library Movement

Do you enjoy reading and want to share your love of good books with others? If so, check out [The Little Free Library](#) and learn how you can share and exchange books right in your neighborhood; there are more than 90,000 of these ‘libraries’ in the U.S.

The Little Free Library, a nonprofit organization, provides maps for locating registered Little Free



Libraries (LFLs) near you. This nonprofit offers a variety of LFLs you can purchase and install on your property; it also provides links for instructions on

how to build one. Or, like Bruce Eastman of Roseburg, Oregon, you can design your own Little Free Library.

A Life with Fewer Regrets

Bronnie Ware, the author of [The Top Five Regrets of Dying](#), wrote that the most common of all deathbed regrets was “the regret of not having lived a life true to themselves.” Ware warns that too many people live their lives based on what others expect of them.

Personal mission statements are typically based on our unique gifts, [passions and interests](#). When we put forth the effort to create one, we may discover the courage to live more authentically and with fewer regrets.

TEDx Speaker Uses Her Art to Reimagine the U.S.-Mexican Border

For the past few years, Susan Rochester, an Oregon-based artist and a community college educator, has been using art to share a powerful visual story about the United States and Mexico border. Most recently, Susan used her art in a TEDx Talk to challenge perceptions about the border and how we perceive our neighbors to the South.



In her talk, Susan used her art in some fascinating ways to make a compelling point. Some of the images she created looked like the weaving traditions of the South West. She created these pieces using satellite images capturing topographical patterns from both sides of the border. Then she reversed some of the patterns and wove them together. Each of her weavings tells a story. She shared some of these heart-wrenching stories in her talk, [“Reimagining an Inconvenient Line.”](#)



To learn more about Susan and her work, visit her website: <https://susanrochester.com>

Learning Another Language May Benefit Adults 50+

Research has suggested that learning a new language after 50 may decrease the likelihood of [cognitive decline](#) or slow the initial onset of dementia. And, according to one [review](#) of research on foreign language learning, it may have “a positive impact on the maintenance and/or enhancement of cognitive abilities irrespective of age.”

Because learning a new language [challenges](#) the brain in unique ways, it may also help enhance our ability to problem-solve in other areas. And, according to a study from the University of Chicago,

“people who speak more than one language are more likely to make more rational decisions.”



AARP reports that foreign language study can increase social interactions as well as a sense of well-being. Also, when we choose to travel abroad, having at least some basic knowledge of a country’s language can increase our comfort level and willingness to interact.

It’s Not too Late to Learn a New Language

According to AARP, as older adults, we may have some advantages when learning a new language. We are more likely to have developed a variety of helpful study strategies over the years. Further, because we know at least one language very well, we “have practiced with the linguistic capacities that speed language acquisition.”

Eating to Live

Citing a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Knowridge Science Report revealed that the consumption of too much salt and processed meat is associated with deaths from diabetes, strokes, and heart disease. However, eating a sufficient amount of “omega-3 rich seafood, nuts and seeds” could improve our long-term outcomes.

Outlook and Healthy Aging

In less than a century, the average life expectancy in “the developed world” has increased by 30 years. Imagine having decades of living ahead of you—many of which may be experienced in your post-career years.

How we view aging can influence how we experience the next several decades. A 2020 Oregon State University study found that people who *believed* they could stay active, engaged, and

healthy as they aged were more likely to experience that outcome.

We are also more likely to develop healthy habits if we believe the future of our health and well-being



could be positive. Findings from this study also revealed that the negative stereotypes people internalized about aging significantly influenced how they visualized their older selves. “People need to realize that some of the negative health consequences in later life might not be biologically driven. The mind and body are all interwoven.”

A Powerful Antidote

As reported in Medical News Today, even people with a genetic variant associated with dementia were 49.8% less likely to develop it when they had a positive attitude toward aging than those with a negative attitude. Older adults with a positive view of aging were also found to have a 44% greater likelihood of recovering from severe disability than those who held negative views of aging.

If you want to improve your outlook on aging, make an effort to hang out with others who have a favorable view of aging.

As Young as We Feel?

Reported research suggests feeling younger (believing you can still be active and productive as you age) is associated with “stronger thinking skills, less inflammation, lower odds of visiting the hospital, and a generally longer lifespan” compared with those who have a less youthful mindset. Further, a youthful mindset may serve as a stress buffer, helping to counter “the detrimental effect of stress on functional health.”

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