REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Volume 10 **Spring 2004** **Number 2**

Special Issue: The Making of a Gerontologist
Guest Editor: Molly Ranney, Ph.D.

Cover and original artwork by Daniel Jimenez

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Letter from the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

The renewal of life in spring encourages us to hope for growth and change in our collective lives. One place where such change would be welcome is in the form of progressive policies promoting social justice in the United States. While the national and geopolitical climate this spring may appear to blanket any prospect of this, careful observers can notice subtle indications of dramatic shifts in the cultural and political landscape.

Our current preoccupation with the war in Iraq and Presidential politics seems to consume our national energy; yet a paradigm shift in the way health care is delivered in the United States is on the horizon. There is no question that a long awaited national policy on health care will be enacted in the next few years. The calls for reform of the health care system have come from some unlikely quarters—small businesses and large corporations, large labor unions, and conservative politicians—all of whom recognize the unsupportable costs of our current profit based system. Unhappiness with the cost and limited access of our hodgepodge of health care delivery systems, along with discontent over the high cost of pharmaceuticals, has continued to percolate through new groups emerging as constituencies for a national policy change. This widespread deep dissatisfaction, the prerequisite for significant social change, insures that most of us will witness the emergence of this policy in our lifetimes.

The federal budget deficit appears, on the surface, to threaten the viability of Social Security and Medicare. The fact is that both of these programs will likely be enhanced and strengthened over the next five years, as the baby boomers join the powerful aging lobby. Their force cannot be overestimated. With the power of numbers and financial means, those who have had the economic and social privilege to forge the cultural and political agenda for much of their lives will not stand by and see these benefits attenuated. Instead, baby boomers will join the call for national health insurance when their physical limitations and frailties emerge in a Medicare-threatened political environment. Social Security will not be destroyed or reduced; instead policies to insure income support for aging Americans will be given new life by the political will and sense of entitlement of this generation.

The dramatic surge of recognition of the right of gays and lesbians to marry rests on the widespread acceptance in the United States of the right of persons to live according to their sexual orientation. This is a profound cultural change, signaling an opening of American culture similar to that represented by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. This shift toward equality has great meaning for all oppressed groups, for it suggests that a paradigm of intolerance has been overturned, and, as with the Civil Rights movement, other progressive social changes are sure to follow.

Social workers and others committed to progressive social change can be heartened to know that dark times in this country's past have been followed by the most profound social transformations. The New Deal was born from the Depression, the Civil Rights Movement was forged in the midst of a torpid domestic complacency, and the War on Poverty was begun during the worst days of Cold War tension. Similarly, the current economic downturn and anguish of war are sure to be followed by policies of renewal.

These too are dark days, but Spring promises us better days ahead.

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

REFLECTIONS:
NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Reflections, a refereed quarterly journal published by the Department of Social Work at California State University, Long Beach, is currently seeking professional narratives. Please send us manuscripts that describe:

- Your professional practice
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- Experiences in teaching
- Signal events that have transformed your professional thinking or life

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Introduction to the Special Issue The Making of a Gerontologist: The Role of Intergenerational Relationships

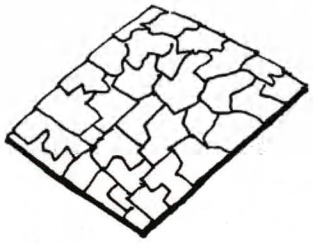
Guest Editor, Molly Ranney, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

This special issue focuses on the role that intergenerational relationships play in choosing a career in the field of gerontology. The idea for this issue came about as a result of my work as a GeroRich project director at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). The main goal of the GeroRich Grant, funded for three years (2001-2004) by the John A. Hartford Foundation, was to expose social work students to more gerontology content and increase interest in choosing career paths in gerontological social work. A total of 67 schools were funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation.

At CSULB, four faculty members from the Department of Social Work worked collaboratively as a project team to coordinate the grant. During the planning phase of the grant, our team spent a lot of time discussing how to increase student interest in working with older adults. Naturally, some of the first meetings included discussions about how our own interests in the field of aging emerged. As a result of these conversations, I began to suspect that a positive experience with an intergenerational relationship was often part of what led professional helpers to choose gerontology as a career. In an effort to further explore this career path, the idea for this issue of *Reflections* was born.

This special issue contains narratives by authors from across the United States. The authors are leaders in the field of gerontology. The interview of Fernando Torres-Gil offers insight as to how his relationship with his grandmother impacted his career path. Others stories share experiences with grandparents who offered their guiding wisdom; life-changing encounters with older adults; with members of the Saginaw Chippewa tribal nation; caring for a mother at the end of her life; friendships with older adult women; with a blues player; and with a supervisor.

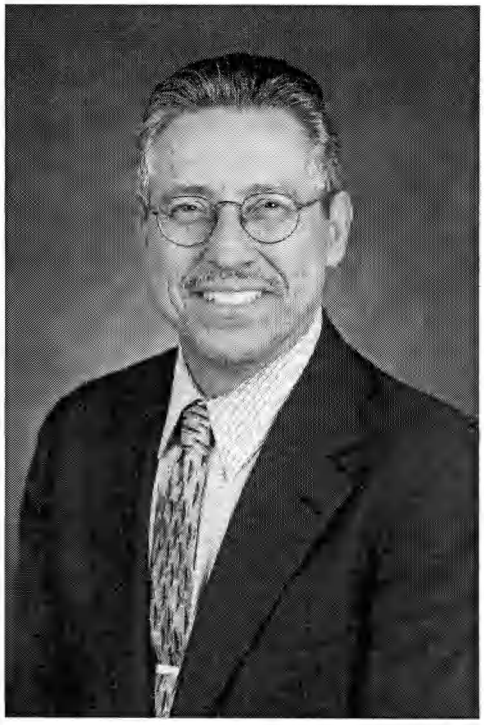
Reading the stories about what a profound impact intergenerational relationships have had on the authors in this issue, professionally and personally, is inspiring. These stories remind us of the powerful role older adults can and do play in our society. They also remind us of what a privilege it is to be a gerontologist.



The Making of a Latino Gerontologist: Dr. Fernando M. Torres-Gil

Rebecca A. Lopez, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

There are few better exemplars of minority aging scholars than the subject of this interview. For over thirty years, Dr. Torres-Gil has contributed to the shaping of aging policy, programs and research agendas on many levels. He reveals the circumstances of his entry to the field of aging, and recalls the pivotal moments and the diverse individuals which have all contributed to his career as a pre-eminent gerontologist.



