

Anna Mary Robertson was born on September 7, 1860, in a small community in upstate New York. The third of 10 children, Anna's father, Russell King Robertson, was a farmer and also operated a flax mill. While Anna's five brothers helped their father at the mill and on the farm, she and her four sisters were taught to master a variety of domestic duties. At the tender age of twelve, Anna went to work as a "hired girl" on a neighboring farm, helping a wealthier family with the household chores. She was to pursue this sort of work for the next fifteen years until, at the age of 27, she met Thomas, a "hired man," whom she married.

Anna and Thomas established themselves in Virginia where they spent nearly two decades, living and working in turn on four separate local farms. Anna and her husband had five of ten children born to them survive infancy. To supplement the family income, Anna made potato chips and churned butter from the milk of a cow that she purchased with her savings. Later, the couple bought a farm. Shortly after Thomas died of a heart attack in 1927, Anna retired and moved to her daughter's home.

Anna Mary Robertson had a hard life for most of her years, but she was particularly productive in two areas .

First, when she passed away, Anna was survived by nine grandchildren and more than thirty great-grandchildren. Not a bad legacy to leave behind!

But in addition her prolific production of off-spring, Anna Robertson was arguably the most famous female artist in American history. Anna's popularity in the 1950s was so widespread that her exhibitions broke attendance records all over the world. In her 80s she was a cultural icon, and was continually cited as an inspiration for housewives, widows and retirees. Her images of America's rural past were transferred to curtains, dresses, cookie jars, and dinnerware, and used to sell cigarettes, cameras, lipsticks, and instant coffee. Anna Robertson was a huge attraction at parades and political rallies, courted by presidents and awarded honorary degrees. At the time of her death at age 101 in 1961, it was estimated that Americans had exchanged over 100 million Christmas cards bearing reproductions of her paintings.

You don't recognize the name 'Anna Mary Robertson'? Perhaps you're more familiar with the name through which she became widely known: Grandma Moses.

Grandma Moses. What a great name!

But more remarkable than the colorful name 'Grandma Moses' -- and even more remarkable than that her paintings hang in nine museums in the United States and in Vienna and Paris -- is the fact that Grandma Moses turned out her first picture when she was *76 years old*. She took up painting because arthritis had crippled her hands so that she no longer could embroider. She could not hold a needle, but she could hold a brush, and she had been too busy all her life to bear the thought of being idle.

Talk about late bloomers! There are many examples of people who became notably productive only later in life.

Colonel Sanders began his famous franchise when he was in his 60s. A Swedish marksman named Oscar Swahn won two Olympic gold medals at the age of 60 and one at the age of 64. He won his last medal, silver, at 72 making him the oldest medalist. That wild and crazy guy, celebrity Steve Martin, became a first-time Dad at the ripe age of 67.

Dovid HaMelech, King David, had an appreciation for late bloomers. In his *Shir Shel Yom ha'Shabbos* -- the Song of Shabbos, King David wrote:

*Od y'nuvun b'seivah, k'rananim yee'yu* (Psalm 92:15)

"Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green."

King David begins by offering thanks for all the ways the Almighty has blessed him. Then, in the final verses, he reflects on the situation of those who remain righteous and productive even in their later years.

*Tzadik, k'tamar yifrach*, "They will flourish like date palm trees."

*K'erez bal'vanon yisgeh*, "and grow strong like cedars of Lebanon."

The fruitfulness of these 'late bloomers' and 'late producers' continues on long after others have retired and put themselves out to pasture. The older the violin, the sweeter the music!

I think I first began to notice I was getting older when suddenly my doctors were getting younger than me. I had a check up the other day, and told my doctor, "Doc, I get heartburn every time I eat birthday cake." He said, "Next time, take off the candles." Do you know why I felt warm on my last birthday? People kept toasting me!

What accounts for the unusual display of flourishing of a Colonel Sanders, a Steve Martin, a Grandma Moses? How do we understand - and tap into -- the productivity and late blooming of those who society tend to dismiss as being over the hill? I'd like to share with you two approaches in understanding 'Late Bloomers.'

First, late bloomers and late producers live in the moment. Their thoughts aren't filled with regrets and recriminations how until they've wasted their lives and how little they've achieved. They're right here: In the here-and-now.

How does a person sensitize himself to the present that is the here-and-now?

