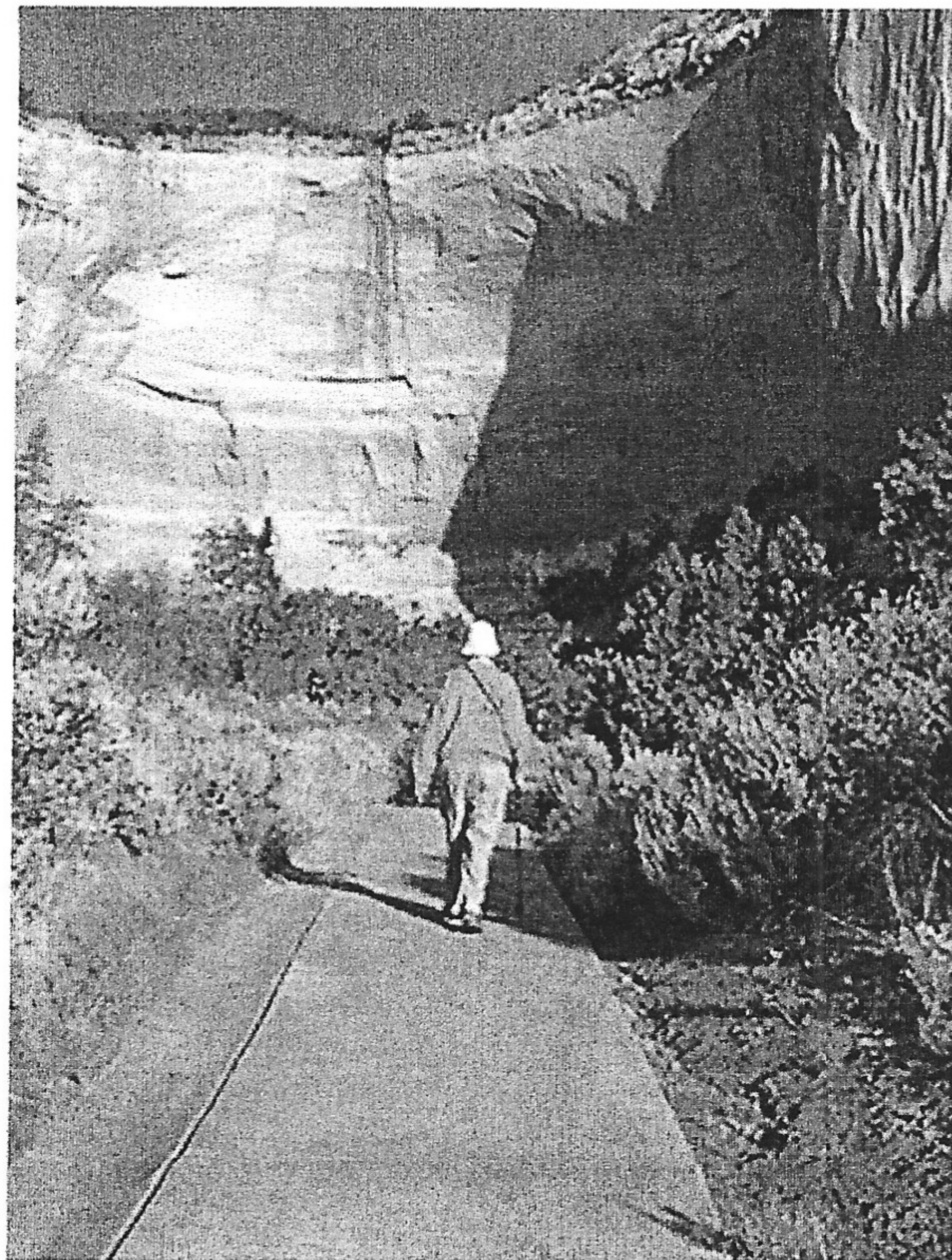


How to Age Gracefully



Village University
April 16, 23, 30 and May 7
6:30pm – 8:00pm

I. The Seasons of Life



Session 1. The Seasons of Life

Intent: To know the five seasons of life. To experience the turning points in own life.

6:30

in 1993

Opening: Chinese Dr. in H.K. – come in here....go out here...in between so precious.

Introductions – share one popular image of “aging” in society today...just one or two words.

Context: • Today’s elderly, fastest growing segment of population. We have 4 sessions to look at the journey of our lives...and the question of aging. 1: look at own life; 2: building the foundation; 3: clarifying vocational intent; and 4: storying our own journey. – learn from each other.

Exercise and nutrition – we can read about in the newspaper constantly. Many things written about the significance of what the changes in length of life mean for us...we’ll look at some of that.

• Each session...open with poem/prayer, conversation, exercise, sharing, close with poetry (and a gift of a story) List of resources in back of notebook.

• “Aging isn’t the problem. It’s the images that we hold about it, our cultural expectations, that cause our problems.” (*From Age-ing to Sage-ing*) People say, “you are only as old as you feel.” Some truth there...how we age depends on the way we internalize images of old. A helpful tool for conscious aging – bring into clear focus one’s whole life.

With Age Wisdom

*“At twenty, stooping round about,
I thought the world a miserable place,
Truth a trick, faith in doubt,
Little beauty, less grace.*

*Now at sixty what I see,
Although the world is worse by far,
Stops my heart in ecstasy,
God, the wonders that there are!” Archibald MacLeish*

6:40

Many years ago we began working with ancient Hindu tradition: 4 stages of life – Youth, Emerging Adult, Established Adult, and Elder (ending at about 80 years old)

Since the population is aging...fastest growing part of population over 85...we re-did the "seasons of life" to reflect the probability of living to 100. It used to be that the major question for a 65 year old was - "are you ready to let go and meet your maker?" Now the relevant question is, "what are your plans for the next 25 years?"

The Seasons of Life: Before looking at your own life...look at the 5 seasons for all of us... to give us an overview first.

Conversation: The Five Seasons of Life - take a minute to look at the chart...then let's talk a bit and be sure we're looking at the same chart.

- what words/phrases caught your eye? (go around group)
- which words were the most striking to you?
- what associations did you make with any of the categories? - what pictures come to mind?
- what surprised you? Puzzled you?
- which images made you feel uneasy?
- what societal images are called into question by this chart?
- how might this chart be used?
- what is this saying to us about aging?

7:00

Charting: Creating a Personal Lifeline

may never have drawn it all out on one piece of paper

Every human being has a history of life-changing events where, on the one side of the event, life was one way, and, on the other side of the event, life was somehow quite different. In this exercise, we will create a picture of our personal history - listing these events and arranging them along the line of our lives.

- have fun - just write the things*
1. Create a list of the key events in your life. For each item below, write a key event from your life and the year it happened. *come to mind*

Kinds of Events

your life - whatever write down is for you -

- an angry argument: *w/ Daddy over politics - 1972*
- * • the death of a beloved relative: - *Daddy - 1992 ~ Mother 1994*
- making a whopper of a mistake: - *not changing Tim's school 1966*
- * • a major success in your life: *The Fax Way published & out 2003*
- an accident to yourself: —

* • a move or change of job: *forming co. w/ Joel - 1989*

* • the time you experienced an "awakening": - *RB-1 - 1965*

• an act of god, like a hurricane, earthquake or flood that you experienced:

• a strange encounter: - *the team we traveled w/ during IERD in Ind. 1984*
Sitting thro. hurricane

• some event that made you see things anew:

• a family drama: *boys fighting in Costa Rica - 2006*
The Writer's Group - 2004

List any other major events that don't fit above:

move to KC - 2001
adopting Mary - 1964
** summer in Tanga - 1982*
Sold folks property 1995
Bought Blue Heaven 1999
PNC - 2004

Sick in Nairobi 1979

7:15

2. Put a star beside the five big events in your life.

3. Using the blank Timeline

• Divide your age by five to get the number of spaces to divide your line into. (If you are forty-two years old, you will have nine five-year spaces. If you are sixty-four, you will have thirteen. I just turned 77 so I'd draw 16 spaces.) Now divide your chart into that number of spaces, and mark the years of your life 5, 10, 15, etc. Birth date - - - - - 5 year increments - - - - - 2008

• Write all the events underneath your lifeline...by date

4. Creating the sections of the chart.

• Place a star for each of the five key events on the timeline where they occurred and mark them on the top of the line with a big star and a brief annotation.-
Markers - like buoys floating by the channel of memories. Memory buoys mark turning points.

• Draw lines up from the baseline at each of these points so that your chart now has six divisions.

• Consider how each of those major events changed your understanding of yourself.

5. Assigning Titles (examples of titles – poetic metaphors: “*Searching for the Way*”
“*Spirit Sharpens Skills*” “*A Different Family is Born*” “*Create the Business*”

- In light of your consideration, give a factual or poetic title to those six parts of your life that captures its unique character.
- In other row above the sections and group the sections into two main parts. Give both parts a title that describe it.
- In the top row of the chart give your whole life up to now a title that pulls together the other titles.

7:35

Reflection – individual

What happened to you as you did this exercise?

What did you struggle with most?

What came clear to you in the process?

What does this tell you about your future?

7:45

Closing Reflection

- what discover
- what stood out
- what most helpful
- what happened to you as charted your life
- how did your life come alive
- what insights about the future

Assignment:

During the week...jot notes across the bottom...what happening in the community and the world in those time periods. How did they affect your life? Encourage you to work on this at home...limited time in our class. Keep in notebook...and bring next week. We will build on what we've started.

Dali Lama: *How To See Yourself As You Really Are* – (2006 book) self-knowledge is the key to personal development and positive relationships.

"If we wish to have the brightest of futures, we need to know the best of our pasts."
Toni Morrison

Closing poem (Read together)

*"Nothing that is worth doing
can be achieved in our lifetime;
therefore we must be saved by hope.*

*- Poem that has held my
life together since about
1970 -*

*Nothing which is true or beautiful or good
Makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;
therefore we must be saved by faith.*

*Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone;
therefore we are saved by love.*

*No virtuous act is as virtuous from the standpoint
Of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint.
therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love
Which is forgiveness."*

Reinhold Niebuhr

Gift: "Getting Old" – anonymous

(If have time read the story before the poem)

to ascend circle - read 1st at a time -
if have time -

9

Getting Old?

The other day a young person asked me how I felt about being old. I was taken aback, for I do not think of myself as old. Upon seeing my reaction, she was immediately embarrassed, but I explained that it was an interesting question, and I would ponder it, and let her know.

Old Age, I decided, is a gift. I am now, probably for the first time in my life, the person I have always wanted to be. Oh, not my body! I sometime despair over my body, the wrinkles, the baggy eyes, and the sagging butt. And often I am taken aback by that old person that lives in my mirror (who looks like my mother!), but I don't agonize over those things for long. I would never trade my amazing friends, my wonderful life, my loving family for less gray hair or a flatter belly.

As I've aged, I've become more kind to myself, and less critical of myself. I've become my own friend. I don't chide myself for eating that extra cookie, or for not making my bed, or for buying that silly cement gecko that I didn't need, but looks so avante garde on my patio. I am entitled to a treat, to be messy, to be extravagant.

I have seen too many dear friends leave this world too soon; before they understood the great freedom that comes with aging.

Whose business is it if I choose to read or play on the computer until 4 AM and sleep until noon? I will dance with myself to those wonderful tunes of the 60&70's, and if I, at the same time, wish to weep over a lost love ... I will. I will walk the beach in a swim suit that is stretched over a bulging body, and will dive into the waves with abandon if I choose to, despite the pitying glances from the jet set.

They, too, will get old. I know I am sometimes forgetful. But there again, some of life is just as well forgotten. And I eventually

remember the important things. Sure, over the years my heart has been broken. How can your heart not break when you lose a loved one, or when a child suffers, or even when somebody's beloved pet gets hit by a car? But broken hearts are what give us strength and understanding and compassion.

A heart never broken is pristine and sterile and will never know the joy of being imperfect. I am so blessed to have lived long enough to have my hair turning gray, and to have my youthful laughs be forever etched into deep grooves on my face. So many have never laughed, and so many have died before their hair could turn silver.

As you get older, it is easier to be positive. You care less about what other people think. I don't question myself anymore. I've even earned the right to be wrong.

So, to answer your question, I like being old. It has set me free. I like the person I have become. I am not going to live forever, but while I am still here, I will not waste time lamenting what could have been, or worrying about what will be. And I shall eat dessert every single day. (If I feel like it)

--anonymous

II. Building the Foundation

Liz' Jane Smith and Chris.

Photo by Crowell of Byersville



Poem
Cant.
exercise
poem
strongly

other life expectancy
charts r 1

Session 2 Building the Foundation

Intent: To recognize the important things in one's own life. To experience gratefulness for the foundation stones that are in place.

Here you have had
time to continue work on

6:30

Opening: This is our 2nd session – and we want to take time to examine the foundation that we have been building ... and are continuing to build.

your
th front!

Poem: A holy man was having
A conversation with the Lord one day and said,
Lord, I would like to know what Heaven
and Hell are like."

Socrates

hard in our
every day

It is the unexamined
life that is not
worth living

The Lord led the holy
man to two doors. He opened one of the doors
and the holy man looked in. In the
middle of the room was a large round table.

Dean Coffin

It is the
unexamined
life not worth
living.

In the middle of the table was a large
pot of stew which smelled
delicious and made the holy man's mouth water.

The people sitting around
the table were thin and sickly. They
appeared to be famished. They were
holding spoons with very long handles
that were strapped to their arms and
each found it possible to reach
into the pot of stew and take a spoonful,
But because the handle was
longer than their arms, they could
not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The holy man shuddered
at the sight of their misery and suffering.

