

Satisfied seniors prove there's life after retirement

For these people, new challenges mean life keeps getting better.

By Michelle McColm
Freelance writer

Some people never quit. In fact, some find that as they leave their 50s, their childhood dreams come true, and they become more satisfied than ever with their lives.

Sound too good to be true? Ask Muriel Burt, 72-year-old art therapist and lecturer.

"I feel like 27," Burt says. "I seem to feel younger every year." Her life has been charmed throughout, she says. Within 10 days of moving to London in 1953, she found a job teaching elementary school. At age 40, Burt began taking university courses and graduated from UWO with a master's degree while in her 50s.

Having taught elementary school for 30 years, Burt retired at 62. "I didn't know what I was going to do (next), but I knew in my bones I was going to do something with creativity."

Burt earned the label "The

Jumper Cable" after her one-woman art show in London in 1978, where her paintings depicted creativity as "an electrical cord of energy," she says.

Shortly afterward, the Ontario Art Therapy Association decided she'd done so much for creative people they presented her with a diploma in art therapy. So began her career as an art therapist.

Today, Burt lectures on art therapy to high schools and galleries across Canada. She also holds private counselling sessions and is writing a series of books about her experiences and insights.

"I build myself up every day by working energetically. I get energy just from the word 'art.'"

Her advice to others? "Don't put all your eggs in one basket — anything can happen to upset the whole applecart, and then you're done."

A SECOND CHANCE

Earl Leiska realized his teenage dream when he became ordained as a priest in the Anglican church in December, 1987.

Leiska, who worked in management for 22 years, began attending university part-time at 48,

when he realized he'd be eligible for early retirement. After retiring six years later, he continued his studies and was put in charge of a parish part-time.

Changing careers, Leiska says, gives retired people a second chance. "If we sit around, we can just waste away."

Leiska credits the support he got from his family and church in helping him make the shift.

'I LOVE PEOPLE'

Maria Stam is a 67-year-old who has "done so many things, I can't remember them all." Stam moved to London from Germany in 1964. After working for 8½ years, Stam decided she really wanted to be a volunteer. "I love people," she says.

Today, she's an advocate for the elderly, especially shut-ins. In 1978, she took a course in gerontology at Brescia College and is a current member of the Ontario Gerontology Association.

She's also concerned about the environment and is a member of the Thames Valley Region Ecological Association, which has been instrumental in pushing for London's recycling program.



Michael Jordan/The London Free Press
Muriel Burt of London displays one of her watercolors. Burt, an art therapist and lecturer, is 72, but says she feels like she's 27.