

# How to Age Gracefully

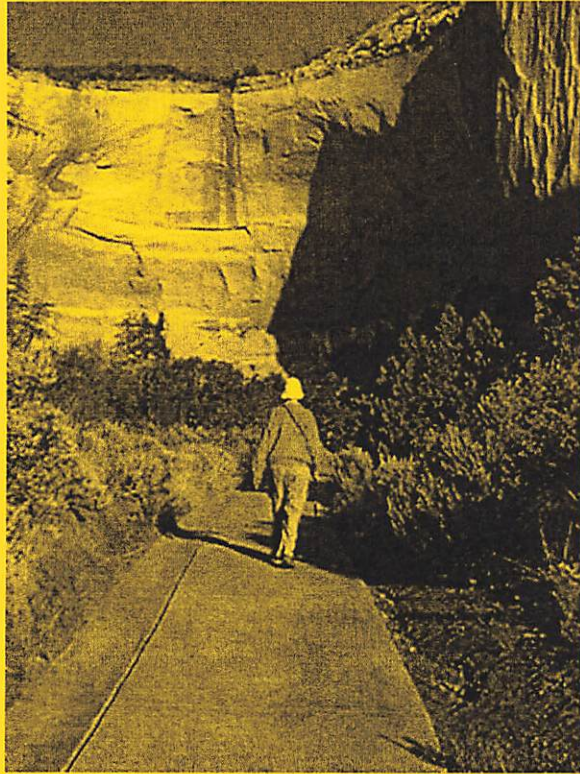


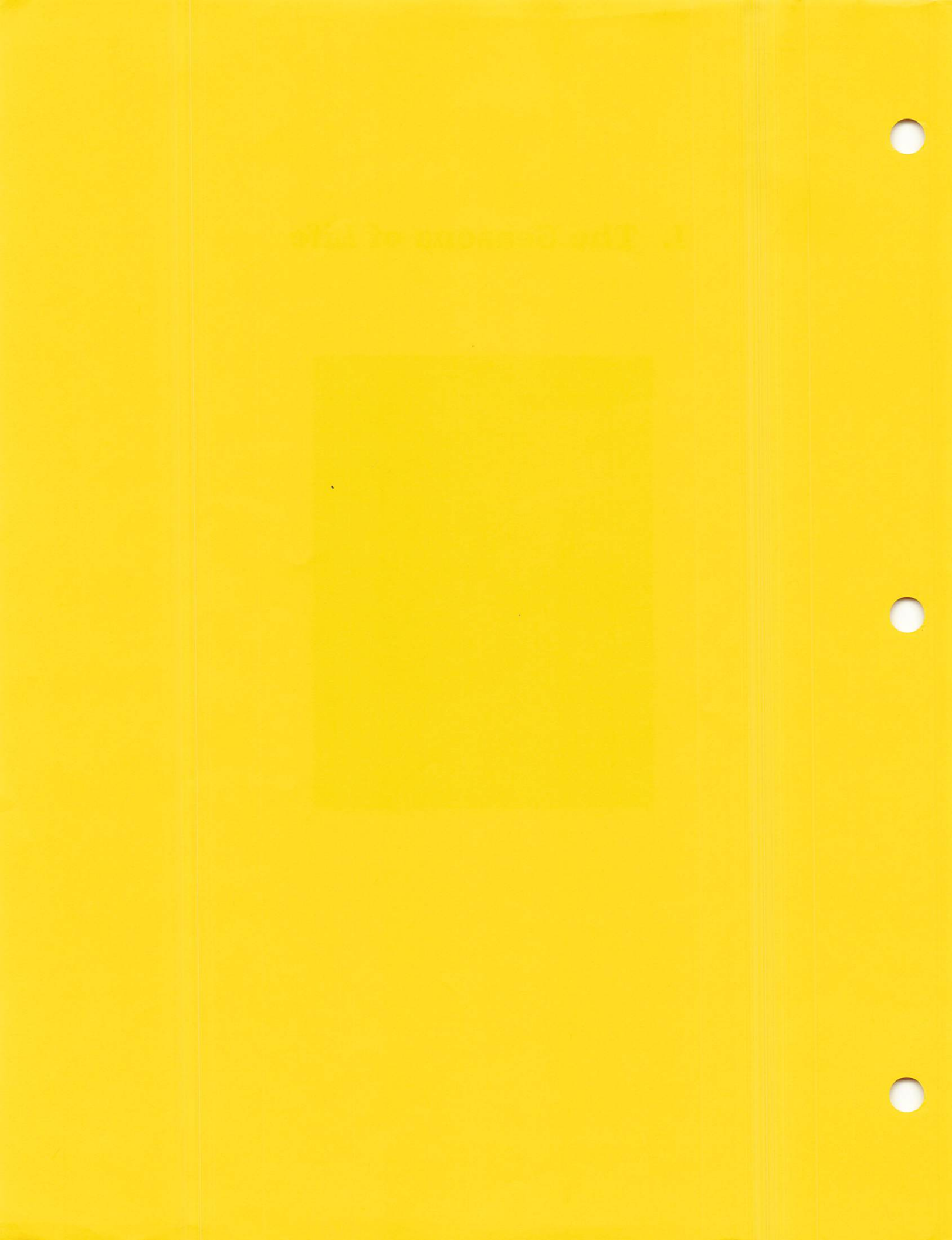
**Village University**  
**April 16, 23, 30 and May 7**  
**6:30pm – 8:00pm**  
**Room 132**