The Lord said, "You have seen Hell."

They went to the next
room and opened the door. It was exactly the
same as the first one. There
was the large round table with the large

pot of stew which made the holy man's mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The holy man said, "I don't understand."

It is simple" said the Lord,
"it requires but one skill. You see,
they have learned to feed each other,
while the greedy think only of
themselves."

6:40

Conversation: Images of Being Elderly

- what are positive images you have heard about being elderly?
- what are negative images?
- what would it take to transform those negative images into positive ones?
- what is one piece of advice that you would give to someone worried about aging?

Research by Yale University and Ohio Longitudinal Study found that "older people with a more positive attitude toward old age lived seven and a half years longer. People with a positive perception of aging, of themselves as an aging person, seem to have a longevity advantage."

3 elderly friends have that out
- Stormy - 89 - Rosemary - John R. Kent
"yes" mid-80s poem

7:00

Life Expectancy: The elderly are the fastest growing segment of the population. This is because of nutritional, medical and economic advancements. Ken Dychtwald, a gerontologist, calls the Age Wave that is coming a tidal wave. Let's look how the numbers have changed – and what you can expect. "Throughout recorded history only one in ten people could expect to live to 65 – today, nearly 80% of Americans will live past that age." Look at charts: When you locate your age bracket...what is your first thought?

Mark where
find yourself -

only last man.

how has expectancy changed
for you

Successful Aging

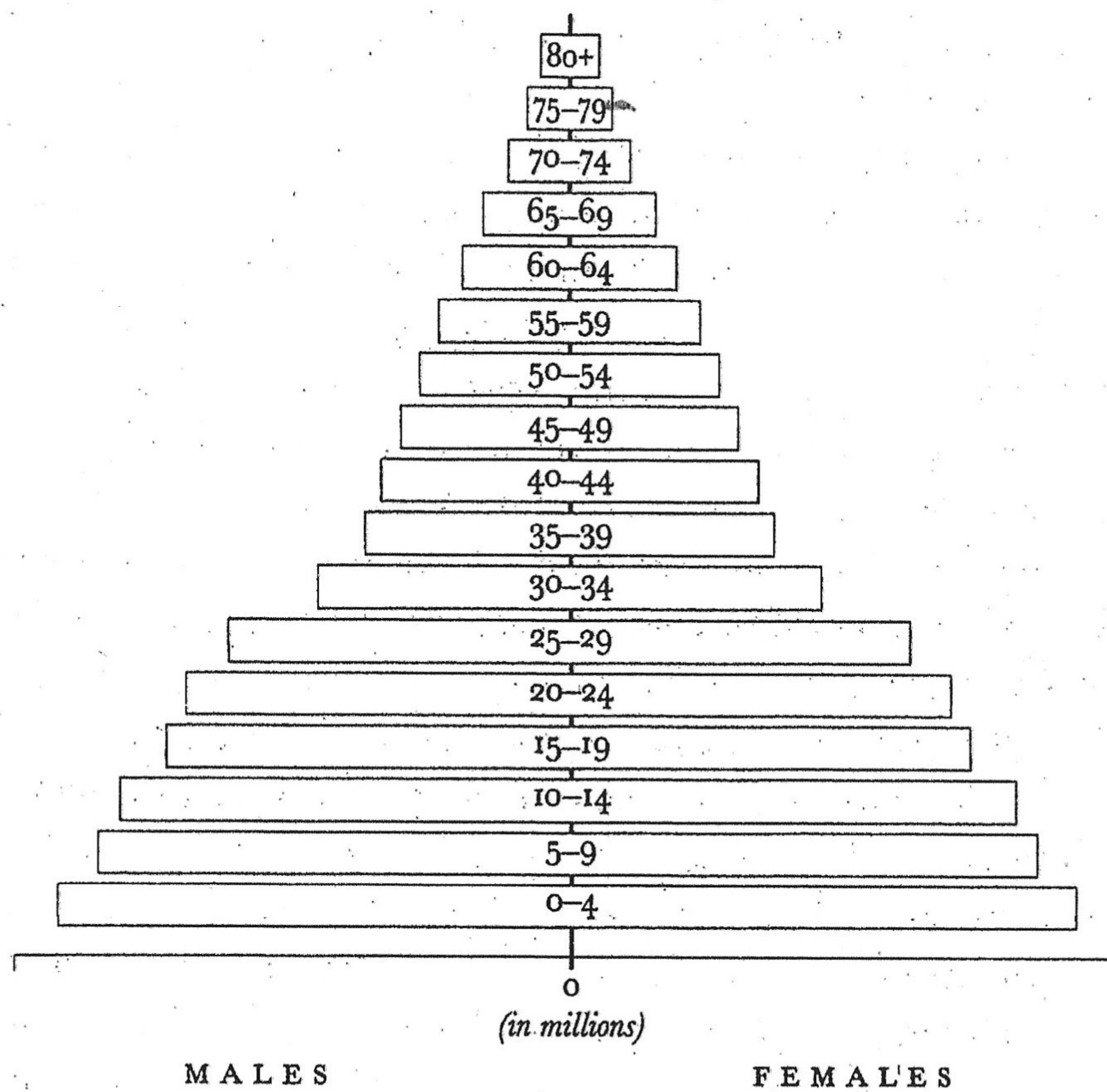


Figure 1. United States in 1900

Aging in America—The New Longevity

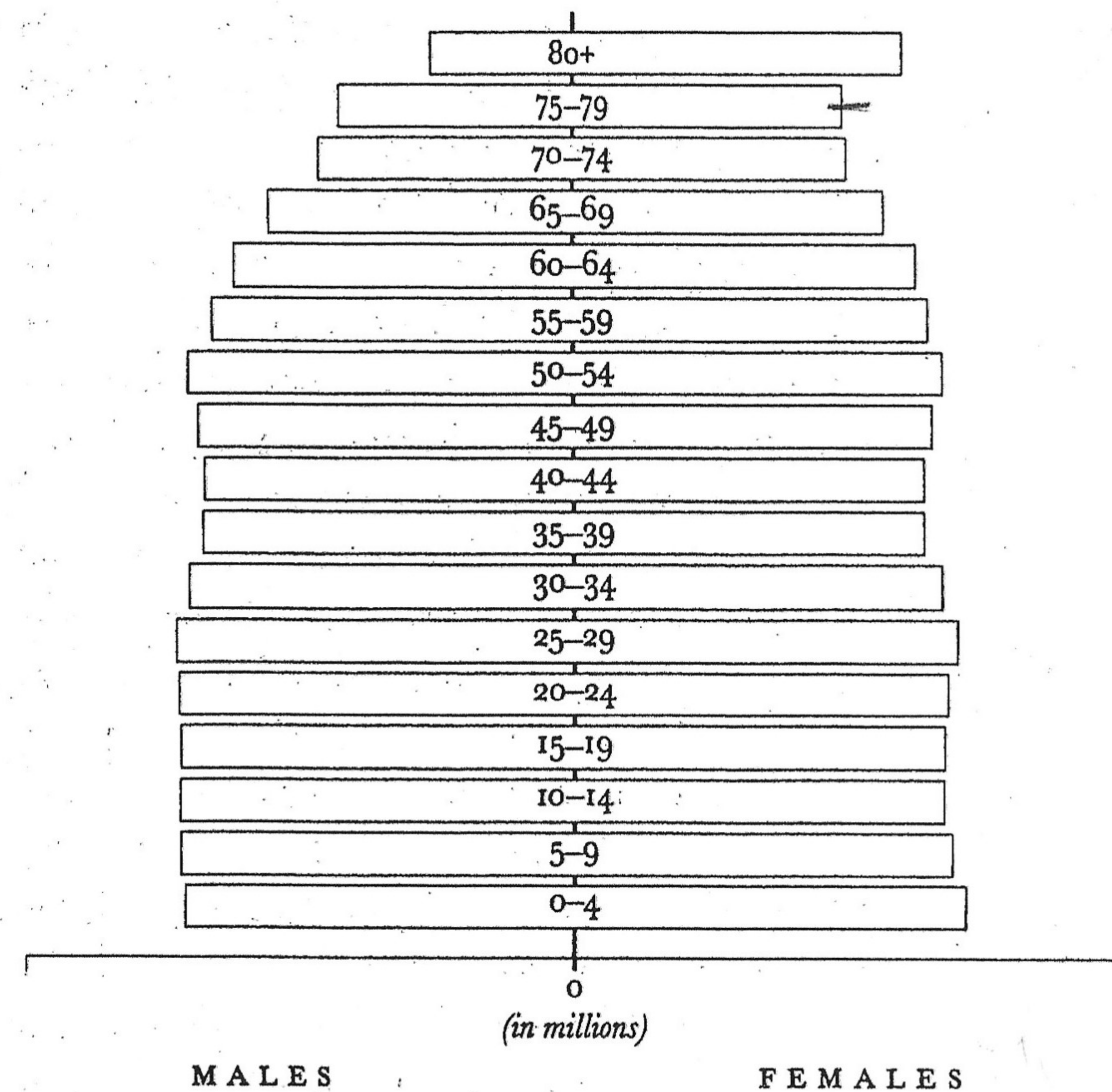
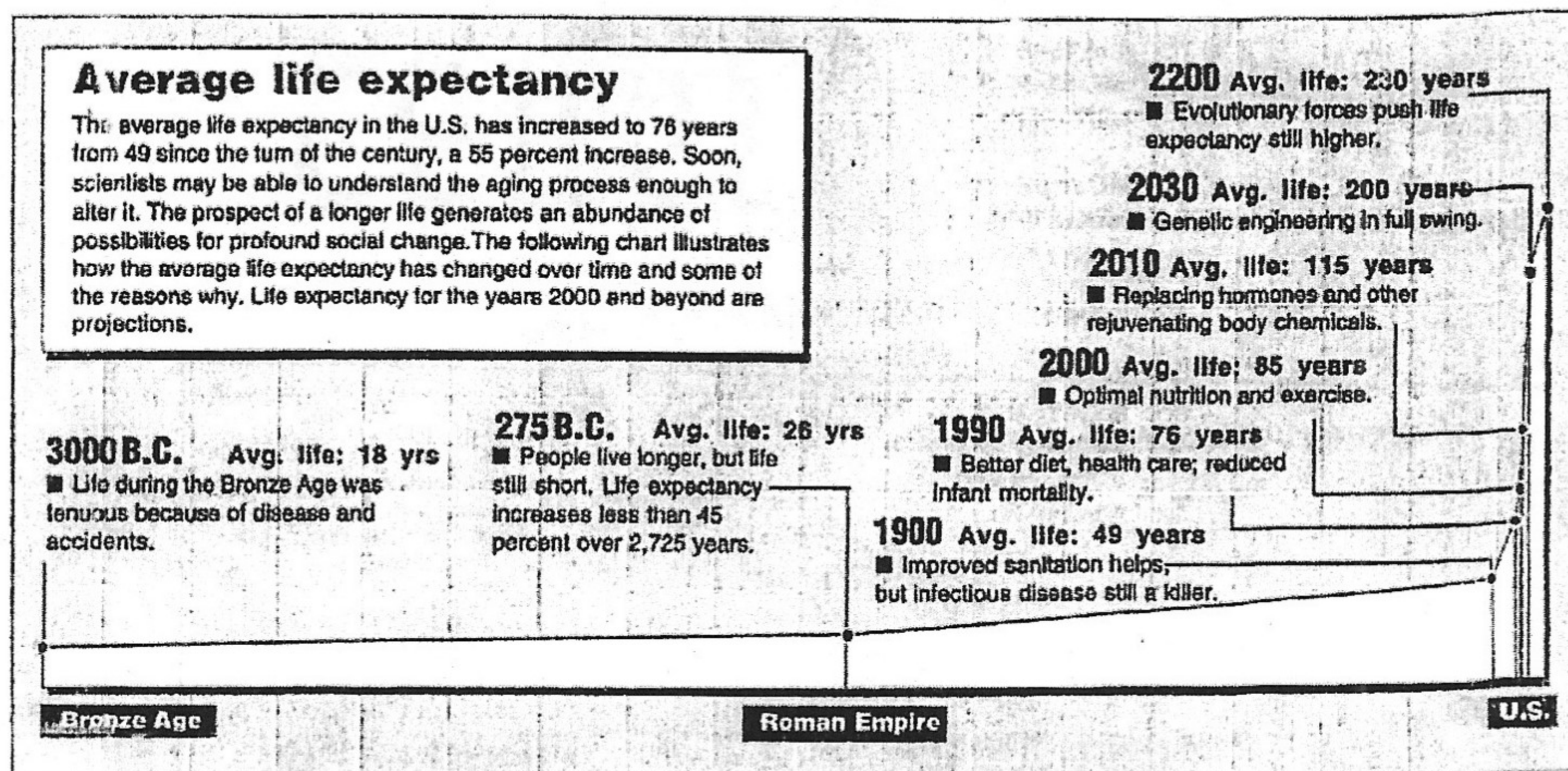


Figure 2. United States in the 21st Century



- enpg2 -

look at hand out -
locate yourself -
how has the
expectancy
changed for
you?

"There's a lot of loss associated with aging, and humans are the only species that recognizes that time eventually runs out. Appreciating the fragility of life helps you savor it" "When your time perspective shortens, as it does when you come closer to the ends of things, you tend to focus on emotionally meaningful goals."

7:10

Workshop: The Foundation Stones

Context: Exercise from Anthony de Mello in *Wellsprings, A Book of Spiritual Exercises*.

He calls his exercises gateways to enlightenment...I think of this one as Foundation Stones. I'll read through the exercise with pauses . . . so you can write. There are no right answers. Trust your intuitions - don't think too hard. I'll read through and give you time to write....or if you need to follow a different pace, feel free to do so.