Dr. Fernando Torres-Gil has long been an unwavering voice in the promotion and investigation of minority aging issues. From his early participation in the White House Conference on Aging of 1971, to his current leadership role as a renowned expert in the fields of health and long-term care, politics, social policy, ethnicity, and disability related to aging populations, he has played a key role in bringing to light the unique issues that confront elder members of ethnic minority groups. He has been a prolific researcher and author in exploring aging issues and has written or contributed to over 80 articles, books, or book chapters on these topics. His accomplishments also include extensive government and public policy involvement at the federal and state levels. He currently serves as Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the School of Public Policy and Social Research at the University of California, Los Angeles; as Associate Director of UCLA's Center on Aging; and as Director of the Center for Policy Research on Aging at UCLA. The author first came to know Dr. Torres-Gil as a fellow student and colleague at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy.

The author had an opportunity to discuss with him, at his home, his personal views about his introduction to gerontology and his professional development as a pre-eminent scholar in the field. In this interview, he comments on the important influences throughout his life that created and sustained his passion for gerontology with a special interest in the political structures and meanings of being a minority elder in America.

R.L.: I want to thank you for taking the time to share your unique story with the readers of *Reflections*. As a maverick in the field of minority aging, is it possible to identify an early recollection that may have been the starting point for your interest in the elder population?

F.T-G.: My grandmother is the first one who motivated my interest in intergenerational activity that, in turn, propelled my career in gerontology. My grandmother played a special role in my life. Having contracted polio at six months of age, I spent many years—from 6 months to 18 years—in and out of hospitals, primarily Shriners Hospital in San Francisco. After each time in the hospital, which would range from three to six months, I would be sent home for follow-up therapy and rehabilitation. It would fall on my grandmother who was staying with us in Salinas in the housing projects to do what we later came to call physical therapy and rehabilitation; except in her day, treatments were more indigenous and

culturally based. She would boil and cook up different herbs and plants and come up with her own medicine. She would do the rehabilitation, the massage, the physical therapy and all of this without calling it by those terms.

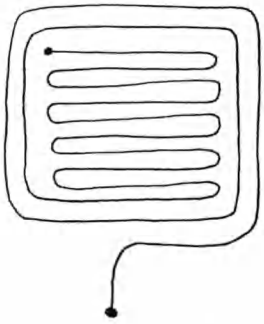
I later came to think of her as practicing *brujeria* [indigenous Mexican folk medicine]. And I give her a lot of credit for my having recovered enough strength to be able to walk, albeit with assisted devices. If not for her, I would probably still be in a wheelchair. She used her own peculiar medicines and prayers and exercises, and she would do all the regular treatments on my legs that we now call wellness. But in her day, it was just part of her culture. And of course always with tremendous love and compassion. So I became very close to her. Sadly, she passed away when I was a teenager, but she played a crucial role in my early years in helping me bounce back and recover from paralytic polio. That influence, and the role she played, stayed with me, even during the years when I had no professional interest in aging. It stayed with me all the way until I went to the Heller School [Brandeis University] where I was introduced to the field of gerontology.

R.L.: So your first professional foray into gerontology was at the Heller School at Brandeis University in Massachusetts?

F.T-G.: Yes, at the Heller School. It was quite by accident—serendipity is the word I would use. By the time I arrived at the Heller School, my interests were in public administration, public policy, and politics. Having been born and raised in the Salinas Valley, I became very involved with the United Farmworkers Union, especially while I was in college. Our family lived in the only housing project in Salinas and my mother was an activist in the 1930's when there were early attempts to unionize workers in the Salinas Valley. These attempts failed and there are actually details about them in John Steinbeck's (1936) book, *In Dubious Battle.* But then, of course, I got involved at San Jose State in the Chicano Movement and the UFW (United Farmworkers Union.)

When I applied to graduate schools back East, I had many choices: Princeton, the Woodrow Wilson School, NYU, UCLA, USC. I remember I had all these great schools inviting me, but I remember I picked the Maxwell School at Princeton. But the more I learned about how it was isolated, primarily male, out in the middle of nowhere I decided that I didn't really want to be there. And I started getting calls from the Heller School and from Joe Rivera, a student who was already there. And he kept calling and he encouraged me to go because the only Latino Ph.D. student that had come out of the Heller School was Juan Ramos. But what finally got me to go was that the UFW offered me a job working with them where I could stay at the UFW house in Dorchester. So for free room and board, I could go to school and work with them part-time on weekends and evenings.

So my first year I would be on the picket line organizing activities and getting up at 4 or 5 in the morning to picket their produce terminal. And then I would head to campus for a full day of classes. Come my first winter, I had never seen snow before. I thought nothing of getting up at 3 or 4 in the morning when it would be, like, 10 or 15 [degrees] below zero. We would be out there in the cold and the wind, and by the time I went to the Brandeis campus it would be 10 or 15 degrees above zero. I would be wearing my California clothes and people would think I was crazy because I thought it was warm compared to working in the morning. But, anyway, after about a year it became clear that I couldn't do both. Working full-time for the Union and going to school full-time meant that something had to give. I stayed involved with them, but I moved to campus as a resident counselor.



By my second year, [Professor] Jim Schultz mentioned to me that there was a conference in Washington, D.C., and he asked if I would like to be a member of an evaluation team at that conference. They were going to pay me to go; and so, of course being a starving student, I jumped at the chance. That turned out to be the 1971 White House Conference on Aging. My very first introduction—and what an introduction!—I met all the luminaries that went on to become famous in the field: from Jacqueline Jackson and Hobart Jackson, to Maggie Kuhn, to Tish Sommers—every big name in the field over the next 20 to 30 years—they were all there.