## Boomers: How to Age Gracefully

<b>I. The Seasons of Life</b>	<b>II. Building the Foundation</b>	<b>III. Clarifying Vocational Direction</b>	<b>IV. Storying the Journey</b>
<p>Opening: HK-Chinese Dr.-1973</p> <p>Introductions: 1 popular image of Age Poem – “The Way to Wonder” – Winter Grace, p.27</p> <p>Context: aging population 4 sessions to discuss &amp; learn from research/each other “death gets only last min.” notebook-course outline, 3 gifts: stories, each session outline, readings, poems, resources</p> <p>The Five Seasons of Life Chart/Conversation</p> <p>Mapping Your Life – putting tog. the puzzle pieces</p> <p>Reflection – major chunks Discover about driving force/passion Shifts foresee in future</p> <p>Closing reflection – bucket list</p> <p>Gift: “Getting Old” – anonymous</p> <p>Closing: Reinhold Neibuhr quote</p>	<p>Opening: Poem: “What heaven &amp; hell are like” –</p> <p>Conversation: Elders you have known Qualities</p> <p>Average Life Expectancy Chart Reflection-Rowe, pp. 8-9</p> <p>Workshop: Listing own foundation stones.</p> <p>Share work in triads.</p> <p>Group reflection: what learned about someone else?</p> <p>Gift: “Aging” – Anne Wood</p> <p>Assignment: “New Images for the Senior”</p> <p>Closing: Christopher Fry poem</p>	<p>Opening: Dag Hammarskjold-“I don’t know who – or what – put the question.” Insisting on the same activities &amp; schedules we’ve always knowN prevents us from finding new ones when our energy diminishes.</p> <p>Conversation: Images of Retirement</p> <p>Study: “New Images for the Senior – Aging, the New Mood” Brian Stanfield</p> <p>Job 28: 12 Psalm 8</p> <p>Gift: Poem: “From My Exalted View” – LaVerne Phillips</p> <p>Closing: D.H. Lawrence: “We Are Transmitters”</p>	<p>Opening: Francois Mauriac “One must hope to grow old keeping one’s life and back-ground richly filled” Memory enables us to hold fast to our identity and shape it in new ways. It is a way of describing the cumulative nature of time. Memories retrace a sacred journey. “If you can dream it you can do it.” Walt Disney</p> <p>The Big Picture Story: A Symphony in Three Movements - • honored roles, • loss of esteem, • search for new myths &amp; models.</p> <p>Dag H. “For all that has been, Thanks, For all that will be, Yes.”</p> <p>Writing Exercise: “Where I’d like to be in five years – project yourself into the future.”</p> <p>Reflect on the writing experience. Share – those who want to.</p> <p>Gift: “Living to Make a Difference” – Margaret Oakley</p> <p>Closing: Elder Creed St. Theresa of Avila</p>
<i>Chart Own Life</i>	<i>List Foundation Stones</i>	<i>Study Article</i>	<i>Write Own Story</i>

# I. The Seasons of Life





## The Seasons of Life

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

## Session 1. The Seasons of Life

**Intent:** To know the five seasons of life. To experience the turning points in one's own life.

### Opening – Introductions – Context

> *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

### The Seasons of Life Chart

**Conversation:** The Five Seasons of Life

### Creating your own chart: a Personal Lifeline

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.