Exp. for stones we've been putting
in place -

write 3-4 things after each what ever comes to mind 1st

3/4

7:10
20 min.

Foundation Stones

1. These things I have loved in life:

things I tasted,

chocolate
cat fish
ripe peach

looked at,

yellow daffodils
ocean waves
rolling clouds
an unexpected bird

smelled,

coffee
sweet grass
fresh mown grass

heard,

Rachmaninoff 2nd Concerto
baby giggling
organ music

touched.

velvet
crystal glass
baby's skin

2. Experiences I have cherished:

walking beach w/ Rod
birding w/ Rod - Pam

3. Ideas have brought me liberation:

I am accepted

obedience - responsibility
freedom

4. Convictions I have lived by:

community is crucial
women have gifts the world
needs

5. Things I have lived for:

family
church, understanding
a healthier world

6. Insights I have gained in the school of life:

- the world,

such a small blue marble
hunger crisis we face -

- human nature,

essentially good

- love,

is found many places

- prayer.

hard to know how alone - community
helps

7. Risks I took, these dangers I have courted:

African language / teaching / facilitating to help others
trips part. in NAC & OE

8. Sufferings have seasoned me:

Tina's early struggles
Rod's illnesses

9. Lessons life has taught me:

must give back - not
often sure how - own
wishes get in the way -

10. Influences that have shaped my life (persons, occupations,
books, events):

JWM - MWM - fac. w/ Joel
BSI NWF - PNC - opened my
eyes -

11. Things I regret about my life:

not changing Tim's school
not more time w/ Marcelo Jeff
pushing my own agenda too often

12. My life's achievements:

wonderful family
singing w/ choir

13. Persons enshrined within my heart:

parents
many friends
family

14. My unfulfilled desires:

Several spots of travel
someone to take over for more time w/ family

7:30

Share work in triads.

Share what willing to share -

"wrote

"happened to you -

"thinking as wrote -

7:45

Group share: What did you learn about someone else? What makes these things you have written foundations stones for aging gracefully?

why did I call these
for stones -

Two quotes worth noting:

Einstein re the atom bomb, "We've changed everything except our way of thinking."

Gandhi, "It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom."

7:58

Next week: we'll look at our vocational intentions. Major life transitions generally occur in the 4th quarter of life. Since 50-75 year olds show the most rapid growth in our population...want to look at education (cradle to grave); work (paid and unpaid: what is needed); and leisure.

Assignment: "New Images for the Senior"

Mark words and phrases that speak to you. Pay particular attention to:

1/3 of group to "Aging;: The Mood of Passing Away"

1/3 of group to "Aging: the New Mood of Possibility"

1/3 of group to "The Spirit Journey"

Questions: What are the major points in this section?

What experiences are you familiar with...you or someone you know?

What questions does this raise for you?

Earth is not aging gracefully - requires our help -

Yes 6 7
head together -

Closing:

"The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move,
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.
What are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity's sake?"
Christopher Fry
A Sleep of Prisoners

"no"
"yes"



85th B-Day
Last of June this is

7 9

Aging by Anne Wood

Save your money.....be a responsible guardian of whatever resources are yours.

Start amassing your medical staff when you are young. Care is more compassionate and competent when you have a long history with your primary care giver, your cardiologist, your opthmologist, your dentist, your gynecologist, your orthopedic surgeon, your gastroenterologist, your dermatologist....even a healthy person needs these guardians and more.

Get your important papers in order...Your will, your power of attorney, your wishes re: resuscitation etc.

Stay put.....you'll be happier where you have roots. If you need to move try not to leave your familiar area where you know the dry cleaner, your favorite grocery store, shopping mall etc.

Follow your bliss.....sign up for a watercolor class, learn how to grow orchids, try your hand at quilting, explore ceramics, experiment with photography, how about creative writing? There has to be certain areas that you always wanted to experience but never had time.

Read voraciouslyromance, history, nonsense, politics, what ever strikes your fancy.

Say something caring.....to at least one person everyday.

Dance.....with or without a partner.

Belong to at least 3 clubs or groups (i.e., book, garden, political) where the membership is roughly half your age.

If you're not.....become computer literate...your window to the world.

Learn to use a cell phone.....it's your protection and security.

Give your time and resources to a cause that you feel passionate about. It doesn't have to be money. It can be sharing your expertise and experience.

Listen to music and make your own.....sing even if you can't carry a tune.

Reflect...write poetry.....you can do it!..... (often in the middle of the night) Write your memoirs.....can be done in short sketches and the next generation will benefit.

Find a way to exercise no matter how limited your physical capabilities may be.

Travel.....even if it's to the other side of town. Open your eyes.....Explore.

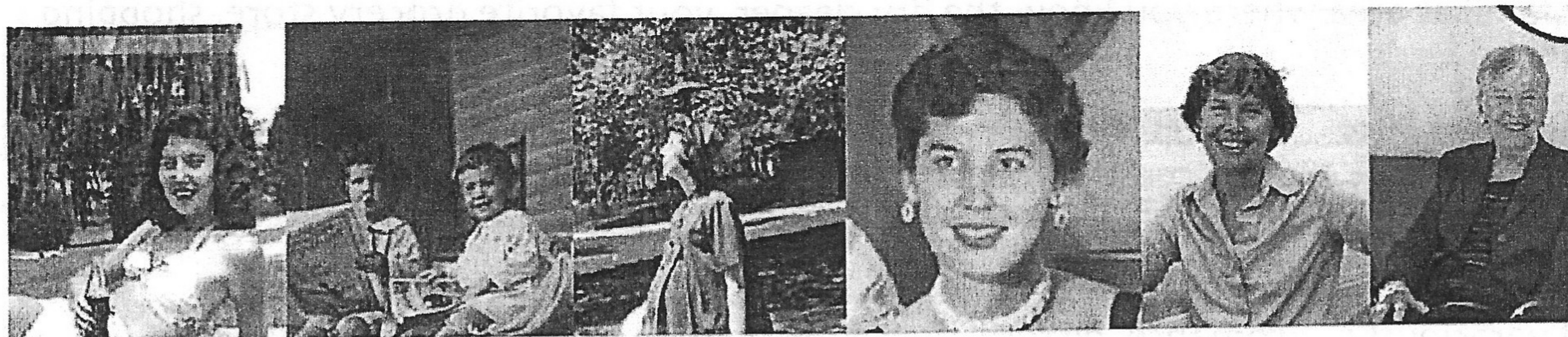
Talk and LISTEN to young people.....their music and their movies.....that'll put a spin on your consciousness!

Always wear lipstick and your favorite colors.

Pay attention to your diet.....beyond calories...what is most nutritious? what foods to avoid.....and yes, you can have a glass of wine every night and more than one sometimes...

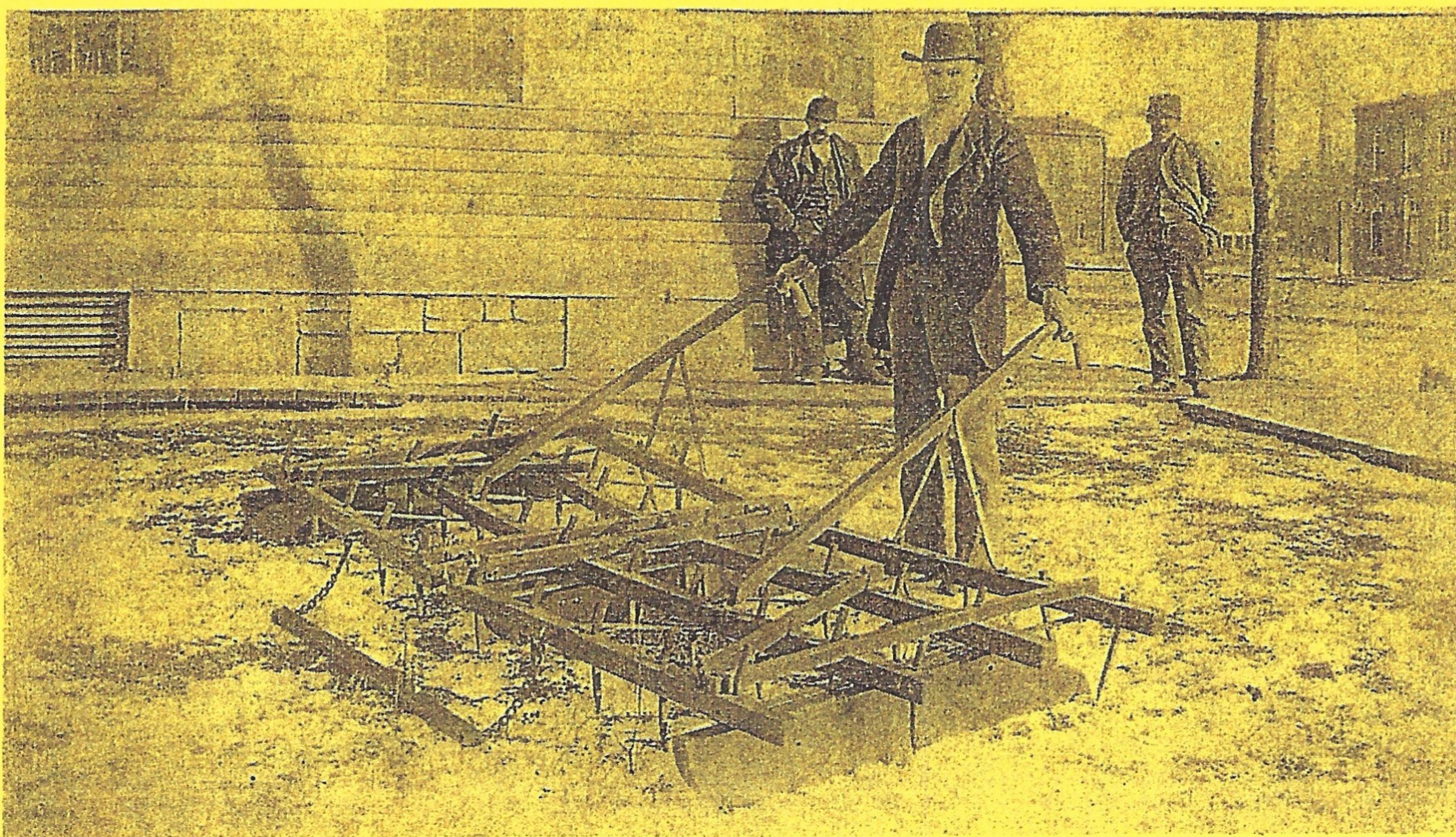
I prescribe chocolate as a mood enhancer.

Finally, just love it.....every blessed minute....it's your last chance!



Anne is turning 85!

Session 3 Clarifying Vocational Direction



Been looking at the life path we've been on -
1 - The Seasons of life
2 - Building the foundation

1

Session 3 Clarifying Vocational Direction

Intent: To broaden images of successful aging. To recognize points of passion in one's vocational life.

6:30

Opening: This is our 3rd session - we want to spend some time looking at the question of vocation and retirement. But first...

Poem:

Our opening poem -
"In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."

I don't know Who - or what - put the question, I don't know when it was put, I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone - or Something - and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal."

Dag Hammarskjöld - Markings

UN Sec Gen. - 60's - his contemplation on his life's journey

Context: 22 years ago, RW retirement coming...weekend at the Elms. Alternating swimming and work-shopping the question of retirement. No way could we have forecast the content of the next 20 years. Retirement may last 30 or so years.
A new stage of life & work - between end of mid-life and arrival of old age.

6:40

Conversation: Reinventing Retirement

Let's think about retirement - whether you are retired or far from it...close your eyes, and try to imagine retirement - keep your eyes closed and share with us what you see in your mind's eye.

- what are you seeing?
- what sounds?
- what images?
- what shapes?
- what scenes?
- what else do you see or experience?
- how is it different from life now?
- what frustrations are you experiencing?
- what do you want to change?
- what do you want to keep the same?
- what is one thing that must not happen?
- what is the one thing that is a must?

Read from Winter Grace - pg 148-149 - 150

"Do things before they happen,
Get them straight before they get mixed up." Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching

11:00

7:00

Study: New Images for the Senior

Each of the groups talk together first...share their answers with each other.

1/3 of group to "Aging;: The Mood of Passing Away"

1/3 of group to "Aging: the New Mood of Possibility"

1/3 of group to "The Spirit Journey"

Questions: What are the major points in your section?

What experiences are you familiar with...you or someone you know?

What questions does this raise for you?

7:10

Reports – Ask for responses on assigned questions from each group

Questions of clarity?

7:20

Whole group:

- what parts of the paper really caught your attention?
- what situations were you reminded of?
- what ideas excited you?
- what left you skeptical or frustrated?
- what questions were raised for you?
- what are the implications for your future?
- what else do you need to think about as you ponder your vocational direction?

X There isn't time to do everything. As we grow older, the opportunities grow less. We can either despair or sink into resignation at that thought. Or we can use it as a moment of transformation. A friend said the answer came to him when he was wrestling with what he should do and someone said, "You have the wisdom – what's holding you back?"

Engaging in action may be the answer. As we grow older...the opportunities for action may become less, but our ability to catalyze action never goes away.

9:30

7:35

Passion in your Vocational Intent – As we've worked up to now – Look back at your timeline from Session 1 and work in the last session – where do you see clues – what do you have passion to make happen? For me...photography, mentoring, writing.

2
where exp
clues.

- what are you excited about making happen – hobbies, dreams, tasks?
- what is important to you?
- what are you willing to choose?
- what will be the benefit of this?