Now, I went there as part of Professor Schultz's evaluation team, but when I arrived, there were protests by a number of minority activists. They were protesting the almost total exclusion of minority concerns in the White House Conference on Aging. So of course, being a union organizer, I kind of gravitated to them. And I remember we went to a church and this elderly lady, who was so incredibly charismatic, got everybody to march to the White House to have a 'counter conference on aging;' those were Maggie Kuhn's words. We all marched into the office of the chairman of the conference and made all our demands known. And there I came upon the legend, Dr. Arthur Fleming, and I was amazed at how he handled the unruly crowd in his office. I remember it so clearly. We laid out our demands and he said 'Well, tell me. What is it that you want from us to be a part of the conference?' We shouted out, 'We want everything written in Spanish and English.' He said 'Fine, you'll have it.' Then we said we wanted more sessions and workshops on minority concerns. 'Fine, you'll have it,' he said. And then somebody in the group said, 'We want minority delegates to this conference.' And he looked around and he said, 'I hereby appoint each of you a delegate to the 1971 White House Conference on Aging.'

R.L.: An incredible turn of events.

F.T-G.: Yes. So, if you look at the delegate listing under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I am listed as one of the delegates. And that really got me interested in aging. Of course, I violated every fundamental rule of objective evaluation research by having become so deeply involved. But, be that as it may, that was my first entrance into aging, and I went back to the Heller School very excited about the topic. So when it came time to do my master's thesis with [Professors] Norm Kurtz, Jim Schultz, Frank Caro, and Bob Binstock, I had a real dilemma. I wanted to do something on politics and organizing. I wanted to do something on Hispanics. But I now had this newfound interest in aging, and I remember sitting in Frank Caro's office saying 'Oh my gosh; I don't know what to do. I don't know which of these three to pick; I like them all equally.' And it was Frank Caro who turned me around and said, 'Why don't you do something on the politics of aging in the Hispanic community?' So the rest, as they say, is history. I did my Master's Thesis, my doctoral dissertation, my first book was on that topic and I immediately became the expert in this area. So that was my introduction to aging.

R.L.: Did your family or culture play any role in supporting your decision for this career direction?

F.T-G.: Well, here I would like to say a word about [Professor] Larry Fuchs. Because my Master's and Ph.D. increasingly looked at political involvement of the Hispanic elderly, it got me in touch, once again, with the role of culture, traditions, values, and intergenerational relationships. I had left these behind temporarily from the time I was with my grandmother. During this time I became heavily involved with the Chicano Movement, which I increasingly found to be a very age-

ist/youth-centric movement. And in my surveys of Hispanic elderly in East San Jose, known as *Sal Si Puedes* [literally translates to 'Get out if you can.'] I came to meet legendary figures such as Ernesto Galarza. I started asking the elders if they were interested in politics, if they had been involved, or were involved now. I came to find in my surveys and interviews that Hispanic elderly were *very* interested in politics and political activism; but they felt under appreciated and shunned by younger Chicano activists. In fact, many of these elders had been heavily involved in organizing and community activism in the 1920's, 1930's, 1940's and 1950's.

R.L.: I can say that this was also a surprise to me, because when we were in the midst of the Chicano Movement, we felt that we *alone* invented activism. And yet our elders have an entire unrecognized history of activism that they didn't talk about all the time.

F.T-G.: Yes. In the 1960's we actually thought *we* had discovered political organizing. We thought that there had been nothing before us. My dissertation, which laid all this out, made it very clear that, in fact, the young Chicano activism was simply a continuation of a long, colorful story of activism among Hispanics; and that it was the elders who organized in the 1930's and 1940's and who had paved the way for us. Many were World War II veterans who came home and became involved in civil rights. It's just that we, as younger Chicanos, were quite ageist about what we thought we were doing. In fact, the data clearly show, when you look at registration and voting rates in the Hispanic community, it is always far higher among older segments of our population. Which was the case then, in the 1960's, but we didn't pay attention to that.

So, by recognizing the intergenerational links that we as young people were ignoring, I started taking a greater interest in our ethnic traditions that influenced the sense of political culture. Larry Fuchs, by the 1970's, was one of the nation's foremost experts on ethnicity and immigration, having done some of the landmark, pioneering research on ethnicity in Hawaii. He brought me back in touch with understanding the traditions and cultures of the countries of origin and how they shape how immigrant groups view their role in their new country—the United States. He made me understand that one reason the Latino elders of the 60's were reticent about bragging about what they did in the form of political activism was because they came from another culture—a more authoritarian culture where visibility and promoting yourself was not only frowned upon, but could get you in trouble. They came from places where you had to do things within the community or within the family, and it had to be hierarchical and it had to be as under the radar screen as possible. Because in Mexico and Latin America you could get into trouble by being too visible. But we Chicano activists came from a civic culture where we were fortunate enough to be born in the U.S. where we were socialized from a very young age to be involved, to take credit, to be visible, to exercise public leadership without any concerns about safety or social ostracism. The long and short of it is, Latino elders had a different political style. It was just as effective, but it was more quiet, more low key, more stoic, more under the radar screen.

R.L.: A very interesting distinction that has application for many diverse immigrant groups.

F.T-G.: Exactly. And so it was Larry Fuchs who helped me understand that culture and where you come from and your traditions are all very important parts of one's political socialization. And so I started to go back to thinking about why my grandmother and my aunts and uncles were the way they

were. Why they seemed more quiet and low key and why they never bragged about what they had accomplished. This was my reconnection to culture.

R.L.: As you began to build your professional body of work in a little known or little appreciated field at that time, was there a prevalent attitude you encountered in the course of your gerontological and cultural pursuits?

F.T-G.: Yes. And I would entitle it: 'poetic justice.' [*laughter*] Back in those early 70's as I pursued this passion for aging, the other Chicanos and Latinos, the few of us who were in the Boston area schools, started to question why I would get into this field. And without malintention, they would try to discourage me from making it a career, or at least my primary area of study. They would actually ask me, 'Why are you in that field? It's so depressing. You'll never get a job.' Now keep in mind this is the early 70's and I was involved in recruiting Latino students from the Southwest to Boston area schools. For those I recruited who were brave enough to go back east, the whole incentive was a prestige profession: business schools, law schools, schools of education, medical schools. Anything but this field of gerontology. Not only that, gerontology was so new. Most people didn't know what it was and didn't even know how to pronounce it. I had no encouragement from my Latino peers. If anything, they were turned off. They just felt I had made a mistake. They would say things like: "...but Fernando you're smart enough to go into law school, or business or medical school." But I had absolutely no interest in those areas, and I figured, well I might never get a job in this field—but at least I was doing what I believed in. It turns me on.