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.

#### Kinds of Events

- an angry argument:
- the death of a beloved relative:
- making a whopper of a mistake:

- a major success in your life:
- an accident to yourself:
- a move or change of job:
- the time you experienced an “awakening”:
- an act of god, like a hurricane, earthquake or flood that you experienced:
- a strange encounter:
- some event that made you see things anew:
- a family drama:

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

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

3. Using the blank Timeline

Divide your chart 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.-
- 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. Assign Titles

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

### **Individual Reflection**

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?

### **Closing Reflection**

- what did you discover?
- what stood out for you?
- what was most helpful?
- what happened to you as charted your life?
- how did your life come alive?
- what insights did you have about the future?
- what might be on your “bucket list?”



During the week...jot notes across the bottom...what was happening in the community and the world in those time periods. How did they affect your life? Continue to work on this at home ... since we have limited time in our class. Keep timeline in your notebook...and bring it 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**

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

*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

## II. Building the Foundation

Liz<sup>l</sup> Jane Smith and Chris.

Photo by Crowell of Byersville



## 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.

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."*

*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.*

*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."*

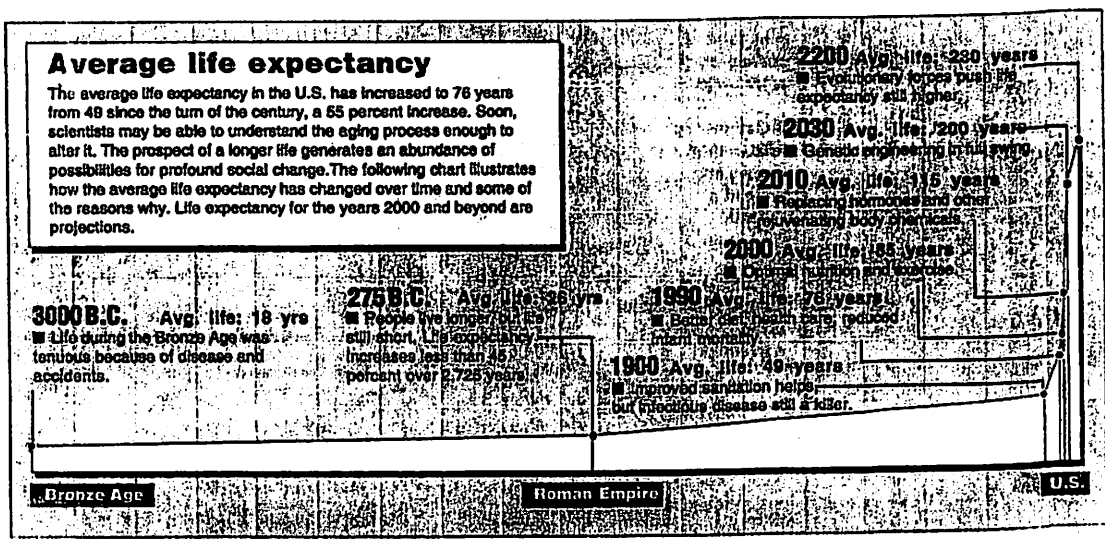
*It is simple" said the Lord,  
"it requires but one skill. You see,  
they have learned to feed each other,  
while the greedy think only of themselves."*

Conversation: Images of Being Elderly

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."

Life Expectancy: Ken Dychtwald, a gerontologist, calls the Age Wave that is coming a tidal wave. "Throughout recorded history only one in ten people could expect to live to 65 – today, nearly 80% of Americans will live past that age."

Charts: When you locate your age bracket...what is your first thought?



"There's a lot of loss associated with aging, and humans are the only species that recognize 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."

