



December 2009

VAN FORUM

Creativity, Dance, and Storytelling**Staying Active, Vital, and Engaged**

Dancer, choreographer, and educator, Maria Genné, and storytelling artist, Nothando Zulu, will join creative forces in a lively, interactive art-making journey through storytelling and dance. They will share the *how* of their art forms, and they will explain why they are passionate about them.

Maria Genné engages children, adults, and elders in listening to their bodies to find their unique way of dancing. Maria is the founder and executive and artistic director of Kairos Dance, an intergenerational dance company, whose performers range in age from 5 to 99 years.

Nothando Zulu is the director of the Black Storytellers Alliance. The Alliance draws from the oral traditions practiced by African people who use storytelling as a source of instruction and entertainment. Nothando is a master storyteller who will enthrall and delight you.

Presenters:

- **Maria Genné**
Artistic and Executive Director,
[Kairos Dance](#)
- **Nothando Zulu,**
Director,
[Black Storytellers Alliance](#)

Questions? Need a ride? Call VAN at 651-917-4652.

I am not afraid of tomorrow, for I have seen yesterday and I love today!"

—William Allen White

Photo by Phillip Bode for Kairos Dance

**Creativity, Dance, and Storytelling**

December 8, 2009
10:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Free and Open to the Public

Southdale Library
7001 York Avenue South
Edina, MN 55435

Map to
Southdale Library

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Save the date
January VAN FORUM

Health Care Reform
in Minnesota:
The Impact on
Older Adults

January 12, 2010
8:00 AM to 12:30 PM

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Creativity: Getting Better with Age

By Pat Samples, MA, MFA, Coordinator of the Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network (MnCAAN)

In some ways, I get braver as I age, and in some ways, I get more reticent about trying new things. I like the familiar, the sure, the tried and true. It's what I'm used to, what I can count on. But I also love to explore, to learn, to challenge myself. I'm quite sure I'll continue creating art in some form until my last breath.

That's the paradox and the blessing of living past mid-life. A creative urge emerges that insists upon our attention, even as we come to appreciate more fully the anchors to our past—the familiar.

In his book *The Mature Mind*, Dr. Gene Cohen, MD, PhD, talks about the *Liberation* stage of our lives that occurs from our mid-fifties through our mid-seventies. In this stage, he says that we experience changes in the brain that prompt us to take on with creative enthusiasm what we'd only dreamed of earlier. We say to ourselves, "If not now, when? What can they do to me?" In the next stage, *Summing Up*, our attention turns to autobiography and reminiscing while we also yearn to contribute creatively and leave a legacy. The paradox continues into our final *Encore* stage. In each stage, the creative juices of our present sweeten the fruits of the past.

This creative cocktail also has health benefits. Dr. Cohen conducted a remarkable study to find out if actively creating art affects our health. His research demonstrated that older adults engaged in professionally led arts programs experienced significantly better health than a control group that did not. They had fewer falls, made fewer doctor

visits, and needed less medication. Not surprisingly, they were also less depressed and more socially active. Many of these older artists drew strongly on their past as they created something new.

[The Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network \(MnCAAN\)](#) helps ensure that older Minnesotans have opportunities to create works of art that draw on their life experiences. This growing network is helping to inspire and educate older adults—and those who teach or care for them—about the creative needs and potential of those over 55. MnCAAN's film *The Creative Power of Aging*, created with Twin Cities Public Television (TPT), highlights older artists and model programs that bring the arts into senior-service sites. The film airs regularly on the Minnesota Channel and will be shown throughout the state in community kickoff events for MnCAAN's campaign, *Creativity Matters for Older Minnesotans*.

As we age, we need to create—for the sake of discovery, growth, beauty, contribution, legacy-leaving, and more. We benefit our physical, mental, and social health, and everyone around us benefits

when something old and familiar in us turns into something new in a painting, a play, or a memoir.

Pardon me, but I have to finish this article now because I have an artistic project I'm working on that is calling for my attention. Is there one calling for your attention? If so, go enjoy yourself.



Photo courtesy Jewish World for Kairos Dance

A Story: Miz Maybelle and the Devil

By Nothando Zulu, Director, Black Storytellers Alliance

Miz Maybelle was in church each and every Sunday, singing and clapping, testifyin' and moaning. But the rest of the times, Lord have mercy!

