

# Academy for Lifelong Learning offers community and growth



**Lawrence Brown**  
Columnist

After 42 years of teaching middle and upper school, I finally retired. By then, I was teaching the children of former students. There were colleagues on the faculty who hadn't even been born when I was already teaching at Cape Cod Academy.

"How old are you, Mr. B?" one of my seventh graders asked one afternoon.

"Oh, I'm *old*," I said.

"No you're not," another kid chimed in. "Besides, we're not gonna let you. We're going to rub off on you." And he was right.

My collapsing spinal column dropped my height 3 inches. My balding aluminum hair has turned white but I could still think and love as well as ever. What was I to do?

That's when I got recruited by the Academy for Lifelong Learning (ALL) at the community college. Would I be interested in teaching folks from 50 on up? It's its own free-standing program. Adult students pay a modest fee to take a number of subjects per semester. Faculty work pro-bono. Classes meet once a week with an emphasis on discussion rather than lecture. Some classes run for 6 weeks; some for 12, with a deep field of choices either way — over 70 new ones this fall.

I'd be lying if I didn't confess I still miss my kids every day. But adult classes have much to recommend. Your classmates have lifetimes of knowledge and hard-won experience. The joys of seeing kids discover things for the first time are balanced by seeing the adult world through adult eyes. I had a woman — whose age we'll not disclose — who was a senior in high school when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Smart as a tack, she remembered everything — and had a lifetime to process it.

Teachers and students have lived through the same history, but the lessons learned are unique to each. Generalizations and stereotypes just don't work.

The Academy for Lifelong Learning program dates back to 1987. In 2001, ALL got established as a non-profit and by 2004 had offices and classrooms in the Grossman Building at the College. By 2020, membership topped 600. Then COVID hit. The classes went on Zoom and instructors kept on teaching. This fall, they'll still offer classes on Zoom but finally, be back in

the classrooms in person.

I'm not crazy about Zoom — and neither was anybody else. Some faculty dropped out, and some students, too. But we soon learned that Zoom has its virtues. Students were taking classes from Florida, for example. I found I could do a "screen-share" and bring my photography students into my office computer where all my graphic apps are — and my students could look over my shoulder to see, step-by-step, how things could be done. They could email me their work and I could share it with everybody else before class even began.

And while COVID had us all isolated, we could still meet. Several of my students lost partners, some of over 50 years. Maybe we were a pile of credit-card-sized faces on a screen — *but we were a community all the same* — there for each other when no one else could be.

It's not only academic at ALL. There are courses in arts and culture, on literature, film and music, photography, history, science, philosophy and religion. There are classes in poetry, writing fiction, politics and social issues ... they've even offered courses in origami and canasta. The new course catalog can be found online in early August. Go to [www.capecodall.org](http://www.capecodall.org) for detailed information on everything you'll need to know.

Old age can be a lonely, lonely time. Education is never only about the lessons. I've learned that what 14-year-olds need to thrive isn't that different from what 84-year-olds need — what all of us need. We need *connection*. We need stimulation, new and interesting things to think about ... and people to give a damn about us, to ask how we are and if there's anything we need to be whole again.

Lots of new research is demonstrating that we hang onto our marbles a lot longer when we keep thinking, stretching and learning new things. As we age, we lose

friends. Sad as it is, it can't be helped. How can we find new companions? I think ALL is one of the answers. And it guides us into communities with common interests.

In many of my columns, I've tried to let you know about all the good things happening around us. All of them, taken together, make our community a civilized place. All of them form a matrix of knowledge and kindness. So today, I offer you another link to friendship and personal growth. Fall is coming. You're never too old to go back to school.

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