*Successful Aging*

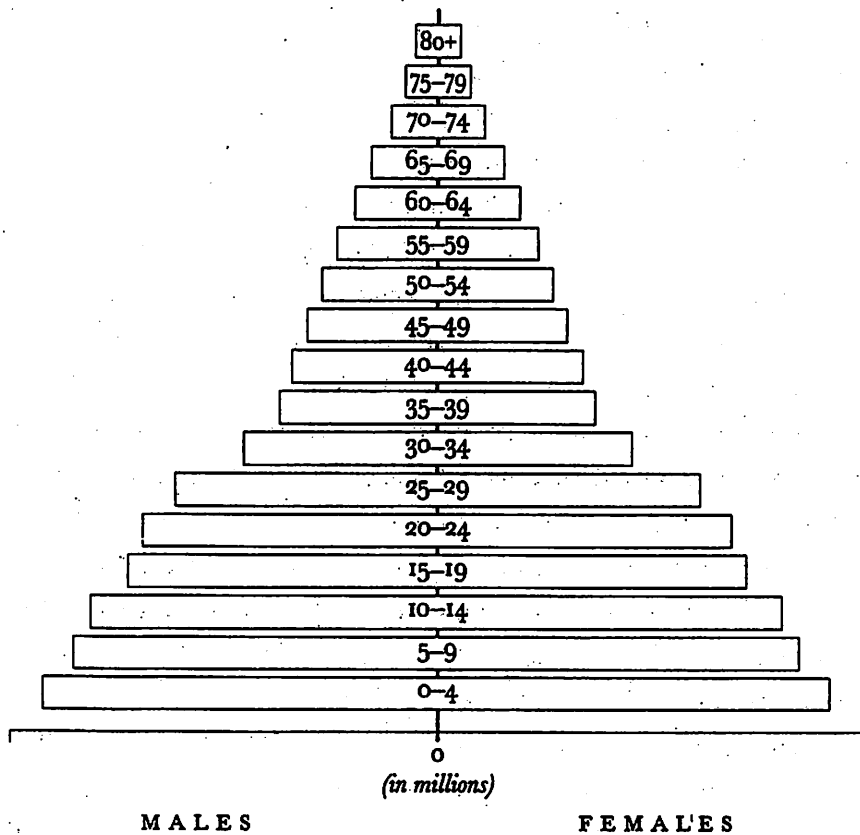


Figure 1. United States in 1900

*Aging in America—The New Longevity*

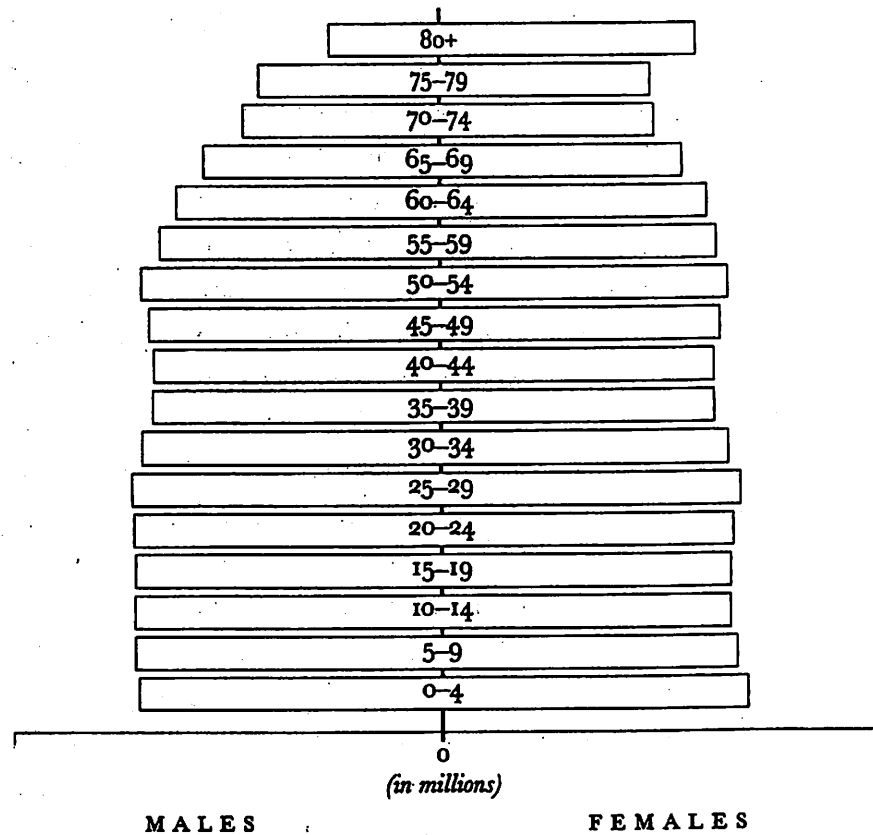


Figure 2. United States in the 21st Century

Workshop: The Foundation Stones

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

# Foundation Stones

1. These things I have loved in life:

things I tasted,

looked at,

smelled,

heard,

touched.