She was sitting on her front porch one Saturday morning when the devil rode up on his horse looking really sad. Miz Maybelle asked him what was wrong, and he told her that he had been trying for over 40 years to cause conflict between Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. He said no matter the obstacles, they were always in one accord. They have never gone to bed angry! The Devil said, "I think I am going to have to give up on them."

Miz Maybelle said, "If I am able to make something happen, what will you give me?" The devil said, "What do you want?" She said, "I want a red, wide-brim hat with a very large feather—like a plume." The devil said, "If you cause conflict between those two, I will get you that hat!"

The devil rode on off, and Miz Maybelle sat there a while longer. She started walking down the road toward the Johnsons' house. When she got to the house, Ms. Johnson invited her in. They passed pleasantries, and Miz Maybelle asked Ms. Johnson how long she and Mr. Johnson had been married. Mrs. Johnson said, "A blissful 41 years!" Miz Maybelle said, "And in all those years, he never strayed?" Ms. Johnson said, "No! He has always been faithful and caring and loving." "That is wonderful, Sister Johnson," said Miz Maybelle. "But you never can tell; so just in case, why don't you cut some of his mustache hairs and place them in your shoe, and he will never wander for sure." Ms. Johnson said, "No honey! We are just fine, and I am going to leave things the way they are."

Miz Maybelle then got up and said, "I have to leave now, but you think on what I said." Ms. Johnson just looked at her and smiled sadly. "Bye, Miz Maybelle."

Miz Maybelle headed down the road, and she saw Mr. Johnson. She waved to him to get his attention, and he rode his tractor on over to where she was standing. When he turned off the tractor, Miz Maybelle told Mr. Johnson that the Lord had awakened her out of a deep sleep last night to tell her to warn Mr. Johnson that Mrs. Johnson was planning to kill him! Mr. Johnson just laughed at Miz Maybelle and told her she must have been suffering from indigestion because as long as they have been together, Ms. Johnson has never even said a cross word to him. "You just go on home, Miz Maybelle, and don't worry yourself; we are just fine, the wife and I." He chuckled a little more. Miz Maybelle said, "I was just sharing what the Lord put on my heart; it was as clear as you and me talking right now. But you do what you have to." She took on off down the road. She had a tiny little smile dancing on her lips.

That evening, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson sat down to dinner together. He told her how work in the fields had gone and she told him about the new quilt that she was working on. Neither one of them spoke of Miz Maybelle. They had a great dinner. Mr. Johnson ate well and when he was done, he watched the evening news and got ready for bed. Mrs. Johnson, sat at the table a little longer, then got up and washed the dishes and cleaned the kitchen. She then went on upstairs and got ready for bed. Mr. Johnson seemed

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Miz Maybelle and the Devil, continued

to be sleeping well, with that even breathing that one gets when reaching the REM sleep. Mrs. Johnson was standing by the dresser and her eyes happened to fall on the barber scissors. Her thoughts went back to Miz Maybelle and her suggestion. First, she thought "NO!" Then she thought, "What could it hurt?" and she picked up the scissors and turned toward the bed and Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson was not really sleeping soundly; he was sleeping with one eye open, and when Mrs. Johnson leaned over him with those scissors, he jumped from the bed screaming that Miz Maybelle was right and what was wrong with her.

Ms. Johnson tried to explain, but Mr. Johnson was not having it! For the first time in their married life, they went to bed angry, slept in different rooms, and did not speak the next morning!

The next Saturday, the devil rode by Miz Maybelle's place. He had her hat, and he tossed it to her from his saddle. Miz Maybelle said, "Devil, why don't you come and sit a spell with me?" To which the devil replied, "No, thank you, 'cause anybody who can cause more confusion than I can, I got to look out for. Bye!"

Heartening Community with the Vision of Elderhood

Have you ever wondered what life would be like if elders in America today played a meaningful role in their communities? What if boomers embraced their elderhood rather than trying to prolong their youth? What if young people sought out elders for wisdom and advice? What if elders knew how to listen?

