

## SENIOR LIFESTYLE

# Stuck at home, seniors discover new skills, talents

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Risa Mallin, 79, isn't used to staying at home. She was "busy, busy, busy" pre-pandemic. She went out with friends and out to lunch; she volunteered in the Jewish community; and she took care of her husband, who passed away in 2019.

"You wouldn't really find me home," she said.

When COVID-19 turned the world upside down, she told herself, "I'm not going to let one day go by where I don't learn something." To "survive" staying at home, she takes a Zoom class at least once a day.

"I'm on Zoom, Zoom, Zoom," she said. "I'm a Zoom girl."

Mallin tunes into a variety of programming from Jewish Family & Children's Service, the American Israel Friendship League, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Bureau of Jewish Education. She learned about Flemish artists and the jewelry they painted, and she took up chair yoga and creative writing. She's also attempting to learn Yiddish by watching plays put on by the National Yiddish Theatre.

"I feel like I have so many more areas of interests in my life," she said. And she's not alone.

Suzanne Dreyfus, 68, and her wife, Sue Fimmen, 71, used to spend their time with friends, perusing stores and going to museums and the gym.

"All of that just shut right down, and we're here in our house," Dreyfus said. Now that the couple only goes out to buy groceries, virtual programs have become essential.

"Thank God for the Jewish Family & Children's Services' senior virtual class program," Dreyfus said.

Dreyfus has especially enjoyed JFCS' senior dance and exercise classes.

"I've always really had two left feet, so to speak," Dreyfus said. But now, she's learning the cha-cha, mambo, rumba and even ballet. "It's great exercise," she said. "You don't even realize you're exercising when you're dancing, but hey, it's hard work." Dance classes were never her thing when she went to the gym, but now they will be if she goes back.

The couple also enjoys JFCS' presentations by Marshall Shore, known as Arizona's Hip Historian. "He'll choose a certain year, and then talk about Arizona history during that year, as well as just general history," she said. Fimmen enjoys the opportunity to meet people she wouldn't otherwise.

More than 1,500 seniors have tuned

in since the program's virtual launch last November, said Jennifer Brauner, director of JFCS' Center for Senior Enrichment Virtual Programs.

"This is truly the silver lining of the pandemic, offering this gift back to the community," she said, noting that the classes help provide a social outlet and a sense of purpose for seniors who may feel isolated. Brauner comes up with the ideas for classes and coordinates everything herself. "I'm wearing so many different hats to make this successful," she said. And she's happy to do it.

"This is not a job," Brauner said. "To me, this is just an opportunity to give back."

Some seniors, like Elaine Fogel, discovered new talents during the past year.

"I never could have imagined that I could paint," she said.

Fogel, 67, was always drawn to art and interested in painting. But it wasn't until the pandemic hit that she really worked at it.

"It's amazing how creativity can help people cope during difficult times," she said. "All I could think of was, 'Please, God, let me have use of my hands until I die. Like, no arthritis. I don't want any problems with aches and pains in my hands.'"

The more she paints, the better she becomes. She started out painting children



Elaine Fogel at her easel on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

PHOTO BY ALLEN FOGEL

before progressing to landscapes. Her most recent painting combines both subjects — a young boy facing the ocean.

But the more she painted, the more canvases accumulated in her house.

She donated one of her paintings to the VHL Alliance, an organization she's been involved with ever since losing a close friend to VHL syndrome. She plans to donate more to local charities and nonprofits for their fundraising auctions. With her background in marketing and business, she launched ElaineFogel Art LLC and began selling her paintings online last September.

"I'm not in this to make zillions of dollars," she laughed. She's just hoping to make enough to help her buy paint, brushes and more canvases. **JN**

For more information about JFCS' senior enrichment programs, contact Jennifer Brauner at [seniorcenter@jfcsaz.org](mailto:seniorcenter@jfcsaz.org).