2. Experiences I have cherished:

3. Ideas have brought me liberation:

4. Convictions I have lived by:

5. Things I have lived for:

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

- the world,

- human nature,

- love,

- prayer.

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

8. Sufferings have seasoned me:

9. Lessons life has taught me:

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

11. Things I regret about my life:

12. My life's achievements:

13. Persons enshrined within my heart:

14. My unfulfilled desires:

Share work in triads

Group share: What did you learn about someone else?

What makes these things you have written foundation stones for aging gracefully?

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."*

Assignment:

"New Images for the Senior"

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

- "Aging: The Mood of Passing Away"
- "Aging: the New Mood of Possibility"
- "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?



# 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

**T**his 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.

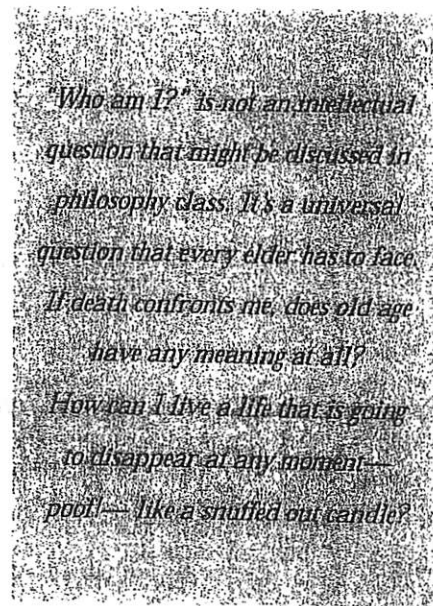
People descend into their 70s and 80s surrounded by a flood of hoary images depicting their kind as ugly, sexless, incontinent, senile, and helpless. Fear tends to control everything. "Do I dare eat a peach?" asked T. S. Elliot's old one. For such people the fear of death is permanent. It can devolve 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 finally sink 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-



...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.

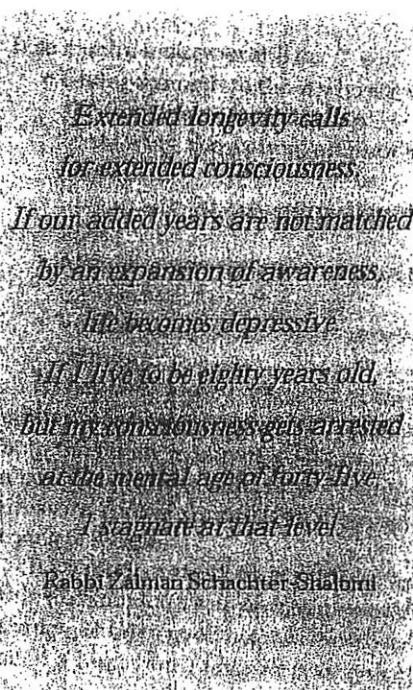
More and more elders are maintaining a combination of activity and disengagement. They can be wildly adventurous—going on wild-water rafting expeditions, taking up dancing again, going on long hikes, balloon riding—a whole range of activities that el-

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



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 involuntional 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).

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

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*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 ophthalmologist, 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 voraciously .....romance, 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...