Judaism says we should make at least one hundred blessings every day. Making blessings helps to remind us constantly of all the blessings that surround us: The ability to see, to think, to enjoy the smell of fruit and flowers, the sight of the sea or great mountains, of eating a new season fruit, or seeing an old friend for the first time in years. We have blessings when a baby is born, and a prayer of thanks when we wake up each morning.

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When we surround ourselves with blessings, we surround ourselves with blessing.

-- The Hebrew word *beracha* (blessing) is linked to the word *beraicha*, which means a pool of water. G-d is like an Infinite Pool of blessing, flowing goodness and enrichment into our life.

-- In the construction of the Mishkan (the portable Temple in which G-d caused His Presence to dwell), there were exactly one hundred "sockets." These sockets were called *adanim*. What is the connection between the hundred *adanim* and the hundred times that we call G-d by the name *Adon* in our daily blessings? Just as the *adanim* were the foundation of the Mishkan through which G-d bestowed his Holy Presence on the Jewish People, so are our daily blessings the foundation of holiness in our lives.

Say 100 blessings a day -- thoughtfully -- and you'll never lose your sense of awe, wonder, and joy at being alive.

A second secret of the 'Late Bloomers.'

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said: There are no second acts in America. But F. Scott Fitzgerald was wrong.

Fitzgerald was an early bloomer: He attended Princeton and was a literary success in his mid-20s. But that was his peak. By his 30s Fitzgerald was spiraling down. One imagines he met all kinds of late bloomers and second acts who were on their way up. He died a bitter man at age 44, the same age that Raymond Chandler began to write detective stories. Chandler was 51 in 1939, the year his first book, *The Big Sleep*, was published.

Last month's Super Bowl was a great game, if you cheer for late bloomers.

Seattle's quarterback Russell Wilson was only a three-star prospect coming out of high school. He began his college football career at North Carolina State, transferred to the University of Wisconsin and in 2012 was drafted in the NFL's third round. Tom Brady, arguably the greatest quarterback in the history of professional football, didn't even start at the University of Michigan until his senior year. He was drafted in the NFL's sixth round.

*Od y'nuvun b'seivah, k'rananim yee'yu* Even in old age they will still produce fruit. Late bloomers understand that *especially* in old age you can produce fruit.

A teaching in Ethics of the Fathers (Avos 5:25) offers a road map to the stages of life.

40: *Binah*: Understanding. We've experienced the difficulties of life. Beginning, of course, with teenage children.

50: *Aitzeh*: Counsel. With a combination of life experiences and heightened mental acuity, we've finally reached the stage of being able to give good advice.

60: *Zikna*: Old age. We're too old to die young!

70: *Saivah* : Wisdom. Stand when someone of this age walks into the room.

80: *Gevurah*: Strength. That's certainly not how our society perceives 80.

We're right to celebrate early success in this country. American culture loves Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Sergei Brin, child prodigies and 20-something billionaires. But if you didn't score 800 on your math SATs and didn't get into Harvard, Stanford, or MIT, or didn't have a personal net-worth of 7 figures by the time you're 30, I have some good news for you: Life isn't over.

I'd like to conclude with the following story.

In 2005 scientists digging around Masada found three date seeds from the level 34 dig. They were found in a storeroom, and were presumably from dates eaten by the defenders. Scientists being scientists, they tried to germinate the seeds and grow them in quarantine. There wasn't much chance of success, since plants grown from ancient seeds usually keel over and die soon having used most of their nutrients in remaining alive.

But one seed, nicknamed Methuselah, surprised the experts. Three years later, Methuselah, the resulting date plant, was healthy and more than three feet tall. *Tzadik, k'tamar yifrach*, "The righteous will flourish like palm trees."

If a 2,000 year old seed can come back to life, there's definitely hope for all of us to be productive, late bloomers -- into our 30s, 40s, and beyond.

How?

1) There's an elderly lady that sits in a nursing home in New York. Every day this is what she says: "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. All we have is G-d's gift of 'Today'. That's why we call it the Present." Live in the present. Say 100 blessings a day, thoughtfully. Late bloomers ask, "What can I do NOW?"

2) *Od y'nuvun b'seivah, k'rananim yee'yu* "Even in old age they will still produce fruit." Especially in old age you can produce fruit. The older the violin, the sweeter the music. You may have lost a step on the baseball field or basketball court, but your job in this life is never done. And with many of the truly important things in life -- as we get older, we can do them better.

After all -- if Grandma Moses can do it, so can you!