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## The artful ager: Love what you're doing

By Barry Caine, STAFF WRITER  
Inside Bay Area

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OF ALL the arts, the art of living well is the most gratifying.

Finding what you love to do and doing it makes everything better.

That's the secret revealed in Amy Gorman's new book "Aging Artfully — 12 Profiles: Visual & Performing Women Artists Aged 85-105" (PAL Publishing, \$20).

One of the performing artists is Dorothy Takahashi Toy, 89. An internationally renowned dancer, she and a partner played the Palladium in London and appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show" on TV.

Over the phone, she still sounds like a young woman.

"All my memories are good memories," says Toy, who lives in Oakland. "I don't feel 89, because I still teach ballet and I'm active around the house as much as I can, going up and down the stairs. I can dance but I have a little problem with my left foot. Otherwise I'd be excellent. I can still tap-dance. I can't put on toe shoes."

Her students are in their teens, 60s and 70s.

"I love the dancing, and I wanted to see younger people be able to accomplish something. Older students appreciate it more than the younger ones because they appreciate accomplishing something they didn't know they can do. It's amazing what you can do if you really want to."

That attitude typifies the women in Gorman's book.

A speech pathologist who lives in Berkeley, Gorman became interested in aging artfully in her early '60s.

"I woke up one morning and age was on my mind," Gorman, 66, says. "I am a sculptor, and I was at a plateau. ... I said, how do I keep the sculpting juices flowing?"

She decided to speak with older women who had similar experiences. She talked to her friend Frances Kandl, composer of "7 Songs of Women," the CD included in the book. Kandl led her to Lily Hurst, then 105 and still playing the piano. (Hurst died last year at 107.)

She met more fascinating people, and decided their stories were so good she had to put them in a book. It's available at bookstores, on Amazon.com and at <http://www.goldenbearcasting.com>.

Q: What did you learn from Dorothy?

A: She said you've got to keep busy. ... You've got to do something. You just keep going.

Q: Is there anything you taught her?

A: She likes that I was able to talk to a lot of different people and pull out their essences.

Q: What is her essence?

A: Her dance. I think all these women have a kind of resilience. And all are optimistic. They don't let the down things in life get them.

Q: What is your essence?

A: I'm not old enough to figure that out. I make connections. I make things happen. I finish projects. I have a joie de vivre. As one of my friends put it, "You can talk to peasants and queens and feel comfortable with both of them."

Q: Did the women in the book ever meet?

A: I had a big party for them. Two of them did know each other, Frances Catlett, 98, a painter in Berkeley — who was still driving and bowling (with a) 200 (game) in April — knew Faith Petric, a San Francisco folk singer who's 91. Their kids were in preschool together.

Q: Who are the other East Bay people?

A: Isobel Ferguson, from Piedmont. She's 90, a painter, illustrator, and an actor at Stagebridge. Grace Gildersleeve from Berkeley. She's 94 and a rug braider. Ann Davlin, 95, ran a dance studio in Berkeley for many years. It's still going on. She now lives in assisted living in Santa Rosa.

Rosa Maria Escobar, 83, is an exception (agewise) because of what she did; she's a singer and dancer, she still sings. She started Cesar Chavez Latin American Library in the Fruitvale district in Oakland. Also, Mary Beth Washington, 85, is a storyteller who lives in Rockridge. And Elsie Ogata, 94, is an ikebana artist, a flower arranger, from Vallejo. Madeline Mason, 104, a sculptor and doll maker, lives in Oakland.

Q: You mention in the intro that you came away with a "new vision for growing old." What's that vision?

A: Engagement, engagement with something that you love to do; sufficient housing, transportation, help and respect for the elderly, so that people are not isolated, their medical and social needs are attended, that this is a national priority, that we give our elders the respect and care that we see around the world in other civilized societies. We haven't quite gotten that here.

Q: What can younger people get out of "Aging Artfully"?

A: That there are all sorts of ways to grow old. It could be a positive experience. It gives you the opportunity to finish things and to synthesize parts of your life; to grow new interests and develop them.

Q: Is there anything they can pick up and use now?

A: How important mastery is; mastery of, control of, something; developing skills in anything they do. Because when you develop a sense of mastery, you can translate that into many interests. You can start painting or bowling when you retire. You can run a group, teach English as a second language, do something that you haven't done before or build on something that you have.

Q: Anything else?

A: I think it's equally or more important for younger people to know that there are positive ways of aging. Older people are not invisible. (They'll) never look at an older person the same way. There's so much behind each of them.

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### **Aging Artfully**

Amy Gorman, author of "Aging Artfully — 12 Profiles: Visual & Performing Women Artists Aged 85-105," will appear with her book and the related Greg Young DVD "Still Kicking" at the following locations:

- Friday: 12:30 p.m., Alexander Bookstore, 50 Second St., San Francisco. (415) 495-2992.
- Nov. 14: 2:30 and 4 p.m., Mercy House, 3431 Foothill Blvd., Oakland. (510) 534-8540.
- Dec. 1: 2 p.m., Piedmont Gardens, 110 41st St., Oakland. (510) 654-7172, Ext. 159.
- Dec. 4: 7:30 p.m., Black Oak Books, 1419 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley. (510) 486-0698.