Write what pops into your mind. You can change those answers tomorrow if you want.

Take the Passion Test ...

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, rate your passion for your work.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Ask yourself questions!

- Δ What is one thing you like about what you are doing now?
- Δ What has interested you the most in the last few months?
- Δ What do you get excited about making happen?
- Δ What has been important for you in the last year?

Align your passion with what is needed.

	Task that needs to be done	Task that does not need to be done
Passion greater than 7	Give all your support	Redirect your passion ... try to see a bigger picture
Passion less than 7	Build yourself a bigger WHY ... why it is important	Learn to say 'NO'

3
any one
share
something
marked
7 or above -
7 or below

3/ Guard against the things that steal your dreams and kill your passion ...

- letting routines get you in a rut
- trying to stay out of trouble
- experiencing powerlessness
- fearing the unknown
- expecting the worst
- experiencing burn out
- blowing smoke
- feeling trapped
- operating with a "no" mentality

Rabbinical prayer: "O God, help me see what I see."

Closing: All of life is a preparation for old age and its crowning task of self-development. Two things that the "experts" now know:

- The capacity to learn is life-long. Learning needs to be cradle to grave.
- Cultivate a spiritual life in middle age, so that when retirement detaches us from the productive work of the marketplace, we don't fall into an abyss of emptiness.

A - We Are Transmitters

*"As we live, we are transmitters of life,
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.*

*That is part of the mystery of sex, it is a flow onwards.
Sexless people transmit nothing.*

*And if, as we work, we can transmit life into our work,
life, still more life, rushes into us to compensate, to be ready
and we ripple with life through the days.*

*Even if it is a woman making an apple dumpling, or a man a stool,
if life goes into the pudding, good is the pudding,
good is the stool,
content is the woman, with fresh life rippling in to her,
content is the man.*

*Give, and it shall be given unto you
Is still the truth about life.
But giving life is not so easy.*

*It doesn't mean handing it out to some mean fool, or letting
the living dead eat you up.*

*It means kindling the life-quality where it was not,
even if it's only in the whiteness of a washed pocket-
handkerchief."*

D. H. Lawrence

Gift: "From My Exalted View" – LaVerne Phillips

- major points in your section
- experiences you are familiar w/ - ^{you or someone you know}
- questions that are raised -

New Images for the Senior

The psychologically and physically healthiest response to old age is to maintain the greatest possible level of activity and involvement in the greatest possible number of roles.

BRIAN STANFIELD

This year I will turn 73. I am growing old. I know it. There is no doubt; I feel it in my bones. I have trouble remembering my phone number. At times I can't remember the day of the week. I ride a three-wheel scooter.

Being old has its advantages. Cars come to a screeching halt when I and my scooter want to cross the road. I can choose my own work and my own schedule. Following in the mode of Jenny Joseph's "I Shall Wear Purple," I find myself donning a red cap, running my cane along the neighbour's fence, and doing other naughty acts just to thumb my nose at "the done thing."

Aging: The Mood of Passing-Away

It's strange how people try to hide the aging process. The drug companies make billions from producing facial and body lotions for getting rid of the wrinkles, as

do doctors offering implants and other operations to hide the onset of age. But some people have decided to wear their age triumphantly as a badge of honour.

Charles de Gaulle said, "Old age is a shipwreck." And many of my friends seem to agree that turning 65 is a sheer catastrophe. Nothing can be done except to take your pills and await death in a nursing home. Some try to take away the thought of dying by pushing a rubber ball round the greens as long as they can. Others devote themselves to life in the rocking chair watching TV. "Sociogenic aging" is a term coined to describe the role society imposes on people when they reach a certain arbitrary chronological age. They must retire. They are rendered unemployed, useless, and often impoverished. After that transition, and in proportion to their chronological age, seniors are prescribed to be unintelli-

gent, unemployable, crazy and asexual. In a society that denies age by resorting to face lifts, wigs, hair dyes, and implants, while indoctrinating people to value youth rather than age, the results are commonly destructive to the older adult.

People descend into their 70s and 80s surrounded by a flood of hoary images depicting their kind as ugly, sexless, incontinent, senile, and helpless. Fear tends to control everything. "Do I dare eat a peach?" asked T. S. Eliot's old one. For such people the fear of death is permanent. It can devolve into fear of everything, especially fear of abandonment, of being alone, and of elderly abuse. Elders fear the diminishment of capacities, of becoming an "Alzhy." If relatives move in to look after them, resentment grows at their loss of autonomy, at dependence on others for their victuals, and even for

going to the toilet. The elders think about their past, grieving over their failures and unfulfilled ambitions. A terrible sense of uselessness overcomes them. They fear the onset of second childhood, and final descent into nothingness: "sans eyes, sans ears, sans nose, sans everything."

The question comes in the face of death: "Who am I—now?" And this "Who am I?" is not an intellectual question that might be discussed in philosophy class. It's a universal question that every elder has to face. If death confronts me, does old age have any meaning at all? How can I live a life that is going to disappear at any moment—poof!—like a snuffed out candle? Is there any human way to live out my old age, when everything is disappearing round me? Why take the trouble to live a full life when it's suddenly going to disappear? No sooner have we asked these questions, nay, five seconds before we have finished asking, we are already fleeing from them. The thought of taking such questions seriously makes us blanch. We want out!

Ways of escaping the question, "Who am I?" are legion. Keeping busy may keep the question at bay—gardening, home decorating, cooking, painting the garage. Then comes the serious denial of death. We work hard to look and be younger. The males primp and preen, trying to get their remaining hair to cover the whole expanse of their balding head. The females try liposuction or some implants. They fiddle with concealing their right age. They come out with sophisms like, "Oh, these days, you know, 70 is really 60." We try to avoid the topic of death all together. Or we get hooked on the artificial support system of poker machines. Some days we say, "I'll decide what it means to be an elder, when I win the lottery." Perpetual vacationism for the better-off is another escape: Italy, Mexico, the South Seas—cruises, one after the other for those who can afford them. Bingo for those who can't. Some escape into resignation, like Eliot's Prufrock: "I grow old, I grow old, I shall wear the corners of my trousers rolled." They refuse to struggle with the conundrums of old age, withdraw from the community, become a lounge, or an elderly beach bum.

In the movie *About Schmidt*, main character Warren Schmidt has just retired. He flicks channels with the re-

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mote, does puzzles, visits places from his childhood, and drives an RV round Middle America. His closing reflection grabs hold of the despair of so many people as death approaches: "What in the world is better because of me? What difference has my life made to anyone? None that I can think of. None at all."

So how does an authentic old person take this question with seriousness: Who am I? What if an authentic response is something like this:

I am a dying entity,
who is nevertheless free
to live the remaining days of life that
are given.

I am free to embrace death as it
comes,
as a brother, sister, as a part of life.

I am free to live the hell out of my remaining years.

Aging: the New Mood of Possibility

In the 60s and early 70s, something new began to brew that would completely change the image of the elder. The theory of inevitable decline in old age, with its attendant physical, mental and spiritual weaknesses, began to be called into question by a series of clinical studies. Evidence began to pile up against the image of inevitable decline in old age. Other research at Harvard, the Max Planck Institute and Duke University, for example, indicated that growth and deterioration of brain structures both occur throughout the life span. For most elderly people, it turns out that there is a great reserve capacity and a vast potential for new learning and growth. As

health science and financial means provide elders with help for sustaining health and living longer, the number of seniors living viable lives continues to increase. Centenarians are no longer the wonder of the world.

A second thing that has happened is sometimes called "the Age Wave." Post-World-War-II baby boomers are approaching retirement age or are there already, and their numbers are very great. Dr. Ken Dychtwald coined the phrase "Age Wave". And in many ways, elders have become the dominant force in society. They control 75 per cent of the wealth. And because they vote in greater numbers than young people, they wield enormous political clout. The upshot of it is that age will rule. Older people will be able to have their say and make it stick, because they have the numbers.

This is a tremendous time to be alive for older people. Many elders today are laughing at gerontologists who say that age and growth are a contradiction in terms. Alex Comfort has told them that only 25 per cent of the disabilities of older people are medically based. They know that old age is not withering and fading. It is an ascent. It is becoming more than they have ever been. This is its purpose. Lao Tzu said that old age is life in its highest form.

Increasingly, elders are demonstrating that they can take charge of their lives. They are able to learn. They are siding with the activity theory that those who remain active physically, mentally and socially will adjust better to age. At the same time they are continuing to live full, energetic and rewarding lives. They show up across society as valuable sources of skills, knowledge and energy. Some seniors are launching themselves into "a second trajectory", beginning completely new careers after "retirement"; and the "retired" are being increasingly re-hired by companies who value their experience. Some of them serve as mentors to the new hands in companies. Thousands upon thousands of seniors are serving as volunteers in hospitals, not-for-profits, and schools.

More and more elders are maintaining a combination of activity and disengagement. They can be wildly adventurous—going on wild-water rafting expeditions, taking up dancing again, going on long hikes, balloon riding—a whole range of activities that el-

ers of old would have called suicidal. These days they are more and more in touch with the current of life. They are learning to relish their reputation for being creatively feisty codgers, for being outrageous and zany. They come across themselves not as worn out, but seasoned, able to maintain their mental vigilance, not ready to retire, but open to a flexible and productive work life. They are on the internet making connections. They start seniors clubs, Geezers' Brigades to get things done. One old guy published an online newsletter that was viewed by 20 million people. He found he was able to touch people's lives and make a difference. In short, these people are finding that age is a fountain, not a ditch. "Retirement at sixty-five is ridiculous," said George Burns. "When I was sixty-five I still had pimples."

Well all this is very exciting, but lying in bed at night, your mind comes awake with an overwhelming question. What am I going to do with the rest of my life? What am I going to do with these thoughts of new things that never before seemed possible: going to Rome, visiting the Holy Land, starting a new business, a new club, on and on. Your belly seems to be boiling over with creativity. But as you sit down to write down some of these ideas, you find yourself nodding at the desk. Sleep always seems just around the corner whenever you start to think of a new future. Overwhelmed by possibility, you look for a few pills that will take it all away and let you get back into "the ordinary life" of a senior. Like Scarlett O'Hara you say, "I'll deal with that tomorrow." Today, there is the golf course and the cards club, and then bingo as usual.

The questions that arise now are not intellectual questions. They are existential: Don't I deserve a rest? Do I have to wind myself up all over again? Can an old codger like me make any difference? Haven't I done my share? I worked hard all my life—don't I deserve a time of doing nothing? Time continues to weigh heavily without commitment to something. But there is always tomorrow to make decisions about my future. So I find myself humming that old song every day, "Mañana is good enough for me."

The "no urgency" escape is very

*Extended longevity calls
for extended consciousness.*

*If our added years are not matched
by an expansion of awareness,
life becomes depressive.*

*If I live to be eighty years old,
but my consciousness gets arrested
at the mental age of forty-five,*

I stagnate at that level.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

common. It's as if I am on one of those *Around the World in Eighty Days* balloons, and I'm surveying what's wrong with the world, so I can make a determination on what concern I want to spend my life. The balloon passes over the North African desert, and the thought comes, "I could spend the rest of my life over there using my biological skills to stem the onward flow of the Sahara. But the balloon keeps moving and I am over the Arab countries, and it occurs to me that I could use my literary skills to inform a wider public about the Arab attitude to their women and the poor, but the balloon keeps moving to Afghanistan, and I see that that country needs a lot of reconstruction. I could use my building skills there on setting up infrastructure, but the balloon has moved on. The decision never gets made.

"So how many years do I have and what, O what, will I do with them?" is the question. History beckons and the destiny of your advancing years awaits. Indecision builds on indecision, until, tired of the struggle, I dismiss the whole possibility and all the new images as "a pile of beans."

Or I may turn into what Samuel Johnson called "an old screech owl" complaining and yelling about everything "wrong" with life. I can be settled in the opinion that the great business of life is to complain, that I was born for no other purpose than to disturb the happiness of others by painful remembrances

of the past, or cynical prognostications of the future.

But the *What do I?* question never goes away. The elder knows that the opportunity is there to take the rest of life and decide what it will go for. For example, some great musicians continue to play in public into their 90s. Some clergy continue to care for parishioners as long as they have strength left. Some writers keep writing as long as they can find the period and the comma on the keyboard. Some pick up entirely new vocations: caring for the ecology. Their stance is that the sun may be low in the west, but there is still energy in this old guy yet. So once again they put themselves in the cannon of history and pull the trigger. For them, the fate of old age becomes meaningful destiny.

Today, a widely held theory states that the more active older people are, the better their morale. A high level of engagement with life is often seen as a criterion for successful aging. The activity theory argues that the psychologically and physically healthiest response to old age is to maintain the greatest possible level of activity and involvement in the greatest possible number of roles. As psychologist Erikson put it, "For those who are enjoying retirement, the primary satisfaction does not seem to come from open-ended relaxation and permissible laziness, but from new expressions of skillfulness and perseverance."

The Spirit Journey

Old age exists for the intensification of personal growth, for the enlargement and deepening of the soul. According to Rabbi Salman Schachter-Shalomi in *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*.

Extended longevity calls for extended consciousness. If our added years are not matched by an expansion of awareness, life becomes depressive. If I live to be eighty years old, but my consciousness gets arrested at the mental age of forty-five, I stagnate at that level, and may suffer from what psychologists call involutional melancholy—a haunting sense of despair that asks the existential question, "What is it all for?" Who needs years, maybe decades, of such decline?

The journey into old age is serious business. Bette Davis used to say that

old age is no place for sissies. The body-mind-spirit complex needs serious work. Perhaps the first challenge on this journey of intensification is getting and keeping the body in shape: at the gym, at the pool, on the tennis court, or, on what many seniors prefer, the walking path. Seniors need to get out there. Endless hours in the rocking chair is no way to keep the body in trim.