Well, fast forward 30 years later. Now, whenever I run into any of these folks, invariably they're asking me how they can get into this field. If they are lawyers, they want to get into the areas of trust, probate, and elder law. If they are in business or have MBA's, they want to get into that huge elderly consumer market. If they are in medicine or the health professions, of course, that's their clientele. If they are in education, it's about life-long learning. So that's why I call it 'poetic justice.' I came into it at a time when there was no career track; there were no clear professional opportunities. But I learned from mentors that you must follow a path that gets you excited when you get up in the morning. Not a path where you feel obligated, or because you feel it's prestigious. So I just did what I felt excited about, and the rest is history. So there was virtually no encouragement back then. The only encouragement came from people like Jim Schultz, Bob Binstock, and Frank Caro and the few students that were interested in the field. We essentially had to be self-motivated.

R.L.: Since the time of the White House Conference on Aging, our society has become much more ethnically and culturally diverse. From your multi-cultural experience, have you perceived cross-cultural differences in how populations approach aging or the aged?

F.T-G.: Yes; even more so today than 30 years ago. Let me answer that this way. Los Angeles is probably the best place to study cross-cultural differences in aging because the southern California region has the largest population of a number of ethnic minority groups outside their countries of origin. It has the largest populations of Mexicans, Central Americans, Armenians, Persians, Koreans, Japanese. In addition, it has the largest population of elders in those groups. And the reason that's a critical issue is that Southern California tends to attract elders who have been brought here by their children. And so the elders here are totally unacculturated to our country. So I often say

that if you want to know what it is like to be an older person in Korea, or Armenia, or Mexico, and what the traditional values are of those countries, you don't have to go to Korea or Mexico. Go to Los Angeles, California, and spend time with those elders.

Each group has their own view of what it means to be an elder, how they view their relationships with younger generations, how they want to be treated as elders. Just as I learned from my grandmother, each of those minority groups has a different view of aging that is heavily influenced by their cultures and countries of origin. This is also a source of great tension and can create real mental health problems among elderly immigrants. Another concept I learned very well from Larry Fuchs, who is one of my all-time heroes, was the concept of assimilation and acculturation. Assimilation is giving up your culture to be like someone else. Acculturation is keeping your culture, but yet being effectively involved in another culture. And that's where I learned the importance of acculturation over assimilation. And I learned to admire the Jewish community because they are highly acculturated, very influential and effective in this country and yet maintaining their religious and cultural traditions. I think Cubans have done that well, also.

Yet, for Mexicans of earlier generations, we became assimilated—able to effectively deal in this country, but giving up many of our cultural traditions. Although that is less so with later generations of Mexican Americans. The point is that I now find that those twin issues of assimilation and acculturation play out constantly as a series of tensions within each of these immigrant ethnic groups. And it is the elders that face the greatest tension, because their children come here and are working hard to become acculturated and eventually assimilated. But the elder comes here with thoughts of how they would be treated as elders in their countries of origin; and now they are generally left alone, isolated, having to cope as individuals in a very individualistic society. This is without having the acculturation skills of the language, knowing the system, knowing how to get benefits and how to get around. So we find high levels of stress, tension, depression among immigrant elders because their children and grandchildren are so different from them that the intergenerational bonds between them begin to fade. So that's how cross-cultural differences begin to play a role here.

R.L.: All of these dynamics would suggest there would be higher levels of depression among immigrant elders, and yet there are so few studies that seek to disclose these levels.

F.T-G.: This is true. There are so few studies that honestly and objectively study mental health issues. It means doing studies that are objective and are not over-romanticizing immigrant or ethnic cultures. But the second thing is that in immigrant cultures, whether it's Mexican or Chinese or Armenian or whatever, there is a science, an art, to how you uncover what is actually occurring. Immigrant elders are loathe to admit that there is a tension, a problem. There is a great deal of denial and shame by the elders and by their children. So on the surface, unless you really know how to get into the underlying dynamics of a particular ethnic community, they won't open up. It's not easy for them to admit that their children have been ignoring them, or have been emotionally abusing them, or that they feel alone and let down. It is not an easy topic to uncover; yet it's very, very real.

R.L.: For decades now, we have heard the portent of 'The Graying of America.' Yet, this also means the Graying of 'Minority' America. What do you foresee for our population from the perspective of a Latino gerontologist?

F.T-G.: Therein lies a great question which I hope to pursue in the next 10 to 20 years through my research and professional activities. The Graying of America and the graying of ethnic and minority populations is creating a whole new social and political dynamic. It is what David Hayes-Bautista has coined, in part, the 'age-race stratification.' As a gerontologist, I now realize that the world has become a far more complex place than when I started doing my studies. I am now focusing on those complexities which involve certain variables. The first is that the proportion of each ethnic minority group will increase as we, too, enjoy higher life expectancies. That is to say, there will be many more ethnic minority elders, so we have to better understand the many and complex needs of each group and find a way to integrate that information into the system of services and public benefits that now exist.

The next issue is the aging of the younger population—the 'age-race stratification.' There we find that for the next 10 to 20 years, we have a peculiar dynamic where the older population in California and the U.S. will still be predominantly White and English speaking. Yet, the young population will increasingly be young, ethnic minority, non-English speaking. So, to put it simply, we will have an increasingly ethnic minority work force supporting an older, White, retiree population. And we see that in California, where the bulk of the electorate is White, English speaking; but, increasingly, the majority of the working population and the Kindergarten through 12th grade population are members of ethnic minority groups. And those interests don't always come together when there is a mismatch of political power. You may have one group overly influencing the electoral and political systems, and not always on behalf of that younger group, which is increasingly diverse. We have to find a way to reconcile that 'age-race stratification' because it can and is already creating political controversy and tension.

The third element in this is how we prepare a young, ethnic minority population for a longer life expectancy. What should we be doing to enable them to have a greater probability of a good old age, a good retirement security? Therein I have my greatest concerns, because when you look at the educational attainment and job prospects for ethnic minority populations, they are not good. When you look at retirement and pension investing, the levels are extraordinarily low for the younger ethnic population. When you look at this country's political willingness to sustain public entitlement programs 30 years from now for, what will hopefully be, many more minority elders, that is in question. When you look at such issues as a global economy, minorities are less able to play a role in the way the global economy is playing out. It ultimately has a huge impact on the countries of origin, whether it be Asia or Latin America. And that plays out in many complicated scenarios that affect cross-border migration from those countries to the U.S.

