The happiness of strangers
Avoiding the loneliness epidemic

By Ben & Leah Bloom

Yes, strangers can bring you joy.
Caregiving can typically start with a stranger. In the best-case scenario, this person can become a dear friend or akin to extended family. Research studies are showing that even brief interactions with strangers can lift a person’s mood and lead to greater happiness.

A 2019 study found that, surprise, when people are looking at their smartphones, they are less likely to smile at each other. Researchers in 2013 tested if brief conversations with strangers in public could improve moods and found that, yes, they can.

“People who had a social interaction with a barista – smiled, made eye contact, and had a brief conversation – experienced a more positive affect than people who were as efficient as possible,” states the authors of “Is Efficien-
cy Overrated? Minimal Social Interactions Lead to Belonging and Positive Affect.” Evidence showed that these effects were mediated by feelings of belong-
ing.

Their conclusion? “These results suggest that, although people are often reluctant to have a genuine social interaction with a stranger, they are hap-

py when they treat a stranger like a weak tie.”

These little connections can add up, and that’s important as there is now a “loneliness epidemic” hitting people of all ages but particularly those who are elderly and physically isolated due to ill-
ness or age and abilities. A Cigna survey in 2018 found that 46% of Americans always or sometimes feel alone and 47% feel left out.

Furthermore, 54% said that they always or sometimes feel that no one knows them well. This is not limited to the United States as similar surveys in England found even higher percentages of peo-
ple with these feelings of isola-
tion and disconnection.

Lonely feelings can turn into physical ailments, scientists have discovered, and can be connect-
ed to everything from depression and anxiety to heart disease and Alzheimer’s disease. Conversely, the sparks of connectivity be-

tween strangers can lead to im-
proved well-being over time.

For people who are a little shy, these moments of connections can start with just making eye contact at the market and simply putting down the smartphone when out in public.

Homewatch Care Givers is located at 3820 Broadway in Oak-

land and is owned and operated by Homewatch Care Givers of Berkeley.

Creative growth opportunities abound at Stagebridge this Winter

By Vicki Wong

Writer Betty Friedan ap-

proached getting older with an

inspirational attitude: “Aging is not

lost youth, but a new stage of

opportunity and strength.” How one ages may have an impact on how well

feels physical and mental health, and the performing arts are a great way to stay strong and vi-
brant at any age.

Stagebridge cultivates artis-
tic growth in adults over 50 with

Performing Arts programming in a supportive, encouraging envi-

ronment. For these creative souls, the new session of storytelling, singing and more is coming soon with the Winter schedule, avail-
able November 11. Those who want to try a class with no obliga-
tion or cannot commit to the full

session will have the option of a new Flex Pass for many classes in this session.

Registration starts Novem-

ber 18 for classes running from

January 6 to March 13. While

newcomers delight in express-

ing themselves in a fresh way, longtime devotees also find in-

spiration and ways to feed their creativity – there’s always room for growth.

“I don’t think any of us master an art or skill as much as contin-

ue to grow and learn more about it,” says longtime singing stu-

dent Diana Mitchell-Chavez. But when one exhausts the benefits of any given subject, they can either move on to another interest.

“They can delve deeper into the subject to find a new ap-

proach,” she added.

The many layers to each skill set allow for ample opportunity to continually grow. This 41-year-old creative ag-

ing institution offers events de-

signed to aid in creative growth such as a special one-day Master Class in Storytelling on Novem-

ber 7 taught by world-renowned storyteller Antonio Rocha, who will cover topics such as charac-
ter development, handling transi-
tions, building a performance set,

and the intricacies of pantomime. Places are still available through Stagebridge’s website.

October and November include Lunchtime Storytelling on Thursday, November 14 at 12:00pm for a noshing hour of stories from Stagebridge story-
tellers, as well as the next install-

ment of free Personal Storytell-

ing Concerts where listeners call or log in from home to tune in on Thursday, November 21 at 10am through Stagebridge’s partner-

ship with Civia Well Connect-

ed; and the next Elder Salons on

Thursday, November 21 at 10am.

Founded in 1978 by Dr. Stu-

art Kandell, Stagebridge is re-
nowned for its award-winning creative aging programs, and is located at 2501 Harrison Street in the First Congregational Church of Oakland. For more details of any of the events listed above, visit www.stagebridge.org.