We're Kaia Svien and Eric Utne. We're both in our 60s and, between the two of us, we've spent many years learning about how to be an elder from elders in our own and other cultural traditions. Now we'd like to share this exploration with you.

Please join us **Friday, December 4, 2009, from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at the Carondelet Center in St. Paul** as we investigate the meaning of being an elder in 21st-century North America. Call 651-696-2788 or visit www.wisdomwayscenter.org for details

In the meantime, we leave you with some thoughts that we'll be exploring in the workshop.

When It's Over

*...When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular,
and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited
this world.*

—Mary Oliver

The Music

*In and through community lies the salvation of
the world.*

—M. Scott Peck

Conversation

*What is more valuable than gold? Light.
What is more precious than light? Conversation.*

—J. W. von Goethe

How to Tell a Story

By Nothando Zulu, Director, Black Storytellers Alliance

As storytellers, we frequently are asked how to tell stories. Everyone has a story to tell, it is just a matter of speaking the words! To get started telling your story, use one of the following prompts:

1. My favorite room in my home...
2. Something that really scared me...
3. I am most proud of...
4. The best trip or vacation I have had so far...
5. My most embarrassing moment...
6. My greatest life lesson....

After organizing the story in your mind, share it with a family member or good friend.

Storytelling is relating a story or tale or event to one or more listeners, using your voice, facial expressions, and gestures. After relating your story for the first time, ask your listener some questions to find out how they liked the story.

Ask questions such as:

- Did you like the story?
- What did you like most about the story?
The answer will help you to figure out what is working best: the content of the story, your gestures, your facial expressions, or your voice.
- Is more detail needed in the story?



- Did you understand everything I was trying to say?
- What did you think of the ending?

Does this route seem too much for your first storytelling foray? Try telling a traditional tale such as:

- *Little Red Riding Hood*
- *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*
- *Cinderella*

The main thing is, start telling stories—to an audience!

*“There is a fountain of youth:
It is your mind, your talents, the creativity
you bring in your life and the
lives of people you love”*

— Sophia Loren

Safeguarding Investments for Minnesota's Future

By Steve Morse, Executive Director of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership

Recently, I was invited to speak at a VAN forum in Apple Valley about the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy constitutional amendment, discussing how Minnesotans can help ensure that the government uses the dedicated funding for its intended purposes. In November 2008, 1.6 million Minnesotans voted YES to provide long-term investments to clean up Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and streams; protect our land and wildlife habitat; maintain our parks and trails; and support the arts. We now have a constitutional guarantee that, for the next 25 years, Minnesota will use \$300 million a year specifically for the purposes set out in the constitution to protect Minnesota's future.

But now the real work begins.

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership is committed to ensuring that Minnesota's constitution is upheld and that, even in difficult financial times,

elected officials protect Minnesota's great outdoors for our children and grandchildren. We cannot let government raid constitutionally protected funds to solve short-term budgetary problems of the state.

And we need your help.

Sign up now to stay up to date on the events and happenings of the environmental and conservation community in Minnesota, including action on the constitutionally dedicated funding for our great outdoors. Go to www.mepartnership.org and click on *Want to stay informed?* to sign up today!

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership is a coalition of 78 nonprofit conservation and environmental organizations committed to the protection and restoration of Minnesota's lakes, rivers, streams, forests, natural areas, parks, and trails.

Volunteering Spotlight

Can we help spread the word about a volunteer opportunity in your organization? Send us information by the 10th of the month for publication in the e-Bulletin for the next month. While we will make every effort to include what you send us, space is limited.

Kairos Dance

Dancing Heart Program

Intergenerational performers

[Kairos Dance](#) reaches hundreds of people each week with its Dancing Heart program for frail elders and its intergenerational dance performances. The agency welcomes all volunteers. If you're interested in supporting Kairos, contact Carla Vogel at 612-481-3078.



Photo by Claudia Dengler for Kairos Dance

From the Chair

I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
—Albert Einstein

Ending a Productive Year

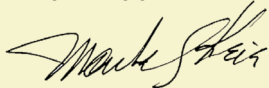
Where does the time go? I find it hard to believe that we are already at the end of 2009. It seems like only a few days ago that we were worried about Y2K. Here we are 10 years later with a whole new set of issues that we are facing.