And then lastly, one of the topics I hope to write about is the issue of America's involvement as the global policeman and its involvement in the many wars we will have to fight. When you look at who's going to serve and protect this country, increasingly the military is realizing the soldiers will have to come from young, immigrant minority communities.

R.L.: Because immigrant groups increasingly constitute the younger segments of our society?

F.T-G.: Yes. The whole point of this is that the Graying of America and the Graying of Minority America is going to create a much more complex demographic mosaic for our country where we will increasingly have to confront the nexus of aging and diversity. I have several articles out on this already. This

is the great challenge for the next 10 to 20 years. That is why I am still really excited about still being in the field of gerontology.

R.L.: These are exciting times. It is amazing to see how the field of gerontology that you started with has literally exploded into so many critical areas beyond narrow concern about public services and has provided a wealth of opportunities to explore so many complex issues and dynamics.

F.T-G.: Let me say that I was, fortunately, very lucky. If I did anything that was smart, it was that I followed my passion. I was able to motivate myself, but I was also able to acquire wonderful mentors along the way who helped me open the doors to places I needed to go that would further my ability to be effective in this field. I was lucky in that I was a Latino who got involved in the field early on. And so the fact that I am into aging and I am Hispanic puts me in the middle of two huge trends that are playing out now and in the future. A third area of luck, which may sound kind of strange, was that I grew up with a disability. And now one of the newest areas and trends happens to be aging with a disability. So I am able to play a leadership role and to have credibility in all those three areas: aging, disability, and ethnicity. Of course, for most of this, it was just the luck of the draw.

I also learned, early on, the importance of accumulated experiences. This is something I always advise my student and mentees about. That early on in one's career, you should not get pigeonholed and stuck in one career path because, ultimately, to address social issues, you need an interdisciplinary set of skills and experiences.

R.L.: This certainly speaks to the eclectic nature of social work and social policy.

F.T-G.: Eclectic is a good word. It helps to be eclectic, and it also helps to not get too comfortable in one area. For me, I became involved not just in aging or Latino issues, but I also moved into public policy, public administration, into social work, into health care; and not just as a scholar and an academic, but also as a public servant and a political activist. And now, increasingly in my old age, people come to me and ask 'How were you able to balance out and handle those different roles?' It seems most of us are encouraged to become either an academic or to go into a different career and just stay with it. The ability to move in and out of different interests is not easy, sort of like building two or three careers at the same time. If I give credit to anyone for 'enabling' me to do that it's Elvira [*wife.*] It's hard to do it as an individual. It takes a really strong system of supportive friends and family. And in my case, Elvira has been my number one fan and, as she puts it, my number one enabler. She has enabled me to put in the tremendous amount of time and energy to do all those things that have given me those accumulated experiences.

Plus, I have always remained close to my family. My grandmother passed away, but I remain close to our extended family and my siblings [9 in this country and 2 in Mexico City.] I find that I have taken on my grandmother's role in the family. My grandmother was the center of her family. She had ten children, and they all had from five to ten kids all scattered up and down California. So while my grandmother was alive, everyone came to her. When she died, the family felt like they were going to drift apart. So my mother and an aunt, twenty-three years ago, started an annual family reunion in order to keep the connection. We just completed our 23rd annual reunion which brought together about 200 to 250 people, and every year we alternate between northern and southern California. It brings us all together; but most importantly it brings in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th gen-

eration of kids. And I find that I am becoming more and more like the patriarch of the extended family that people go to and ask what it was really like, and how did our family get here, and what were our grandparents like. And I am enjoying this at a reasonably young age of 55, of being a patriarch and being called by some "Don Fernando." It all goes back to my grandmother and the values she showed us.

R.L.: Fernando, I would like to thank you for sharing, albeit just a snapshot, of those values and of a remarkable career. From Washington, D.C., to local efforts, you have played a critical role in the direction our society has taken in exploring aging issues. You have often stood alone in giving voice to the unique qualities of the minority aging experience and we are indebted to you. Thank you.

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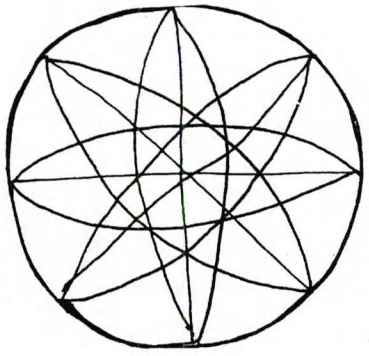

Wisdom-Bearers and Story-Tellers: Older Adults as Guides and Friends

Holly Nelson-Becker, Ph.D., University of Kansas

This narrative recounts the author's discovery that her primary pathway to service was in working with older adults. Embedded in this process were separate but related journeys of coming to terms with a spiritual call and learning how her affinity for languages and cultures could support a contribution in aging.

Gerontology as a profession chose me; I did not first choose it. Through a series of synchronistic events whose roots lay below my early consciousness, geriatric social work began to thread through the core of my life. This central focus remained largely invisible to me until it thumped me on the head in a forceful way in my mid-thirties, declaring itself in a way I could not ignore. Later, when I came to fully recognize my place in the aging studies field, I began to understand how this vocation had always called to my soul and how the digressions from this path had only made the way more clear. Because of childhood relationships with older adults who treasured me, I formed friendships that have spanned four decades of my life; these friendships have been a continuing source of inspiration and nurture and a key to my undiminished trust in a benevolent future. I also sensed a transcendent force with me on this journey. At times, because of busyness or fear, like the Biblical Jonah, of what I might be asked to do, I have limited its access to my heart. But when I have allowed it to enter, this companion has challenged me to live my life in a searching, mindful, and compassionate way.

Looking back now, I can see how the many strands of my youthful interests have come together in a tapestry of time, making aging the dominant color. I will relate this process of discovery through description of my family guides, guides I met during college, emerging guides in my career, and what I learned from each of them.

