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Alumni Profile

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A different view of aging

An 85-year old marathon runner changed Patrick Rodén's perception of aging.

Rodén '85 met Mavis Lindgren during the 1992 Portland Marathon. While serving as a medical volunteer, he came to Lindgren's aid after she'd taken a fall at the 18-mile mark. She insisted on finishing the race, so he held her injured arm and escorted her to the finish line. They became friends and he accompanied her on several other marathons until the last one she ran at age 90.

"She gave me a completely different view of what is possible with aging," Rodén said. "I learned that many of the things we blame on aging have nothing to do with getting older."

That friendship changed the course of Rodén's life; he began graduate studies in gerontology to discover how and why some people age differently.

His research exposed him to a different theory of "critical gerontology," which views aging from a perspective other than just the peak-and-decline model. Aging is examined as a life-span process with potential for human development and growth, not just a disease process.

For example, individuals who retire from work and a career to nothing often lack an organizing principle for their lives. Many eventually take on what Rodén calls "sick careers," where their lives are organized around the disease process, in order to find meaning.

Studying life-long artists over the age of 70, he found that some age differently than the rest of the population – because they never give up their art. They, like Lindgren, have a purpose. She didn't start out to run marathons. When she was 62 she organized a walking group with women from her church to help her recover from three bouts of pneumonia. Ten years later, she ran her first marathon. But running marathons was not Lindgren's purpose. Her mission was to share her faith in God.

"The marathon was how she exposed other people to what she thought was a greater good," Rodén said. Lindgren and the artists all had something in common – a purpose outside of themselves, whether painting a beautiful portrait, making a gift or sharing their faith.

After completing a Ph.D. in social gerontology at Fielding University in Santa Barbara, Calif., Rodén launched **aginginplace.com**, a website full of insights and resources for people who want to age in the safety and comfort of their home. Resources are available for senior citizens, for individuals facing mobility issues, and for adults who serve

in the role of caregiver for aging parents. It provides case studies, links to resources and information, design tips, remodeling resources and information on universal design – products that are accommodating for users regardless of age, height or physical limitations.

Rodén's website is about educating the masses, and giving people a portal to information and resources.

"Nurses have always been the translators of the privileged (medical) code," Rodén said. "We translate medical terminology into something that people can understand. I employed those skills in developing Aging in Place by providing relevant information that people can use to improve their experience of aging."

For his innovative work, Rodén received the Lloydena V. Grimes Award for Excellence in Nursing from Linfield Good Samaritan School of Nursing. Rodén said the high standards set by Linfield Dean Emerita Pam Harris and Health Science Professor Jack Keyes '63 made him a better student and nurse.

"I owe much to Pam's influence and guidance," he said. "Jack Keyes' tests were legendary and I've not encountered a testing system that made me employ my brain as diligently as Jack's did. My patients benefited for many years because of his emphasis on systems thinking. I employed those same skills in developing **aginginplace.com** by providing relevant information that people can use to improve their experience of aging. To these mentors I owe a debt of gratitude. Their teachings have served me well." 🌿

– Mardi Mileham



Patrick Rodén with Bonnie Saucier, dean of nursing and health sciences.

For resources on aging:

aginginplace.com

Mature Market Experts <http://tiny.cc/1nald>

Boomer-living.com <http://tiny.cc/nacl9>