For me personally, the new year marks the start of a whole new chapter. On January 1st, the Vital Aging Network will have a new chair—Nancy Eustis, PhD and professor at the Humphrey Institute. I know that Nancy will make a great chair. She comes with a strong background and an indepth understanding of vital aging.

The past two plus years have brought a lot of positive changes to the Vital Aging Network: our move to the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging; a new website; the restart of the ALVA Program; new partnerships; and marked increases in the number of individuals receiving our newsletter, visiting our website, and attending forums. Still, many opportunities remain as we reach out to more Minnesotans and expand diversity in our network.

I will continue to be involved with VAN's Leadership Group in the coming years. I do look forward to continuing to be a vital ager.

Thank You



Mark Skeie
Chair, VAN Leadership Group

For Your CALENDAR



Tuesday, January 12, 2010

8:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Wilder Foundation Auditorium
451 Lexington Parkway N.
St. Paul, MN 55104

[Map to Wilder](#)

JANUARY VAN FORUM

Health Care Reform in Minnesota: The Impact on Older Adults

Presenters:

Community-based Panel

- Jan Malcolm, CEO, Courage Center
- Kathryn Roberts, CEO, Ecumen
- Michele Kimball, State Director, AARP

Health Care Provider Panel

- Donna Zimmerman, VP, HealthPartners
- Brock Nelson, CEO, Regions Hospital
- Matthew Anderson, VP, MN Hospital Association
- TBD, MN Medical Association

\$20 - General admission

\$10 - Retirees; encore career seekers

Registration deadline: January 6, 2010

Call 651.917.4652 for additional information

TALKING SUITCASES: GATHERING LIFE STORIES IN A DIVERSE WORLD

**Katherine E. Nash Gallery, Regis Center of Art,
University of Minnesota**

Running through December 17, 2009

The Talking Suitcases Project at the [Katherine E. Nash Gallery](#) uses the creative power of art to allow people to find voice and empathize with the experiences of others. The exhibit includes suitcases by Korean, Hmong, and Vietnamese elders; schoolchildren from rural Minnesota and east St. Paul; high school students in the Twin Cities; and Cedar Riverside neighbors of Somali, Oromo, African American, Vietnamese, and Euro-American backgrounds. The exhibit also presents work by individuals on topics of grief and loss, immigration, and identity. The exhibit at the gallery is free and open to the public. For more information, visit <https://events.umn.edu/000852>.

BOOMERS MEAN BUSINESS: RETAINING A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

Minnesota Department of Human Services

Thursday, December 3, 2009

7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Minnesota business leaders will come together to consider how the aging of baby boomers will affect their workforce. Participants will have an opportunity to network with others and to consider methods for retaining productive, but aging, workers. The event takes place at the Wells Fargo Center, 3rd Floor, in Minneapolis. Registration is free, but space is limited. For more information, contact the Transform 2010 staff at the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Transform.2010@state.mn.us. Click to [register online](#).

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For Your CALENDAR, continued

2009 POLICY SUMMIT AND GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE FORUM

**Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCOA)
Tuesday, December 8, 2009, 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

MNLCOA is hosting a 2009 Policy Summit that features a forum for gubernatorial candidates to present their responses to key issues facing seniors and family caregivers. MNLCOA is working to elevate issues of aging and of long-term services and supports. The agency will serve a breakfast and light lunch to allow for networking with colleagues. The cost is \$40. To register or to obtain more information, visit www.mnlcoa.org/events/summit/summit-dec-09.

HOLIDAY EVENTS

For information about upcoming events during the holidays, visit the [calendar](#) on the VAN website.



Points of Interest

Elderburbia: Aging with a Sense of Place in America

Phillip B. Stafford, Author

This book is an informed and often moving account of the crucial role of place in the lives of elders. The book discusses what researchers and city planners are doing—and need to do—to make communities more age-friendly. To obtain more information or to request a copy of this book: visit www.abc-clio.com and click "Browse Titles."

The National Council on Aging Webinar Series

Using Skilled Volunteers to Improve Organizations

The National Council on Aging is hosting a series of webinars now through January 2010. The series focuses on how to use skilled volunteers in improving organizations. For more information or to register for this series, visit www.ncoa.org and search on the webinar name.