Family Guides: Early Memories

Both sets of my grandparents raised their children on farms in Iowa. I remember the rich experiences of visits to grandparents' houses that included setting foot in rooms redolent of time and earth, slightly musty but pleasant fragrances. The houses were filled with objects that must have represented well the *objets du jour*, but which to me were strange and wonderful: a Seth Thomas mantel clock; a library replete with Arthur Conan Doyle classics and Iowa law books; pie chests and Rococo rocking chairs; a beautiful rosemaul-painted wood chest from Norway inscribed "Anna Rorvig-1883"; embroidered linen tablecloths; light streaming through a stained-glass staircase window; ten foot ceilings; patterned wallpaper that I memorized over the years; and homemade, special recipe, raisin spice cookies. Outside were barns in need of paint, Holstein cattle, cackling chickens, vineyards, vegetable gardens, and large expanses of land and light. This was the context of the life of my grandparents: these objects and locations spoke of what they valued. As I loved my grandparents, I also learned to value the context of their lives. This context brought me a love of books and of learning, an appreciation of old things, and an understanding that the beauty of an environment had the power to nourish me at times when I felt despair or loneliness.

My grandparents' rural life included a deep concern for friends and neighbors. For example, as a farmer, lawyer, and insurance

agent, my paternal grandfather was well-respected because of his thoughtful care for people in the community. During the Depression of 1932, when mortgaged farms were brought to auction to pay debts the farmers could no longer cover, my grandfather would regularly appear at these auctions with a pitchfork in hand. No one ever bid at the auctions he attended; thus, a number of threatened farm sales were thwarted and some of the farmers negotiated more generous payment schedules. In her late 80s, my paternal grandmother was photographed for the *Des Moines Register* along a roadside campaigning for George McGovern in the presidential election of 1972. She remained concerned about the political world and its consequences for the poor until the end of her life. My grandmother's example taught me that even at older ages, one could and should make a difference. These models of advocacy later led me to see the power of social work to promote both my passion for aging and my concern for the voiceless.

My maternal grandparents had retired to Arkansas by the time I began to form memories of them. As with my paternal grandparents, I knew I was loved and welcomed on their small farm. My grandmother developed cancer and I watched in brief segments across time as my grandfather gently tended her through an initial recovery and then a relapse. He modeled a sensitive, uncomplaining style that I hope I will use if I am ever in a caregiving circumstance. After her death, he cycled between my family home and the home of an aunt and uncle. He was a quiet man who didn't have a lot of outside activities. I was quiet too, and I remember feeling awkward with him at times, wanting to talk with him, but not knowing how to begin the conversation. Now I view it as an opportunity forever lost. I believe he would have welcomed those conversations as much as I would have enjoyed sharing in them. In our active suburban household, I think there were times when he felt bored and lonely. Our world was not his world of choice and he never made it his own. But in his quiet way, he taught me that love could be communicated even in wordless ways.

Emotional Supports

My grandparents must have looked forward to yearly visits as much as I did. I remember racing into the living room after an eight-hour car ride to see them sitting in favorite rockers, rising to greet each one of us with a kiss and a hug, answering the excitement in our voices with excitement in their own. My grandparents loved me and told me so. I was my paternal grandmother's "little lamb," though I often didn't feel like one, if I even knew exactly what she meant by that term. This endearment bestowed on me a sense that she cared deeply about me. Even though small, I was not insignificant to her. Like facing on a hand-sewn dress, this was a powerful and largely invisible stabilizer in my life.

As the youngest child in a traditional family with two older brothers and a mother who suffered from undiagnosed depression, I learned to melt into the background to avoid being the object of angry outbursts as my brothers often were. I learned to be quiet and to suppress the sound of my voice. One of my struggles since has been to value my own voice and to let it speak its truth. Perhaps this is why it took me three decades of my life to discover that gerontology was the field to which I was called. Had I listened harder, had I listened sooner, this truth may have been available to me earlier. Still, the first life path I followed in languages led me to find an alternative voice and to value diversity in aging because of the friends I made and kept in foreign lands. Perhaps there are really no diversions from one's true vocation, since vocation contains all the lessons that have come before.

Emotional caring from my grandparents was something I could count on. My paternal grandparents especially were able to support me in a way my mother was not because of her own struggles. My grandmother, a grandmother to many grandchildren, wrote me letters. When my grandparents phoned (rare in those days because of the expense of long distance calls) they always asked to speak with me. That was affirming for a somewhat shy child—to know that I was that important. When I was young I thought the scenario of greetings and good-byes would replay itself in an unending and welcome loop. Later with their deaths, I felt the pain of irreparable loss. There was a tear in the fabric that could not be mended.

Later Influence

Three of my grandparents died when I was young, but my paternal grandmother lived until I was in my 20's. She represented the now common demographic of older women surviving their spouses: she lived about twenty-one years beyond my grandfather. During that time she continued to live in the same farmhouse just outside of town, but extended her commitment to the well-being of the marginalized rural poor. She was active in local societies that collected and distributed goods, and she maintained her political advocacy by being a frequent letter writer/commentator to the local newspaper. The wisdom she showed me was that one can make a difference through all ages of life. If one chooses that pathway, the pathway of activism and altruism, one's sense of self-efficacy will remain intact even as health problems appear. I remember her presence at my wedding, older then and in pain, but radiant in a beauty that comes from finding an internal source of resilience.

Another source of wisdom that also became a personal resource to me was the religious affiliation of both sets of grandparents. My paternal grandparents lived in a town with only two churches: both from the same Norwegian mainline Protestant denomination. They were active in the church and, though my father had joined my mother's church, we always enjoyed attending with them when we visited on Sundays. My other grandparents were members of a small church organization, and some of their relations had been missionaries. All of my grandparents enjoyed the social relationships formed with church friends, but valued more the deeper connection to Spirit which the church invited. As I watched them pray at meals and other times, I began to appreciate the value of trust in the transcendent.

Extended Family Guides

Cast into this family mix was an array of distinctive unmarried great-aunts and a great-uncle. Three chose to live together and run the family farm with a house that still sported an outhouse well into the 1960s. Because my paternal grandfather was the only one who left the homestead to marry and start his own family, they retained some bitterness at that decision. My grandmother would refer to the yearly visit with these good-hearted but myopic relatives as the "duty call" and sometimes would send us without her. My brothers, parents, and I sat in the parlor as these great-aunts and a great-uncle scurried to make us feel welcome. The parlor had a faded green and white linoleum floor and a sagging sofa. Though poor, these relatives were always interested in us and asked many questions about school and our lives. Behind closed doors was a second, more formal parlor with a light oak Victorian pump organ. I only saw it once. We

were family, but it seemed as if there were also boundaries between us that were symbolized by the pump-organ-in-the-parlor we never saw.

