

TUCSON WEEKLY, MARCH 12, 2009



<http://www.tucsonweekly.com/gbase/Opinion/Content?oid=oid:123084>

PUBLISHED ON MARCH 12, 2009:

Messina

First-time novelist Marilu Norden, 83, makes aging look downright easy

By [IRENE MESSINA](#)

The United States is on the brink of a longevity revolution.

These carefully crafted words appear on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Healthy Aging Web site](#). In simpler terms: We're going to see a huge increase in the number of senior citizens through the next 20 years.

The statistics are a bit shocking. According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, in 2005, the number of residents 65 or older was 36.8 million. The CDC estimates by 2030, that number will jump to 71 million--one in five Americans.

As many of us get older, we'll no doubt be searching for the secret to aging gracefully. And every once in a while, we'll meet a person who seems to have aging licked.

Local artist and author Marilu Norden is one of those fortunate souls.

At 83, Norden is an attractive, petite woman who looks many years younger. As we sit in her art studio, Norden recounts a life full of accomplishments. She has five children and two grandchildren. She studied art at Syracuse University. She's been a ballroom dancer, singer, actress, model, director, producer, writer and artist.

When I ask what she hasn't done, Norden laughs heartily and says, "I've done a lot of stuff. I want to keep going."

In the 1950s, Norden spent her time acting, modeling and singing in Hollywood. She recalls one special night with delight. "I was a singer with big bands (such as the Leighton Noble Orchestra. At the Screenwriters' Ball at the Biltmore, I remember standing on the bandstand, looking down and seeing Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh dancing by."

Norden later became active in community theater. A number of theater awards for acting line her art studio's shelves.

"I lived in Del Mar for 20 years. I founded the Stratford Studio Theatre for children. I felt the public schools were failing as far as the arts were concerned. (At my theater), there were classes and workshops for children. ... I felt very proud of that. It was a nice contribution to the community."

With a life of great feats behind her, Norden isn't satisfied with sitting on her laurels: "Don't just feel like you've lived life, and that's it, and you are going to live on a bunch of memories. You are making memories all the time, so why not make the most of them?"

Norden is certainly making new memories. She's dating a man she met on [Match.com](#). (Norden was widowed in 2007 after a 48-year marriage.) She released her first novel in December and recently had an art show at Academy Village, an active retirement community where she lives.

Norden's novel, *Unbridled: A Tale of a Divorce Ranch*, is partially based on her own experiences at a divorce ranch in Reno, Nev., in 1951, after her first husband ended their marriage. Nevada divorce ranches were popular in the '30s through '60s for those wanting a quickie divorce.

"I thought it would be a good thing to write about. A lot of people don't have the foggiest idea such things existed. It's a part of our country's history. ... You went there to establish residence. When your six weeks were over, you went to the county courthouse in Reno and had the host of the ranch come and testify for you, saying you've been at the ranch every day for six weeks."

In addition to working on a second novel, Norden continues to paint. She works with oils, watercolors and pastels and creates landscapes and portraits. Her recent show, *Sunsets and Showtunes*, included watercolor and oil paintings of sunsets--all created as Norden listened to musicals. An impressive display of paintings is found on [her Web site](#).

As Norden pulls out sketch books of pen drawings--including images of cats, people and nature scenes--she reflects on aging and the responsibility of senior citizens.

"Keep living, growing, learning and interact with the community," she says. "That's the ideal way to retire. So much of what you lived in life can be so beneficial, especially to younger people.

"When you are able to get around and feel good most of the time despite your age, it's your responsibility to use the talents God gave you, and maybe it will help somebody. It will change their life and help them find a different path. ... People can do more than they think they can, more than they dream they can. A lot of things are possible."

I left Norden's studio feeling more optimistic and hopeful for my future. If at 83, she can date, write novels and have an art show, why can't the rest of us?

Aging seemingly just got a whole lot easier.