Then there is the mind. It seems that minds that are not cultivated during old age are likely to become prime prospects for Alzheimer's Disease. Many seniors are going back to school. Others are taking some of the hundreds of courses available through university extension. Others again read extensively. Reading clubs abound. One way or another the mind needs to be kept active; otherwise it goes to sleep on us.

Every senior is on a spirit journey. Every individual is at a different place in this journey. It is a journey involving knowing, doing and being. Our life's experience is our knowing, our life's action or work is our doing, and our inner journey is our being. This means the extension and deepening of our understanding of life and of the human spirit. Knowing, doing and being take the journey with you. Elders need to organize their knowing in a way that gives meaning and significance to their lives. Often people spend a long, long time delving back into the past, mainly to retrace their family's past. This can be valuable for some people. It can serve to tie a bow around their past, allowing them to move on. But you have to ask whether it yields any real knowledge except who begat who on the family tree. Elders need to dig back into their own lives to dredge the significance of what happened in their past, and use it as a launching pad for their future. Our roots are in the future, not the past.

The senior's doing is, perforce, somewhat different from what it was in younger days. The doing of an elder is less intense and sustained than a younger person's. It has to do with generativity. But, if the senior cannot do some tasks, there are still plenty of tasks suited to the elder: keeping an eye on the decisions being made in his community and beyond by councils, associations or government agencies. Generating discussion. Making interventions to deal with social issues. There

is so much a senior can still do:

- Giving strength to those who are on the front lines of social action
- Mentoring the young, and not so young
- Championing those with really good ideas
- Affirming everyone and encouraging those who are despairing
- Volunteering at the local service centres

If they were given back some of their authority to impart wisdom, elders could help the family regain its equilibrium as a support system, rather than being a pressure cooker from which many are trying to escape.

It's a glorious thing for an elder to be able to champion those involved in social change, or bring good heart to those who need a kind word. How necessary it is these days for elders to take up the cause of the young, and lend a helping word or hand when they most need it. When you see this happening you know that this is what elders were made for. And it is wonderful to behold.

Providing time for being is crucial. Silent time alone is a valuable exercise for the elder. Sitting still and silent allows other voices to enter. It gets you in touch with your soul. Fifteen minutes of sitting still and just watching what's happening within is something that can be done every day. Sometimes you just have to drop everything and go into silence. It was T.S. Eliot who wrote:

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still

And in the words of W.B. Yeats:

We can make our minds still like
water . . . and so live for a moment
with a clearer, perhaps even a fiercer
life,
because of our quiet.

Being may be many different things for different people. For some it might be a form of meditation or contemplation, or writing memoirs. It might mean becoming more conscious of the mystery of the universe and caring for it. For some it could mean being content just to whittle on a stick, or skim stones across the water.

It is the glory of the elder to live a life of caring, of trust and hope; to be a sign of possibility for seniors everywhere. The elder can model active living in depth for everyone around.

To all those who have crossed, or are about to cross, "the Big 65 line", I recommend *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older* by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, (Time Warner, New York, 1997).

This article derives from research into old age by the Oakley, Robins, and Stanfield families.

From my exalted view (age seventy + a half),
I'll try to share some insights learned these past
^{six months} — don't laugh!

To you who soon will follow in my geriatric shoes,

I pass along some tips to shake those
^{septuagenarian} blues:

Being Seventy's cool. Let's have that understood.

You won't feel NEAR as old as {Long ago} you thought
^{you would.}

It's true the old get wiser (tho no kid would
^{believe it})

How could we not? If we're alert, we can't help
^{but receive it.}

Someday, when we reach eighty, the young will call
^{us "cute".}

But as for now, we're gorgeous — and isn't THAT
^{a hoot!}

So what? We sometimes creak and leak; our
^{skin is not so firm;}

But NEVER would we say that OLD is a
^{pejorative term!}

So raise your glasses, People! Forget the
^{status quo.}

Life's always an adventure in the Land of
Seven. Oh!

4 – Storying the Journey



The Seasons of Life

0-20 Youth

A time of: exploring, experimenting, inquiring

20-40 Rising Adult

A time of: cultivating, searching, becoming

40-60 Established Adult

A time of: blossoming, shining, polishing - *influencing*

60-80 Elder

A time of: reviewing, securing, planning

mentoring

80-100 Sage

A time of: harvesting, reflecting, sharing



4 - Storying the Journey

Intent: To write one's own future while envisioning the next years of life.

6:30

Opening:

"In spite of illness, in spite even of the arch enemy sorrow, one can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small ways."

- Edith Wharton

*Poetry - poetry
to aging
gracefully -*

"One must hope to grow old keeping one's life and back-ground richly filled, hope to live so that people need us and we need them until the end.

Nothing, of course, can prevent old age from being a desert, An expanse of sand that gradually covers and smothers everything. But it is for us to preserve enough strength to plant and people our desert, to create oases in the midst of our solitude."

Francois Mauriac

Context: We have spent most of our time together "remembering." The Hebrew verb 'to remember' means bringing the past into the present in such a way that it influences present decisions and conduct. We all have sorrowful as well as joyful mysteries in our lives. But how we view the past affects profoundly how we live the present. This has much to do with aging gracefully.

****Almost all the research on aging talks about attitude being so incredibly important.**

True remembering contains hope for the future and helps us move into that future. We want to spend some time today storying the future...and begin a process that I hope you will continue on your own.

6:45

The Big Picture Story

A quick story of elders in society - a symphony in three movements:

- honored roles - back in a tribal and agricultural age
- loss of esteem - industrial age
- search for new myths and models - in our time -

*Conv. - re look at The Seasons of life chart
in Session one - add 1 categories for
"A Time of -"
1 - Which category grabs you now -
2 - " Speaks to your current exp?*

*Session
1/5
pg 5*

Everything in our lives has brought us to this place.

Suggestions one writer makes include bringing fresh flowers into your house, listening to music that elevates your spirits, reading spiritual literature- inspirational literature that has that effect, seeking out the company of people in whose presence you feel more elevated, spending more time in nature.

As we age, concentrating on what is most worthy increases its value while allowing what's inconsequential to dissipate. It can smooth out roughness, add depth of character.

***Real secret of happiness and success in life is to understand that while we can't control what happens to us, we can control how we react to events.
Self-stories – learning Bach's St. Matthew Passion...

7:00

Writing Exercise:

Carl Jung laid out 7 tasks of aging – one is: reflection, putting a story line to your life.

Stories shape our lives...power in life can come forth and negative can be let loose. Often reluctant or unaware of our own life stories.

“Stories have a way of allowing us to reconnect with our deep yearnings, our original decisions to be part of the _____ world. Consequently without stories we lose a pathway to those yearnings, and to those dreams.” (Bruce Williams)

What do I want the rest of my life – to my death – to be? Check back with your timeline...with the Five Seasons of Life Chart.

How do we "recontextualize aging as the anticipated fulfillment of life, not its inevitable decline" – even as energy levels diminish?

Use “decade markers”

Turning points

People influenced you

Objects

Values

Achievements

Bucket list - 15-20 years of Pilgrimage as you write your reflections

Write...bit of prose, a paragraph or two, poetry, draw a picture...what works best for you to express yourself.

Sharing and Reflection:

Sharing is a way to get in touch with our own stories.

Who is willing to share? – reflect on what learned about self – about life.

Closing:

Significance in letting go...

"Insisting on the same activities and schedules we've always known will prevent us from finding new ones when our energy level keeps us from repeating the old. Denying we are growing old will stop us from turning it into a positive experience." Winter Grace

Sarah, a friend in upper NY state commented and raises a question: Some recent human deaths and debilitating illnesses of friends have caused me to think about the snowballing of the process of having to let go of beloved animals, people, personal health (and hence activities) and possessions as part of the dynamics of aging. We even have to give up our sense of being comfortable with the world as the younger generations take over and change everything. To survive this without despair or cynicism is an important part of a healthy phase four and five. Is it a spiritual category of "detachment" or something else?

John Buchanan (pastor, Fourth Pres, Chicago): Fear of aging prevents us from enjoying being who we are now, and fear of dying can paralyze us emotionally, spiritually and prevent us from living.

"If you can dream it, you can do it." Walt Disney

Humor, of course, always helps...

*You don't stop laughing because you grow old,
You grow old because you stop laughing.*

A Senior's Lament

*"Everything is farther away than it used to be.
It is twice as far to the corner, and they have added a hill,
I've noticed.
I have given up running for the bus,
It leaves faster than it used to.
It seems to me that they are making the stairs steeper than in
the old days, and have you noticed the smaller print they
now use in the newspapers?"*

*There is no sense in asking anyone to read aloud:
Everyone speaks in such a low voice you can hardly hear them."*
Anonymous

In the back of your notebook:

- Great questions to continue to work with...
- Resources

Rosemary: Death only gets the last moment...none of the moments before that.

Elder Creed

An elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to, the future. An elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy, and pleasure, and his/her birthright to these remain intact. More-over, an elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations.

Are you in the process of becoming this kind of elder?

What personal and social forces could prevent you from claiming your full stature as an elder?

Silence for several minutes to ponder these questions..



*I came to your shore as a stranger, I lived in
your house as a guest, I leave your door as a
friend, my earth.*

~Rabindranath Tagore, *Stray Birds* (#272)

<http://tinyurl.com/2yxvwd>

*On our gracious journey with the earth
community, from birth to death, may this
be our farewell of thanksgiving.*

CRABBY OLD MAN

When an old man died in the geriatric ward of a small hospital near Tampa , Florida, it was believed that he had nothing left of any value.

Later, when the nurses were going through his meager possessions, They found this poem. Its quality and content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital.

One nurse took her copy to Missouri. The old man's sole bequest to posterity has since appeared in the Christmas edition of the News Magazine of the St. Louis Association for Mental Health. A slide presentation has also been made based on his simple, but eloquent, poem.

And this little old man, with nothing left to give to the world, is now the author of this 'anonymous' poem winging across the Internet.

Crabby Old Man

What do you see nurses? .What do you see?
What are you thinking.....when you're looking at me?
A crabby old man, .not very wise,
Uncertain of habitwith faraway eyes?

Who dribbles his food.....and makes no reply..
When you say in a loud voice.....'I do wish you'd try!'
Who seems not to notice .the things that you do.
And forever is losing A sock or shoe?

Who, resisting or not.....lets you do as you will,
With bathing and feeding ... The long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse.....you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am As I sit here so still,
As I do at your bidding, .as I eat at your will.
I'm a small child of Ten.....with a father and mother,
Brothers and sisterswho love one another

A young boy of Sixteen ..with wings on his feet
Dreaming that soon now.a lover he'll meet.
A groom soon at Twenty .my heart gives a leap.
Remembering, the vows.....that I promised to keep.

At Twenty-Five, now I have young of my own.
Who need me to guide And a secure happy home.
A man of Thirty My young now grown fast,
Bound to each other . With ties that should last.

At Forty, my young sons ..have grown and are gone,
But my woman's beside me.....to see I don't mourn.
At Fifty, once more, Babies play 'round my knee,
Again, we know children My loved one and me.

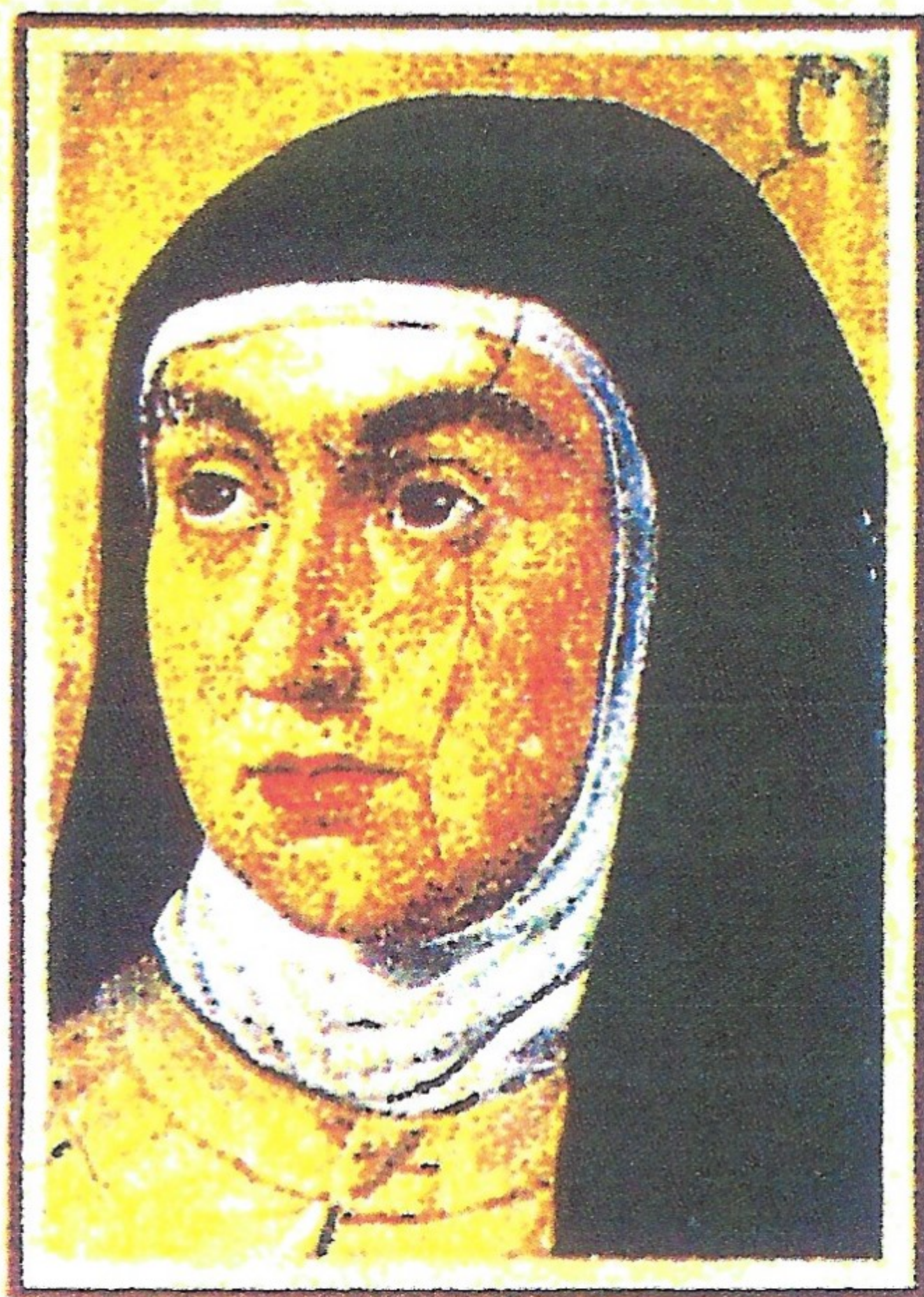
Dark days are upon me My wife is now dead.
I look at the futureI shudder with dread.
For my young are all rearing.....young of their own.
And I think of the years..... And the love that I've known.