My grandmother's twin sister, a schoolteacher, lived with a woman who graduated with a law degree from and who was a trustee of Drake University. This woman's grandfather had been a ship captain. She had come from wealth on both sides and this well-appointed house, by contrast to the farmhouse of the great-aunts and great-uncle, had plastered walls, silver coffeepots, and magnificent 18th century paintings. Though not related to me by blood, she took as much interest in me as great-aunt Mary, encouraging my early interest in horses by giving me armfuls of magazines about show horses. I have a photo of me at age four standing between these two great-aunts, one real and one adopted, looking up with an expression of joy on my face. These early encounters with my extended family shaped my understanding that while the worlds of adults and children were kept quite separate at that time, the lines could melt into each other in ways that helped me feel safe and that encouraged me to do whatever I dreamed.

Experiences with family elders laid a foundation for my career choice of gerontology. Along with Remen (2000), I was blessed by being born into loving family relationships with my grandmothers and my grandfathers. These relationships taught me to begin to trust my inner feelings and to rely on the wisdom that these elders so graciously lived and gave. In a spiritual sense, these connections and the love I learned from them continue on, golden threads woven through the rest.

Guides in College and Beyond

I had been fortunate to have French classes from fifth grade onward. My growing interest in many foreign languages and cultures was fostered and given support by all of the older adults in my life who were not surprised or puzzled when I chose modern foreign languages as my major and to study and work overseas in my junior year of college. Through my college years, I remember bringing my friends from other countries to my paternal grandmother's house in Roland, Iowa, for weekend visits. Even though they were from distant places like Hong Kong, Kuwait, and France, they were always welcomed by my grandmother, living alone by then, who treated them as she did any of her grandchildren. Even in rural Iowa, diversity was valued.

During my first year, I took a one-month, winter-term course in rural poverty. I had the opportunity to shadow a social worker extensively. I assumed that many of the homes we would visit would be those of young families with children who had difficulty meeting expenses of running a small family farm in the beginnings of the corporate farm age. To my surprise, most of the homes we visited were those of older adults who lived in houses very similar to that of my great-aunts and great-uncle. They told of not being able to save money when they were young and of depleted resources that now impeded any cultivation of produce from their land. The stories and settings were familiar but sadder than anything I knew. Many of the rural dwellers we visited had been adversely affected by events far beyond their capacity to control. My heart was touched by their plights. I was a witness to a time that should have been happy for them as it had been for the older adults in my family, but was marred by insufficiency and unwanted dependence on limited government largess. This experience served as a guidepost along the way, whispering to me from the future I did not yet know, that with new awareness comes responsibility to help.

The winter month that I spent in the Amana Colonies of Iowa further engaged my interest in language and in learning from older adults. Formerly known as the Community of True Inspiration, the Colonies were settled

in the early 19th century by a religious community from Germany with ties to Lutheranism. This community sought divine inspiration and nurture of the inner life through male and female prophetic voices. They lived a communal lifestyle until circumstances in 1932 caused them to disband their way of life but to maintain separate business and religious societies. In the mid-70s, they recognized that they were in danger of losing connection with many of their youth who had not learned German and thus could neither read, nor understand, the inspired historical writings, which were read by elders in the church. Concern over this impending cultural loss led them to agree to house six college students and a German instructor who would assist in translation.

All six students wanted to be housed with families who had children so we could have many opportunities to practice our nascent German. As fate would have it, I was assigned to an older, childless couple. The wife had been a librarian and appeared distant at first meeting. Gradually, through living life in that space together, Henrietta (Heinchen to her friends) began to talk to me about the important things in her life: her church, her community, her love of books. Indeed she loaned me several favorite books over that month. Later when I had a daughter, she sent us *Emily of the New Moon* series by Lucy Maud Montgomery. This led to many happy moments snuggled together with my daughter, reading on the couch, and to a family trip to Prince Edward Island. Those times with my daughter are, in a way, a debt I owe Heinchen.

That relationship continues to this day. I was given a guestroom in their solid brick house that had once been part of the kitchen and dining building in South Amana. My Amana friend shared stories about the early days of the community and what tasks she had been expected to do as a child. She worked in the kitchen but also developed a love of literature and writing. She spoke of donning long-sleeved dress, black shawl, cap, and apron and walking to church with Psalter spiel and Bible three times on Sundays. I had worked patiently to break through her first reserve and gained a friend for life.

Now in assisted living, Heinchen continues to maintain an independent and fulfilling life. She is an example to me of someone who is aging successfully by continuing to engage in activities that have always made her happy. I have met no other student from that time who kept in touch with his/her host family. "Fate" had been kinder to me than I realized. This relationship I later recognized as a guide into the aging field.

My German instructor from that time also kept yearly contact with me until his death in June 2003. Like the ripple from a pebble skipped on water, he taught me how a passion, in his case for German language and culture, could enrich one's life in ever-expanding outward circles. Though I didn't know it at the time, gerontology would return and catch me in its widening ring. Language and culture guided me into work with older adults and provided me with a perpetual curiosity about how ethnicity and culture affect perspectives on aging.

In the summer of my third year in college, I lived in Frankfurt, Germany. While there, I traveled to the northern tip of Denmark to an international church youth retreat. Although we spoke many languages with only a few in common, there was a still a strong sense of community and acceptance among us. Walking alone to an abandoned World War II bunker by the sea, I recall sitting on the sandy ridge and contemplating the ocean. I felt the presence of a transcendent power and knew I was called to something larger than myself. Watching the waves lap the beach in hypnotic cadence, I felt a shared connection to all living things. This understanding opened me further to building relationships with older adults, even when I had to exert great effort.

I met a German couple, Eva and Walter, who were only in their early forties then. They spoke about large things, like the difficulty of living in Germany during World War II and being forced to participate in the Jugend corps (youth movement of the 40s). They also spoke about small things, such as their dislike of blackberries, which were plentiful on the roadsides and one of the few available food staples in postwar Germany. Most Germans did not discuss these things openly at that time, and I felt privileged that they shared their feelings with me. They taught me about *laufen gehen*, the value of seeking spiritual renewal by taking a walk in the woods. Even today, I find restoration in forest hikes. Over the years we have often visited together and that has always been renewing.