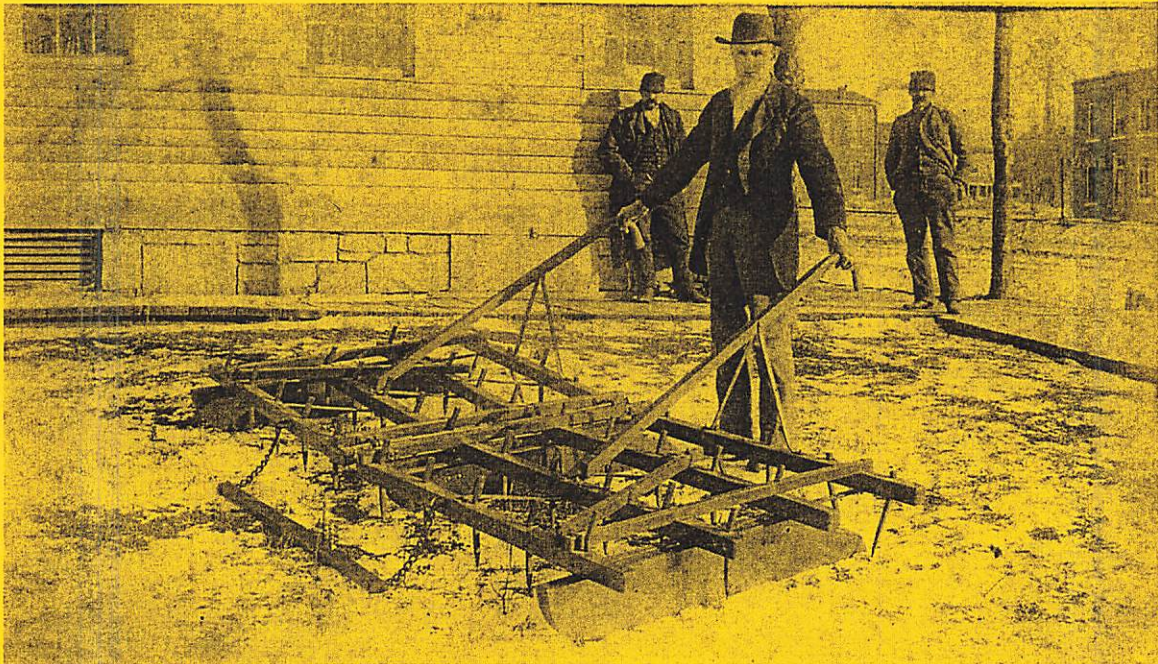
I prescribe chocolate as a mood enhancer.

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



***Anne is turning 85!***

## Session 3 Clarifying Vocational Direction



### Session 3 Clarifying Vocational Direction

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

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 Hammarskjold – *Markings*

Conversation: Reinventing Retirement

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.

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

Study: "New Images for the Senior"

Group 1 – "Aging: The Mood of Passing Away"

Group 2 – "Aging: the New Mood of Possibility"

Group 3 – "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?



## Reports and Reflection

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.

### Passion in your Vocational Intent

Look back at your timeline from Session 1 and the work in the last session – where do you see clues – what do you have passion to make happen?

- 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?

Take the Passion Test ...

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, rate your passion for the things you want to do.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Ask yourself questions!

- △ What is one thing you like about what you are doing now?
- △ What has interested you the most in the last few months?
- △ What do you get excited about making happen?
- △ 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	<i>Give all your support</i>	<b>Redirect your passion ... try to see a bigger picture</b>
Passion less than 7	<b>Build yourself a bigger WHY ... why it is important</b>	<i>Learn to say 'NO'</i>

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.”*

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.

## 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

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



## 4 – Storying the Journey

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

*“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

*“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

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.

### 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

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.

\*\*\*The 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.

### Writing Exercise:

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

Stories shape our lives ... the power in our life can come forth and the negative can be let loose. We are 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

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

### Sharing

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

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

### Closing

The 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 raised 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 Presbyterian Church, 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...

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

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

*You grow old because you stop laughing.*

#### 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?*



*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.*

*-RabindranathTagore, Stray Birds (#272)*

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

*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 habit .....with 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 sisters .....who 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.