I'm now an old man.....and nature is cruel.
Tis jest to make old agelook like a fool.
The body, it crumbles.....grace and vigor, depart.
There is now a stone.....where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass A young guy still dwells,
And now and againmy battered heart swells
I remember the joys..... I remember the pain.
And I'm loving and living.....life over again.

I think of the years ..all too few.....gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact.....that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, peopleopen and see..
Not a crabby old man. Look closer....see.....ME!!

Remember this poem when you next meet an older person who you might
brush aside without looking at the young soul within.....we will all, one day, be
there, too!



Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
All things pass away:
God never changes.
patience obtains
all things.
he who has God
finds he lacks nothing
God alone suffices.

Verbo de Jesus



- Relic -

- S. José de Avila -

Living to make a difference

As the older generation, we look from the lofty tower of experience, and we expect all those in the preceding 'life phases' to live to the best of the considerable ability we can see that they have. They just have to get on with life and make sensible decisions. AH! But don't forget the Journey.

Perhaps people of all ages are looking at us on our lofty tower of experience and longing for us to share in their journey, not by constantly recounting our own failures and accomplishments, but by listening and encouraging and being genuinely interested in the journey of the other.

This is a time to share. A time to introduce others to our passion for reading, or for yoga, or bird watching, or growing vegetables, or needlework, or music. And we share, not to be smart and to show off our own prowess, but because these things are now soul food for us, and our friends and family are hungry for soul food. And we can gently help others to discover their own recipes.

This is a time to share, 'where appropriate.' The young sometimes like to hear tales of when we were young, 40 year olds like to know if that birthday was a big deal for us, 60 year olds ask if we had to make big adjustments to live on a reduced income and do we have advice about retirement. And 80 year olds smile at our 70 year old aches and pains and say, "Never mind, love, you learn to live with it, but you should come to our keep fit class. We have a lot of fun." And so the encouragement continues.

Retirement trauma is one learning that should not be underestimated even though the time is right. Perhaps health has had a dictating hand, perhaps it was a redundancy pay-out, or perhaps the magic age of 65 had to be obeyed, the actual change in the whole of life's routine. This change of meaning for your life's engagement makes for a traumatic time of adjustment. Take time to grieve if you are grieving, take time to share with others, take time to get to know your partner again, to recontact friends and be open to this new time. You have gifts, friends, experience, time and endless possibility. Don't be over-whelmed, you are in the process of laying the bricks on a new and adventurous path.

CONCLUSION

These thoughts are a palette of the mystery of my life as a 70 year old. All my life experience is there with-in me, but it feels something like the packets of photos within our cupboards and albums. How best to organise and use and share these gifts, this new time of life, but these things I know:

- To be an Elder is partly decision, partly lots of life experience and a real conviction that your care for people can make a difference.
- To be an Elder is to recognise that sometimes you have a sense of fore-boding.
- You can sense danger to those around you. This sense must be treated with great respect, with the wisdom of true eldership.
- To be an Elder is to acknowledge that each phase of life is very short. The pre-school years seem to be forever to the child waiting for his/her fifth birthday.
- It is an illusion. Aged 65 years I proclaimed that the 5 years to 70 were precious and must be lived accordingly. Well they were to some extent, but they have passed so quickly.
- To be an Elder is to be a yarn-smith. Not just to tell old stories but to teach, to encourage, to broaden the current thinking, to give the needed soul-food, to amuse and entertain with appropriate life experience stories.
- To be an Elder is to be a positive presence; to be a catalyst injecting humour and possibility to those around you; to uphold the faith stance that Life is Good.

Margaret Oakley
Adelaide,
Australia

St. Francis -
Hymn -

Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace

Lord, make us servants of Your peace:
Where there is hate, may we sow love;
Where there is hurt, may we forgive;
Where there is strife, may we make one.

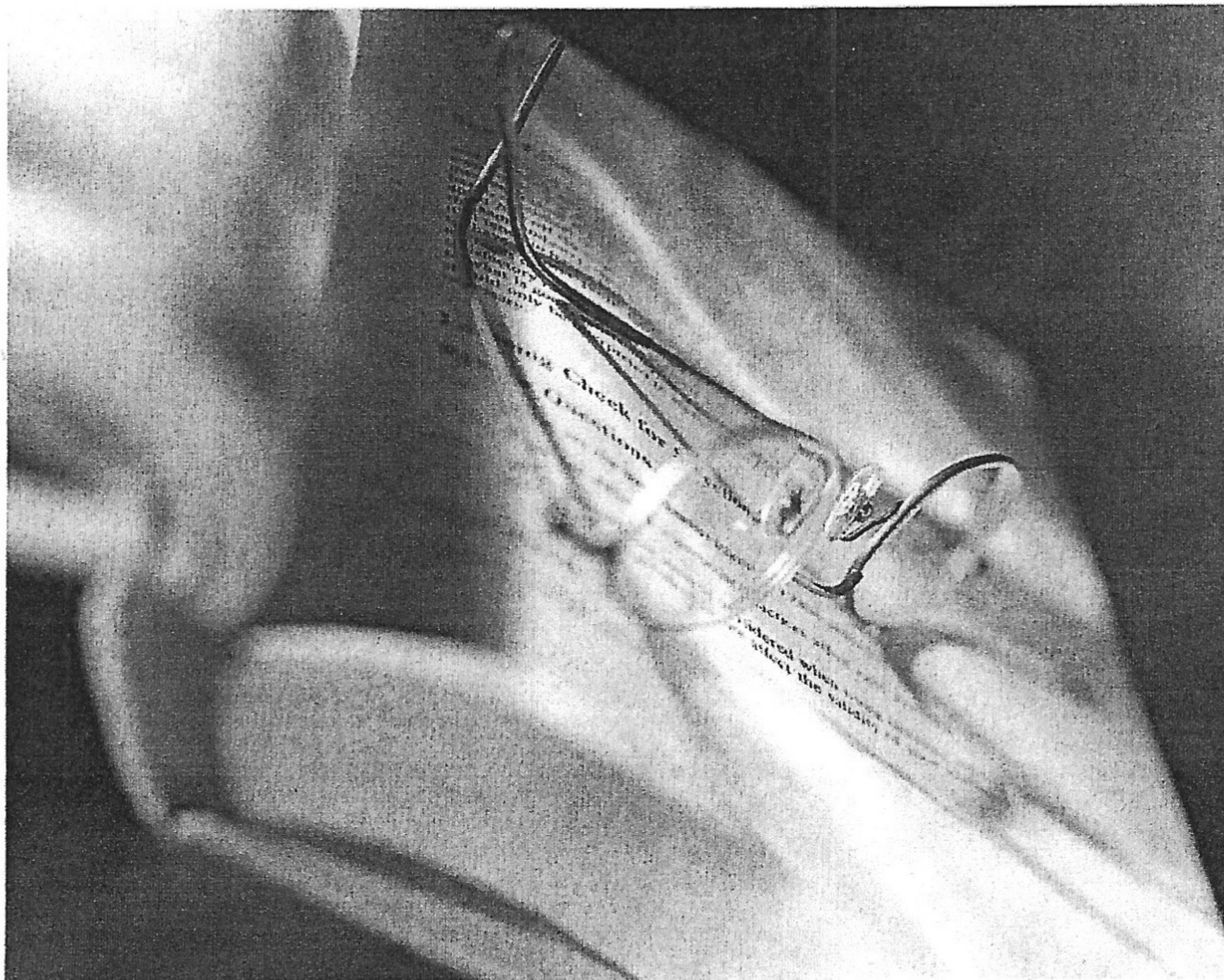
Where all is doubt, may we sow faith;
Where all is gloom, may we sow hope;
Where all is night, may we sow light;
Where all is tears, may we sow joy.

Jesus, our Lord, may we not seek
To be consoled, but to console,
Nor look to understanding hearts,
But look for hearts to understand.

May we not look for love's return,
But seek to love unselfishly,
For in our giving we receive,
And in forgiving are forgiven.

Dying, we live, and are reborn
Through death's dark night to endless day:
Lord, make us servants of Your peace
To wake at last in heaven's light.

Resources on Aging Gracefully



Great Questions

Great questions for anyone

What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?

Who was the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her?

Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did they teach you?

Who has been the kindest to you in your life?

What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?

What is your earliest memory?

Are there any words of wisdom you'd like to pass along?

What are you proudest of in your life?

When in life have you felt most alone?

How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?

How would you like to be remembered?

Do you have any regrets?

What does your future hold?

Is there anything that you've never told but want to tell now?

Friends

What is your first memory of one of your friends?

Was there a time when you didn't like that person?

What makes you such good friends?

How would you describe him/her? How would you describe yourself?

Where will we be in 10 years? 20 years?

Do you think you'll ever lose touch with each other?

Is there anything that you've always wanted to tell him/her but haven't?

Grandparents

Where did you grow up?

What was your childhood like?

Who were your favorite relatives?

Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?

Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?

Was she/he well-behaved?

What is the worst thing she/he ever did?

What were your parents like?

What were your grandparents like?

How would you like to be remembered?

Raising children

When did you first find out that you'd be a parent? How did you feel?

Can you describe the moment when you saw your child for the first time?

How has being a parent changed you?

What are your dreams for your children?

Do you remember when your last child left home for good?

Do you have any favorite stories about your kids?

Parents – asking your parents...

Do remember what was going through your head when you first saw me?

How did you choose my name?

What was I like as a baby? As a young child?

Do you remember any of the songs you used to sing to me? Can you sing them now?

What were my siblings like? What were the hardest moments you had when I was growing up?

If you could do everything again, would you raise me differently?

What advice would you give me about raising my own kids?

What are your dreams for me?

How did you meet mom/dad?

Are you proud of me?

Growing up

When and where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

What was it like?

Who were your parents?

What were your parents like?

How was your relationship with your parents?

Did you get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did?

Do you have any siblings? What were they like growing up?

Love and relationships

Do you have a love of your life?

When did you first fall in love?

Can you tell about your first kiss?

What was your first serious relationship?

Do you believe in love at first sight?

Do you ever think about previous lovers?

What lessons have you learned from your relationships?

Marriage

How did you meet your husband/wife?

How did you know he/she was "the one"?

How did you propose?

What were the best times? The most difficult times?

Did you ever think of getting divorced?

Did you ever get divorced? Can you tell about it?

What advice do you have for young couples?

Do you have any favorite stories from your marriage or about your husband/wife?

Working

What do you do for a living? Tell about how you got into your line of work.

Do you like your job?

What did you think you were going to be when you grew up?

What did you want to be when you grew up?

What lessons has your work life taught you?

If you could do anything now, what would you do? Why?

Do you plan on retiring? If so, when? How do you feel about it?

Do you have any favorite stories from your work life?

Religion

Can you tell about your religious beliefs/spiritual beliefs? What is your religion?

Have you experienced any miracles?

What was the most profound spiritual moment of your life?

Do you believe in God?

Do you believe in the after-life? What do you think it will be like?

When you meet God, what do you want to say to Him/Her?

Serious Illness

Can you tell about your illness?

Do you think about dying? Are you scared?

How do you imagine your death?

Do you believe in an after-life?

Do you regret anything?

Do you look at your life differently now than before you were diagnosed?

Do you have any last wishes?

If you were to give advice to your children or others, what would it be?

What have you learned from life? The most important things?

Has this illness changed you? What have you learned?

How do you want to be remembered?

Family heritage

What is your ethnic background?

Where is your mom's family from? Where is your dad's family from?

Have you ever been there? What was that experience like?

What traditions have been passed down in your family?

Who were your favorite relatives?

Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?

What are the classic family stories? Jokes? Songs?

War

Were you in the military?

Did you go to war? What was it like?

How did war change you?

During your service, can you recall times when you were afraid?

What are your strongest memories from your time in the military?

What lessons did you learn from this time in your life?

What did you look like?

Childhood

How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you happy?

What is your best memory of childhood? Worst?

Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?

Who were your best friends? What were they like?

How would you describe a perfect day when you were young?

What did you think your life would be like when you were older?

Do you have any favorite stories from your childhood?

