

Never too late to learn

Pete & Shelley Aarssen - January 2026

A popular country artist has a song called “Days Go By” which alludes to the swiftness of our earthly life. With the beginning of a new year now upon us, we are focusing our attention on starting something new! We can lull ourselves into just thinking about starting something new but never actually do it. One of the lines in this song that we both love says, “You better start living, you better start living right now”. What are we waiting for!? Sarnia and surrounding area offer many wonderful activities for seniors and not all of them cost money. Here’s a bit of encouragement to get going:

- Put your past experiences into a new endeavor. While being retired from nursing for many years now, Shelley still enjoys volunteering as the camp nurse at a girl’s camp over the summer. Pete has used his accumulated knowledge in business and collaborating with people in various volunteer political roles.
- Encourage a friend to join you in a new experience. Learning is always more fun when we’re sharing it with someone else. The Strangway Center has an extensive offering of classes and activities that can be signed up for, such as exercise classes, art, music and language courses, day trips and how-to classes.
- Reframe your failures into explorations. Once Shelley attended a paint night and when the instructor was walking by my painting, she mentioned to the class that the good thing about painting on canvas is that if you don’t like what you’ve done you can paint over it with white, let it dry and start over. At first, I took offense and thought she was aiming that suggestion at my poor first attempt at painting a picture. Now, looking back, I’d like to try again to paint. Even if it’s not worth hanging on a wall, the experience of creating something original makes failure impossible! A family member of ours attends a day program for adults challenged by dementia. She never painted a picture in her life and hated to paint anything. Now she is painting pictures that we would hang upon a wall.
- Negative self-talk increases as we age if we don’t challenge those thoughts as soon as they enter our mind. Replace “I’m too old for this” with “I can do this, and I will do this!”
- Stay physically active: low impact activities like walking, swimming and yoga are great for our bodies and boost our self-confidence and energy levels. Pete read an article warning against snow shovelling after 65 especially if the person is not physically fit. The strain on the heart can greatly increase the risk of a heart attack. Here is what you can do if you have been cleared by your doctor to shovel: do some stretching and warming up ahead of time, only push the snow never lift it, take breaks every 10 minutes and never shovel alone.

The benefits of starting something new are vast but here’s a few important ones:

- Improved self-confidence because even if we’re not good at the new thing, we can be proud that we were brave enough to try.
- It brings meaningful experiences to our life. Not just the learning but the people we meet in the process enriches our life.
- These long winter days can pass more happily when we are doing things that we enjoy or things that can help others.

In this coming year, let’s try a few new things and quickly so that when we are once again singing ‘Auld lang syne’ at the end of 2026, we’ll recall with warm thoughts the many new experiences we were brave enough to attempt, no matter what our age! Happy New year!