# Your Life as a Masterpiece

*By: Dr. Roger Landry*

The Masai have a saying: *Life is change*.

If we’re alive, we are indeed changing, and as we get older, that change is more likely to be unwelcome. Being the best we can be as we age, then, is doing all we can to prevent adverse things from happening, but it’s also about accommodating the inevitable challenges of living longer, and even more important, it’s about developing a *resilience* to bounce back when life throws us a curve ball. So, how do we do that?

**Being the Conductor of Your Life**

Research has definitively shown us that our lifestyle is the major determinant of how we’ll age. That lifestyle is not just about our physical self … how much we move, what we eat, or how much we sleep … but, it is absolutely about the rest of our complete self: the intellectual, the social and our peace and fulfillment. Are we continuing to challenge our brain by learning new things? Are we staying engaged with others across all generations? Do we have meaning and purpose that’s bigger than us and gets us enthusiastically out of bed in the morning? Like a symphony orchestra, are the strings, brass, woodwinds and percussion contributing to the music of our lives?

If we are not doing all this (and very few of us are), then we’re not only at risk for negative things happening that can threaten our quality of life, our independence, and our very lives, but it’s also much less likely that we’ll be able to bounce back when life’s slings and arrows make their inevitable appearance.

**It’s Your Life’s Symphony**

Healthy longevity is being all you can be … no matter your age, no matter what challenges you have. That isn’t a matter of hoping for the best or denying that we are going to be put to the test. It’s about being aware of what it takes to build resilience and to lower the risk of bad things happening.

For over fifteen years our magnificent team at Masterpiece has been partnering with retirement communities to support their environments of healthy longevity and wellbeing. These vibrant places are dedicated to the idea that older adults can, should and will continue to grow.

They seek *compression of morbidity* for those who live and work there. This is the public health term for minimizing the time when we are sick or impaired. Achieving this requires that each of us be the maestro of the many aspects of life. How? Here’s some tips we’ve learned from some of the best.

**Tuning Your Life’s Orchestra**

1. **Move every day** as part of your day rather than only as a scheduled event that you’ll forego if you get busy or lazy. In the Blue Zones, where people live to be old yet very vital, movement is natural and part of everyday activities. Try using a Fitbit or pedometer to see how much you move, and then try increasing it about 10% a month until you’re regularly registering 10,000 steps.
2. **Learn something new every day**. It can be a simple fact, or part of larger undertaking, such as a new skill, craft, or language. You’ll be building new pathways in your brain that could very well protect you from developing the symptoms of dementia.
3. **Reach out to someone every day.** It can be a smile to a cashier or a nod to someone on the street, or reconnecting with people once important in your life. Whatever it is, welcome people into your life … people of all ages. Get rid of those defense mechanisms and biases that are isolating you and robbing you of the stunning health advantages of being connected to others.
4. **Do something that scares you every day.** It doesn’t have to be bungee jumping (although if that is what you’ve always dreamed of doing, why not?), but it should be something that takes you out of your comfort zone. Reaching out to new people, traveling without reservations, getting a little it lost. It’s all good for your brain and for you.
5. **Find something that will quiet your chattering mind** if only for a few minutes each day. Unchecked thoughts and worry create stress that rots us from within. Reading, crafts, art, nature, pets, music, meditation … you’ll know you’re there when you feel that peace and joy of being alive.
6. **Find your purpose** … that essence of the current phase of your life’s journey. That “one thing” that gets you out of bed in the morning and makes you grateful to be alive. It can be a small or large thing, but my guess it will involve other living things … people, animals, the environment, etc.

This isn’t rocket science, dear reader. Paying attention to all aspects of our life’s symphony … the physical, intellectual, social, or spiritual … will make this phase of our life a masterpiece with a resilience to manage anything that attempts to put it out of tune.