The Seasons of Life

	I – 0-20 Youth	II – 20-40 Rising Adult	III – 40-60 Established	IV – 60-80 Elder	V – 80-100 Sage
A Time Of:	Exploration	Setting Bench-marks	Contribution To Society	Pursuing Social Justice	Letting Go
Qualities	Wonder-filled Explorer	Risk-filled Builder	Potential-filled Leader	Integrity-filled Mentor	Wonder-filled Wisdom-keeper
Role	Life Apprentice	Personal/Family Catalyst	Social Stabilizer	Diplomatic Guide	Spiritual Eldering
Task	Experience Possibilities and Limits	Challenge Status Quo	Administer Ongoing Structures	Deepen Contemplative Abilities	Story Life's Journey
Relationship to Other Seasons	Injects Vitality of Play	Injects Passion of Adventure	Injects Value of Stability	Injects Power of Knowledge	Injects Vulnerability of Endings

Resources

Books

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deMello, Anthony, *Wellsprings, A Book of Spiritual Exercises*, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden city, NY, 1985.

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Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman and Miller, Ronald S., *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Warner Books, New York, NY, 1995

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Articles

Chapman Thomas, Apryl, "3 Steps to Stress Reduction"

Evanston Northwestern Healthcare Cardiac Patient Education Booklet, "Suggestions for Heart Healthy Food Choices"

Stephen S. Hall, "The Older-and-Wiser Hypothesis," *The New York Times – Medicine and Health*, May 6, 2007.

Internet

www.Timegoesby.net

www.health.harvard.edu, "10 research-proven tips for better memory"

Movies

"Two Weeks" – Four grown siblings return to their North Carolina hometown to visit their mother (Sally Field) on her deathbed. Each handles the situation differently: Emily (Julianne Nicholson) devours self-help books; Keith (Ben Chaplin) floats through events in a Zen cloud; Barry (Thomas Cavanagh) won't stop working; and Matthew (Glenn Howerton) seems disengaged. This poignant comedy is based on writer-director Steve Stockman's personal experience.

Caregiving and the stress factor:

How to take care of yourself while taking care of someone else

By Jodi Olshevski, Gerontologist, the Hartford Customer Services Group



Providing assistance to a friend or relative can be deeply satisfying on a number of levels. But it can also be a source of stress.

For example, fitting the tasks of caregiving into an already busy day, adjusting to the changes in your loved one, attempting to make sense of available community services and finding ways to pay for help can be overwhelming.

No matter how strong your love for the other person involved, it's a good idea to learn to manage your stress so you don't suffer long-term health effects yourself. The following simple steps will help you do this.

MONITOR YOUR DAILY STRESS LEVEL.

Take a few minutes before bedtime to rate the stressfulness of your day. Using a scale from 1 to 10 — 10 being the most stressful — log your stress level for several days. If you keep coming up with high numbers, try the following:

PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES.

When your body is relaxed, your mind will be able to relax as well. To relax your body, tense and relax various

muscles; for instance, clench and relax your fists. Breathe slowly and deeply while concentrating on every inhalation and exhalation. Learning to relax is a skill, and with regular practice you can learn to control your body's tension. Start by spending 5 to 10 minutes every day and then gradually increase to 10 to 20 minutes. Taking the time to practice relaxation techniques can help to reduce stress. So can making time for yourself.

SCHEDULE RELAXING EVENTS.

You may find in the course of helping your loved one that you spend less time on yourself, but giving yourself a few minutes daily can keep stress at bay. Call a good friend. Listen to music. Exercise. Read a good book. To bring these relaxing activities back into your life, start by making a list of your favorite activities, then schedule at least one activity per day into your calendar. The activity needn't take a long time. A 10-minute break can do wonders. Once you've established a schedule, stick with it and see what happens.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR THOUGHTS.

Stress often opens the door to worry, and worry leads to stress. Caught in this cycle, you may find it hard to think clearly. Pay attention to the times when you have worrisome thoughts and replace these thoughts with "stress neutral" thoughts — realistic thoughts that can make your caregiving less threatening. One example of a worried thought might be, "If I knew what I was doing, Aunt Mary wouldn't be getting worse." If you replace such a thought with "I did what I felt was best at the time," you'll put less pressure on yourself, and you'll face future decisions with a clearer head and at least a somewhat lighter heart. With regular practice, you'll find that you have fewer worried thoughts — and less stress. And you'll be able to better handle new situations as they arise.

Who we are. Who we'll be

1. By 2050 there will be 600,000 individuals in this country who are more than 100 years old — and four out of five will be women.
2. 50% of all the people who have ever reached 100 are on the earth now.
3. The three most critical components of successful aging are avoiding disease, maintaining high mental and physical function, and active relationships.
4. 50% of all women born in 1990 can expect to live to 85.
5. Only 4% of Americans age 65+ live in nursing homes.
6. 70% of older adults feel they are in good health.
7. Americans who were 65 in 2003 can expect to live 18 more years.
8. The median annual income of households headed by persons age 65+ in 2001 was \$33,938.

65
18
83

Source:

Successful Aging, John W. Rowe, M.D. and Robert L. Kahn, Ph.D., Dell Publishing, New York, NY, 1999

An Internet address book

www.seniornet.org Features 600 discussion areas from the arts and computers to science and travel plus consumer education and the Healthy Aging Enrichment Center, with guides to foods, medical conditions, diet and numerous other subjects.

www.2young2retire.com How to find meaning, purpose and work!

www.aarppharmacy.com Features prescription drug discount services, products for healthy living, medical supply services and more available to you through the AARP Pharmacy Services Program.

MENTAL EXERCISE | You can minimize symptoms of aging

MEMORY IS MADE OF THIS

ILLUSTRATION BY NEIL NAKAHODO | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Staying sharp is a matter of 'use it or lose it' for your brain.

By LISA ANDERSON
Chicago Tribune

Can you remember your best friend's address? Your cousin's birthday? Your own child's cell phone number? The name of the attorney general of the United States?

No? You're not alone, and you're not necessarily on the far side of 40.

The proliferation of cell phones, BlackBerries, Outlook calendars and other "smart" technology — not to mention frenetic multitasking and easy Googling — has left many of us feeling stupid in the memory department. The reams of addresses, dates and numbers that people once routinely rattled off have become mental mysteries for those of us who rely on electronic directories, pop-up reminders, speed dialing and global positioning satellites to get what we need to know or where we need to go.

Experts say it's unlikely such gadgets actually are harming our capacity to remember. But when it comes to memory, there's little doubt that it's a case of "use it or lose it."

"It's the same as physical fitness. We know we have to get into the gym, but how many are in the gyms? ... Memory is the exact same process: Are you willing to do the work?" said Tony Dottino, a management consultant who founded the USA Memory Championship 11 years ago to "showcase people who exercise their minds." The next championship competition is scheduled for Saturday in New York.

For the nearly 80 million baby boomers already concerned about the threat of Alzheimer's and dementia, the threat of memory loss is no small issue. And, as they age, it is not only the target of promising research and medications but also the basis for a growing number of busi-

SEE MEMORY | D2

BEYOND FORGETFULNESS

There are "telltale signs" when it comes to memory problems, said Stephen Salloway, director of the Memory & Aging Program at Rhode Island's Butler Hospital and professor of clinical neurosciences at Brown University's Alpert Medical School. Among them:

- Failing to remember a word or name, and it doesn't come to you at some later point.
- Forgetting not just the detail of an event but the event itself.
- Losing the ability to multitask, such as driving a car while listening to the radio or carrying on a conversation.
- Some memory problems may be traced to medication or depression, which can be treated.

MEMORY: There's a boot camp

FROM D1

esses, products and services. This spring Westin Hotels & Resorts plans to introduce Brain+Body Fitness, a program of custom mind and body exercises that will be distributed to guests at check-in. In addition, some properties in the chain will offer "brain teasers" on the coasters provided with the in-room coffee service and Sudoku games for poolside loungers.

"It's not just Westin. There are many companies that are thinking about this in many different ways," said Gary Small, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at UCLA's Semel Institute, who designed the mental exercises for Westin.

"At least half of people, by the time they reach their 40s and 50s, notice cognitive decline," said Small, who is launching a one-day Brain Boot Camp at the UCLA Memory and Aging Center.

Asked about the effectiveness of such programs on sharpening memory, Small chuckled.

"We can fix your brain in a few hours. I'm laughing, but we really can," he said. "The evidence becomes more and more compelling that we can do something about it. The challenge is to get people to do it."

Small's program, which runs about \$500 for the six-hour version and about \$250 for a three-hour "Boot Camp Lite," first assesses campers' memory, stress and fitness levels. Then it teaches them basic memory techniques and introduces a "healthy brain diet" including fish, antioxidant-rich colorful vegetables and fruits, and wine in moderation.

TIPS FOR REMEMBERING NAMES AND FACES

■ When meeting someone, focus on what you're going to learn about that person, not on what you are going to say.

■ When you hear the person's name, try to repeat it or ask about its spelling.

■ Ask for a business card or write the name down immediately after leaving the person. The more senses you engage — hearing, saying and seeing the name — the more likely you will be to remember.

■ Learn at least four things about the person, such as what the person does for a living and where the person lives.

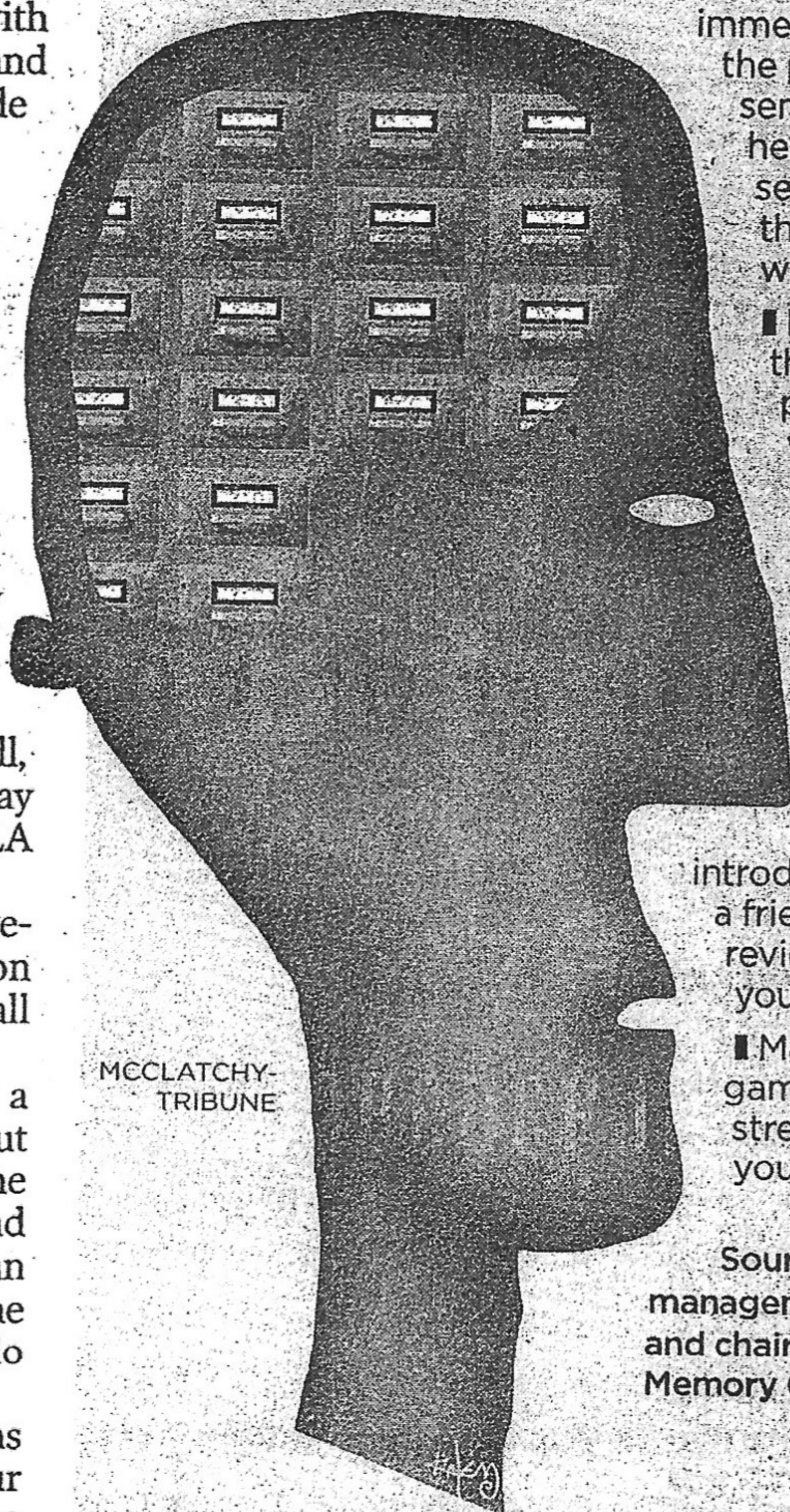
■ As you say goodbye, repeat the person's name.

■ Pretend you have to

introduce this person to a friend and swiftly review the information you've gathered.

■ Make remembering a game. The more you stress over it, the less you'll remember.

Source: Tony Dottino, management consultant and chairman of the USA Memory Championship



MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

Because stress impedes memory, the program demonstrates relaxation exercises to improve mental focus. It also provides a daily lifestyle plan, including physical conditioning, to maintain brain health.

The object is to minimize the symptoms of normal age-associated memory impairment and, perhaps, lower the risk of getting Alzheimer's disease, Small said.

Nonetheless nearly all peo-

"We can fix your brain in a few hours."