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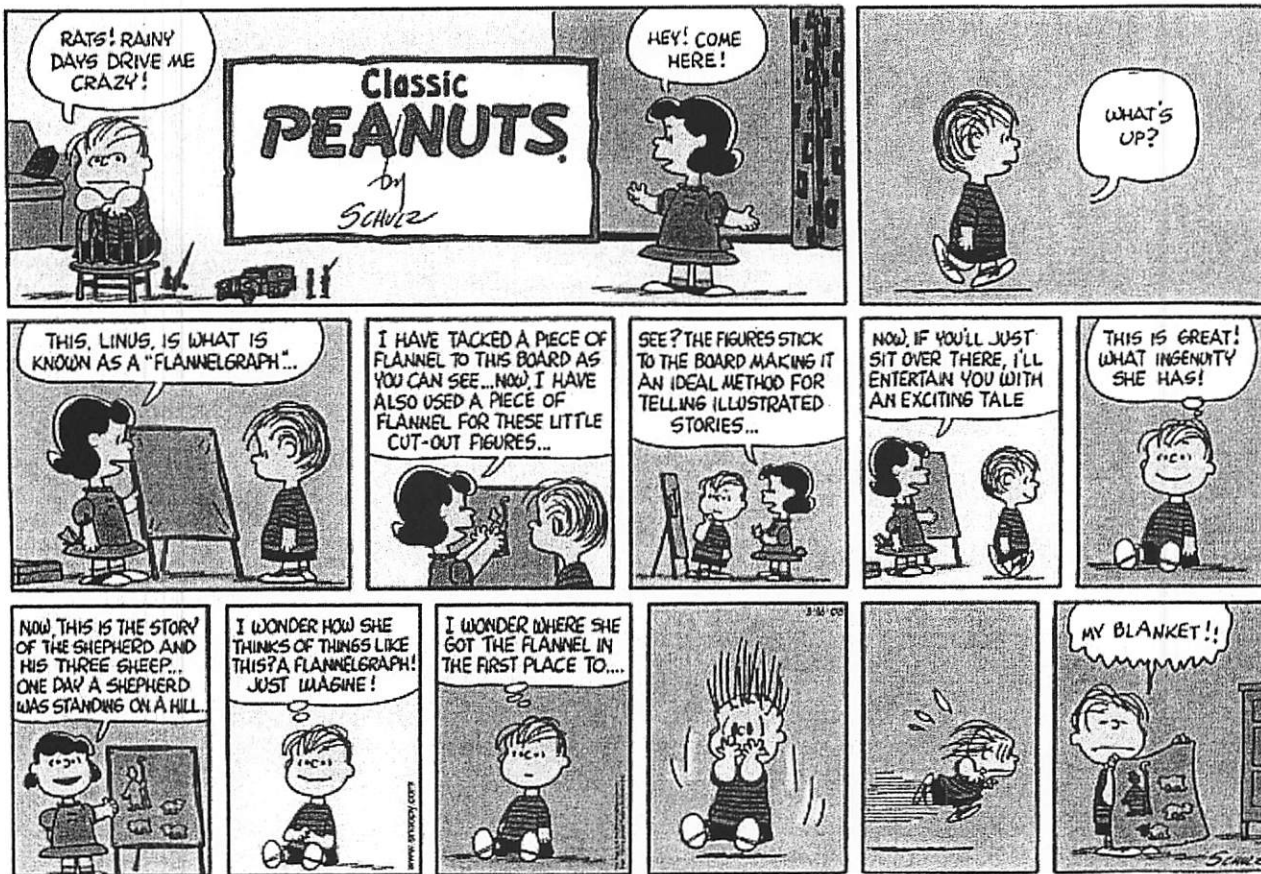
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### **Living to make a difference**

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.

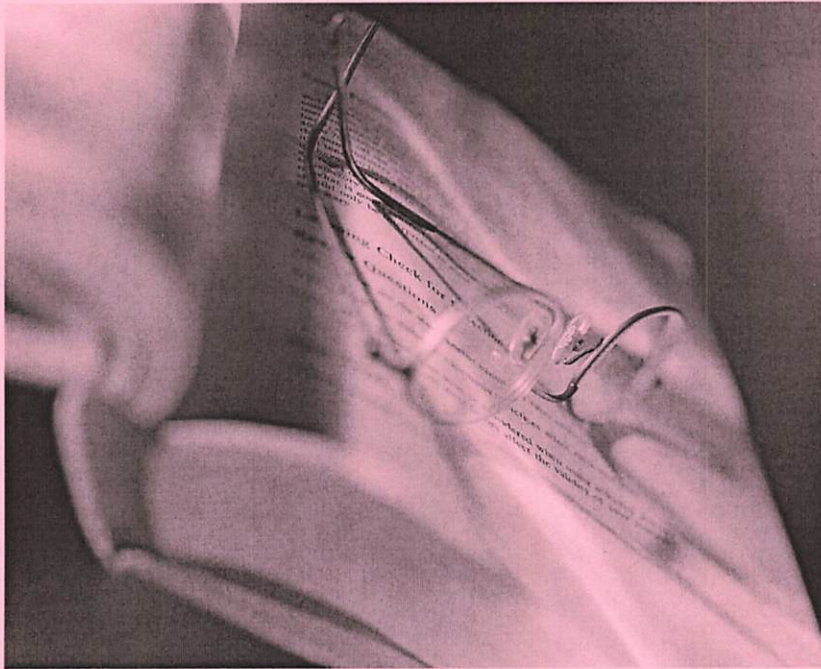
### **CONCLUSION**

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

## 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?

**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](http://www.Timegoesby.net)

[www.health.harvard.edu](http://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.