GARY SMALL, WHO IS LAUNCHING A ONE-DAY BRAIN BOOT CAMP AT THE UCLA MEMORY AND AGING CENTER

ple will experience some aspect of memory loss as they age. The question is how to identify the point where normal loss becomes something more serious.

In general, people who think they have serious memory problems generally don't, because "people who have a more serious memory problem tend to be less aware of it," said Stephen Salloway, director of the Memory & Aging Program at Rhode Island's Butler Hospital.

There is no cure for Alzheimer's, but treatments are available for the disease if diagnosed in its early stages, Salloway said, noting that many new diagnostic tools and treatments are under development.

Meanwhile, cultivating a healthy brain is the best defense against memory loss.

"The more that you maintain your brain activity, the easier it's going to be to be in better shape," said Gabriela Cora, a psychiatrist and president of the Executive Health & Wealth Institute in Miami Shores, Fla.

"It could be ... learning a new language or trying to learn a new software program," she said.

To Rob West, director of the cognitive psychology program at Iowa State University, the key to staying sharp may be even simpler. He said, "It's probably being engaged in anything other than sitting and not doing anything but looking at the television all day."

Taking Care of Yourself

Del Hunter Morrill, M.S., C.C.H.

Fitness: Find a way to do, daily, some regular moderate body movement, such as walking, swimming, dancing or other body activities that exercise the muscles and ligaments. Remember that 5 minutes is better than "no" minutes; one block better than none.

Nutrition: Ensure adequate calcium and potassium, use less salt and fats, and increase fruits and vegetables. Read labels to get as natural foods as possible, avoiding unnatural chemicals, dyes and other harmful additives as much as you can.

Healthy Habits: Cut back alcohol, colas and coffees to a minimum. If you smoke, decide to quit. Go to a hypnotherapist and/or acupuncturist to help you to do so. If you haven't had success with the regular medical profession in solving some physical issue, be willing to go to a complimentary physician such as a naturopath, homeopath, acupuncturist, chiropractor, etc.

Positive Thinking: How you think is what you become. Train yourself to see every situation as a learning experience. If caught in a negative or cynical cycle, tell that part of yourself to take a rest for awhile and allow you to enjoy life. Call forth the parts of yourself that love, have humor and like fun. At the end of each day, determine to discern every positive thing, no matter how small, and be thankful. If you need help with this, don't be afraid to ask. Be with people who uplift you - and get to a counselor or counseling hypnotherapist!

Scheduling: If your life seems too stressful, take time to think through the decisions you have made and the actions you are taking related to them. Look at your week's schedule. How many things do you do that are automatic, but perhaps really are not needed any more? If you decided you are as important as anyone you work with, or live with, what would you be willing to cut back on, or live without?

Relationships: If you tend to blame others for the difficulties you are having, at home or at work (school), be willing to think through how you, yourself, can make changes that will affect, in a positive way, the various relationships you have. If you are being worn down or "torn apart" by any relationship, ask yourself why you keep it. Is it necessary to you, in some way? Is there another way you can relate to it, or change it?

Willingness to Change: All of us human beings get stuck in particular comfort zones we set up for ourselves. They may not "feel" comfortable, but they are safer than risking ourselves in unknown territory. Be willing to change! That's the first step. If you find that hard to do, then start saying the mantra: "I'm willing to change. I'm willing to let go of anything that keeps me from changing," until something new breaks through in your life. Be daring enough to write down what you want for yourself, even if it seems "way out in left field."

Going Deeper: Consider taking up something like Meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi or another reflective activity at least once a week. Not only does it help you deal with stress, it allows you to delve into life more profoundly; and it can transform the way you view things and take action. Find a way to "retreat" once a year to further this reflection. Find out what groups are available where people take the time to grow in their spiritual dimensions. If you haven't taken any classes to further your education, in a very long time, why not do so at your local community college? It keeps your mind young and alive.

10 research-proven tips for better memory

Healthful habits help protect memory, but the aging brain may need an extra tweak or two to stay sharp.

If you're age 50 or over, chances are you've noticed some decline in your ability to remember things. Perhaps you can't recall why you raced to the pantry, or you forget the names of people you just met at a party.

While most people notice memory changes with age, only a small percentage—about 10% by age 65—experience actual dementia, a serious and progressive decline in memory and cognitive abilities. Such significant loss of mental functioning is due not to aging but to organic disorders, injury, or neurological illness. Good general health habits help protect cognitive function and reduce the risk of dementia. Studies have shown that women are less likely to experience cognitive decline or dementia if they stay physically active, get enough sleep, don't smoke, reduce their stress levels, maintain a rich social network, limit alcohol to one drink or less a day, and eat a balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats. And physical problems or medication side effects are less likely to disturb memory in women who seek and follow medical advice (see "Remember your health").

Normal age-related changes in the brain can slow some cognitive processes, making it a bit harder to learn new things quickly or to ward off distractions. Fleeting memory difficulties ("Where did I leave the keys?") may occur more often. These changes are considered normal, but they can be frustrating. The good news is that, thanks to decades of research, most of us can sharpen our minds with proven, do-it-yourself strategies. Here are some ways to boost your ability to remember as you age:

1 Believe in yourself.

Myths about aging can contribute to a failing memory. Middle-aged and older learners do worse on memory tasks when exposed to negative stereotypes about aging and memory, and better if exposed to messages about memory preservation into old age. If you believe that having a good or poor memory is out of your control, you'll also be less likely to put in the effort to maintain or improve your memory skills and may thus experience greater cognitive decline as you age. Believing that you can improve—and translating that belief into practice by developing memory skills and challenging your mind—will keep you sharper.

2 Economize your brain use.

If you don't need to use mental energy remembering where you laid your keys or the time of your granddaughter's birthday party, you'll be better able to concentrate on learning and remembering new and important things. Take advantage of calendars and planners, maps, shopping lists, file folders, and address books to keep routine information accessible. Designate a place at home for your glasses, purse, keys, and other items you use frequently. Removing

clutter from your office or home will minimize distractions so you can focus on the new information you want to remember.

3 Organize your thoughts.

New information that's broken into smaller chunks, such as the hyphenated sections of a phone or social security number, is easier to remember than a single long list, such as financial account numbers or the name of everyone

Remember your health

You won't have much luck implementing memory-improvement strategies if a health condition is sapping your learning ability. Many medical problems that become more common with age can impair cognitive skills if they go unrecognized or untreated. Here are some ways to protect yourself:

- **Avoid sugar shock.** In the Harvard's Nurses' Health Study, women ages 70–81 performed worse on cognitive tests and showed more deterioration over a two-year period if they had type 2 diabetes. Those taking medication to control glucose levels did better than those not on drugs.
- **Control your pressure.** Some "senior moments," or memory lapses, have been linked to a reduction in blood flow to the brain caused by high blood pressure. In the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging, people did worse on memory and other cognitive tests if they had either low or high blood pressure. High blood pressure seems to be more damaging to memory in women than in men.
- **Keep breathing.** People with sleep apnea, who stop breathing temporarily many times during the night, score worse on memory and cognitive tests. Their scores rise if they use continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines to keep airways open during sleep.
- **Treat depression.** Cognitive problems can be a symptom of depression. Older women who are depressed have worse cognitive function than non-depressed women, and their skills decline more rapidly with time. Among adults diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment, those who also have depression are more than twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease.
- **Check your thyroid.** An underactive thyroid can adversely affect learning, memory, and attention. When thyroid hormone levels return to normal with treatment, performance in these areas improves. Even if thyroid hormone isn't low enough to cause other symptoms, older women who go untreated for this condition are twice as likely to experience cognitive decline.
- **Balance your iron.** After menopause, iron deficiency isn't common; physicians worry more about the cardiovascular impact of getting too much. However, women who do have laboratory-confirmed low iron levels perform significantly worse on cognitive tests. After a few weeks of supplements, their scores return to normal.

in a classroom. When presented with something lengthy to remember, divide it into smaller pieces (in the classroom, separate the children by row and gender), or notice patterns, such as repeated digits or all the children with long hair.

4 Use all your senses.

The more senses you use when you learn something, the more of your brain will be involved in retaining the memory. For example, odors are famous for conjuring memories from the distant past, especially those with strong emotional content, such as visits to a cookie-baking grandparent.

A study published in the journal *Neuron* (May 2004) demonstrated that odors can also improve memories of more routine matters. Adults were shown a series of emotionally neutral images, each presented along with an odor. They were not asked to remember what they saw. Later, they were shown a set of images, this time without odors, and asked to indicate which they'd seen before. Recall was excellent for all odor-paired pictures, and the best for those associated with pleasant smells. During brain imaging, the scientists found that the primary odor-processing region of the brain (the piriform cortex) became active when people saw objects they'd originally seen with odors, even though odors were no longer present and the subjects hadn't tried to remember them.

5 Expand your brain.

Widen the brain regions involved in learning by reading aloud, drawing a picture, or writing down the information you want to learn (even if you never look back at your notes). Just forming a visual image of something makes it easier to remember and understand; it forces you to make the information more precise.

6 Repeat after me.

When you want to remember something you have just heard or thought about, repeat it out loud. For example, if you've just been told someone's name, use it when you speak with him or her: "So John, where did you meet Camille?"

If you place one of your belongings somewhere other than its designated home, make a note of it aloud to yourself. And don't hesitate to ask for information to be repeated.

7 Space it out.

Repetition is an even more potent learning tool when it's properly timed. Instead of repeating something many times in a short period, as if you were cramming for an exam, re-study the essentials after increasingly longer periods of time—once an hour, then every few hours, then every day. Spacing out periods of study is particularly valuable when you are trying to master complicated information, such as the details of a new assignment at work. In research studies, spaced rehearsal improves recall in both healthy people and those with physically based cognitive problems, such as those associated with multiple sclerosis.

8 Make a mnemonic.

Mnemonic devices are creative ways to remember lists. They can take the form of acronyms—such as the word RICE to remember first-aid advice for injured limbs: Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation—or sentences, such as the classic "Every good boy does fine," to remember the musical notes E, G, B, D, and F on the lines of the treble clef.

For older learners, a particularly helpful system is a story mnemonic—that is, a brief narrative in which each item cues you to remember the next one. For example, the sentence "The dog knocked over my glass of milk so I have to wash the floor" could remind you that your dog has a vet appointment, you should pick up your new glasses, and you need to buy milk and floor cleaner.

9 Challenge yourself.

Engaging in activities that require you to concentrate and tax your memory will help you maintain skills as you age. Discuss books, do crossword puzzles, try new recipes, travel, and undertake projects or hobbies that require skills you aren't familiar or comfortable with. Again, challenge all of your senses as you venture into the unfamiliar: Try to guess the ingredients in a restaurant dish; give sculpting or ceramics a try; sample different types of music.

10 Take a course.

Memory-improvement courses are becoming more common. Choose one run by health professionals or experts in psychology or cognitive rehabilitation. Stay away from courses that center on computer or concentration games, which generally won't help you with real-life memory problems. Select a course that focuses on practical ways to manage everyday challenges.

The results you get from a memory course will depend largely on the effort you put into it. According to a report presented at the American Psychological Association annual meeting in July 2004, the ability to remember names and stories depends less on age and health than on motivation to practice in people taking memory-training courses. ♥

Selected resources

The Harvard Medical School Guide to Achieving Optimal Memory, by Aaron P. Nelson, Ph.D., M.D., with Susan Gilbert, McGraw-Hill, 2005.

Memory Fitness: A Guide for Successful Aging, by Gilles O. Einstein, Ph.D., and Mark A. McDaniel, Ph.D., Yale University Press, 2004.

Keep Your Brain Young: The Complete Guide to Physical and Emotional Health and Longevity, by Guy M. McKhann, M.D., and Marilyn Albert, Ph.D., John Wiley & Sons, 2002.

The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers, by Daniel L. Schacter, Ph.D., Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Jeanette Stanfield's witness - 5/21/08

It was just two years ago this week when I found myself sitting by my husband's bedside in our local hospital asking him a question I never wanted to have to ask.

Throughout Brian's two years of strokes, seizures and infections, I tried to find ways for him to partner with me in making major decisions about his care. Since he could rarely speak, this was a bit of a challenge. How much he was able to understand was also a little unknown.

In May 2006, Brian had now been in the hospital for several weeks fighting urinary and staph infections with doses of antibiotics. His body was very weak. One Friday the hospital doctor and a palliative (hospice) care doctor spent time with Brian and me and our colleagues the Robins and recommended that Brian not have any more antibiotics.

Of course the decision was ours. I knew that my best opportunity to talk with Brian about this would be Saturday morning when the hospital ward was usually very quiet and Brian most awake. This question of antibiotics was really a much bigger question: will we continue to seek medical treatment?

On Saturday morning in trepidation, I sat with Brian at the hospital. It was quiet in the ward as I had hoped. I needed his whole attention. I looked him straight in the eye and asked him to do a thumbs up if we should stop the antibiotics. He took his right hand and raised his thumb high in the air. I hugged him and with tears in my eyes kissed him and gave him permission to let go and take the next stage of his journey. Looking back I realize that this was really our goodbye to one another.

This hospital ward was quite a comfortable place to be so I asked him the second question: Do you want to stay here in the hospital? And with his right hand he did an emphatic thumbs down. And the third question: do you want to go home? His face lit up with a big smile and the right thumb went up.

When I arrived at the hospital on Monday morning he was all ready, alert, happy in his bed that was now in the middle of the hallway waiting for me to go with him to the ambulance. The nurses were standing around delighting in his happiness. What was very sad became glorious and I found myself smiling too.

He completed his earthly journey two weeks later at home in his own bed as he had always wished.