Unlike my older relatives who were always old when I knew them, I have witnessed the aging of these friends, as they have witnessed the aging of my own family. These are a few of the key intergenerational relationships that have formed the background, and sometimes the foreground, of my life. They have been gifts to me.

Emergence of Gerontological Interest

After college, having become fluent in two foreign languages with knowledge of a third, I worked for a major international airline for eight years. While I enjoyed the work, I recognized that my role was basically reactive, whether working with people who wanted to travel, locating missing luggage, or handing out food and beverages on flights. I began to sense a vague yearning to do something more. Though Spanish was not one of my languages, I found myself frequently on flights to Mexico or Venezuela. On one of the latter trips, I was housed in a magnificent resort on the northern coast near La Guaira. Rather than being assigned a coveted room by the sea, mine faced the mountain across the road. At night, while I sat on my balcony, my view was of the thousands of glittering lamps that lighted the tiny shacks on the mountainside less than a mile away. Sitting in one of the most costly pieces of real estate in the world, I contemplated the view of one of the least desirable locations. At that moment I could not resolve the incongruity between my life and the lives of the poor who lived in such desperate and unheralded circumstances. The stories of my grandparents, who lived meaningful lives of advocacy for the less fortunate, came to my mind. In response to this call, I returned to school and obtained a Master's degree in Social Work from Arizona State University. Though I volunteered in a telephone reassurance program for the elderly to confirm that choice, I did not yet know that gerontology would become my passion.

After several social work positions in mental health, I was thumped on the head by an accidental encounter that made me finally understand that gerontology was the place that would be a home for me, a motivation for me to help others and a way to make my unique contribution to the world. When my program changed auspices, I was left at a crossroads. A position was advertised for a psychiatric social worker on a long-term care mental health team. During the interview, I was asked why I thought I would be able to work with older adults, who could be bad tempered and belligerent. I answered that I had had many experiences with older adults, and I had loved my grandparents. I got the job. The separate strands of my life now began to come together in a very powerful way: older adults, social work, and multilingualism. I might not have sought out this position on my own, but the confluence of events lifted me up and set me gently down on this new, yet familiar, ground of work in aging.

This position doing clinical work with older adults tested me and also brought me triumphs. The work was the most satisfying of anything I had known, though I was not always successful in helping older adults regain a sense of meaning and purpose. Once I worked with

a depressed woman who had reverted to speaking only the French of her youth. I was one of the few professionals able to generate verbal responses. Though referred for mental health problems, many times the clients I worked with were troubled by questions of a spiritual nature. What type of legacy were they leaving when children no longer spoke with them? Why had God allowed them to develop cancer or Parkinson's disease? Because these questions were significant ones, I tried to meet these older clients in the places where they were as well as to involve clergy when a clear connection to religion had been made. One of my mentors, a Jewish psychologist and my supervisor, opened the door by giving me "permission" to follow this path in a public agency.

During this time in the early 90s, I was called to become a self-sustaining elder in a mainline Protestant faith tradition. In this tradition, priesthood calls are an externally initiated process but must, of course, also be an internal one. My life partner is Catholic. He is employed by the Catholic Church and had studied for the ministry himself, so this was a time of growth for both of us. The humor of working with elders and then becoming one in a ministerial office was not lost on me.

My search for answers to the questions I was asked by clients led me to obtain further education so I would be better prepared to help my older adult clients. Within a short time, my family and I were in Chicago and I was in a Ph.D. program in social service with a gerontological emphasis at the University of Chicago. Every class I took was an opportunity to delve into different aspects of aging. One of my instructors in the Divinity School suggested that each student had come to school with a central question, something that would shape our ongoing work; our task as his students was to reflect on and uncover that question. What had brought us here at this point in our lives? My question, as he helped me to discover it, was about religion and spirituality as mechanisms for managing life challenge in older adults. Indeed, much of my research to date related to this line of inquiry. I have learned that older adults draw on many different resources and adapt to new circumstances in impressive ways.

Conclusion

Reflecting back at my life now at what is probably about the midpoint, I wonder at the power that unexpected and unplanned encounters have had in my life to direct me into the field of gerontological social work. While at certain junctures, my life choices seemed to lack coherence, they now have moved into a more continuous path. I now see the people and experiences that entered my life as guides and friends who shaped my interest in aging. Time and perspective have evened out what in a shorter frame would have appeared to be wide arcs of a needle on paper, so that now I think of the digressions into language and culture as integral to my contributions to the aging field.

People enter and exit our lives as teachers: wisdom-bearers and story tellers. Extended family and friends have aroused my curiosity and fired my passion for gerontology. Some people teach us lessons we seek, and others teach us lessons we would never choose to learn on our own. But both kinds are of equal value. I have built relationships with some older adults because they have taught me about life through their actions and the nature of their being. Others were difficult to interact with because they were angry and directed their anger towards me, but the challenges they provided helped me to develop the skills I needed to do this work. What may appear to be loose threads may be what draws us back to the fabric of our lives.

Hanh (1991) suggests that it is in the present moment that we can find inner and outer peace. Being in the present moment with older adults is to hear their pain, sorrow, or joy. It is to acknowledge and validate their

uniqueness. In this simple yet profound act, we may transform their lives and our own.

Keeping a hopeful, watchful wait will bring you those things you need to learn in order to release your unique gift to the world. I know now that my best contribution is in aging, but as I have shown, I have not always known it. Being mindful of the power in the present moments of our lives to shape and direct us can help us glimpse the future person we will be. That vision, once we catch it, can be a strengthening force that leads us into our truest selves. May that vision be accessible for you.

Author Note

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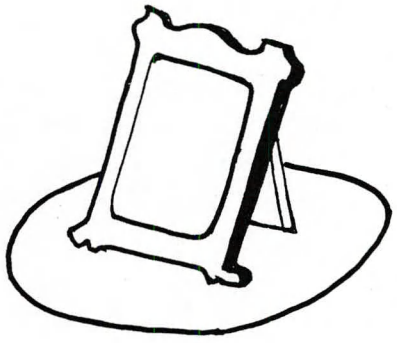


Constructing a Gerontologist: Intersections of Personal and Professional Experience

Elizabeth S. Kelchner, Ph.D., Binghamton University, New York

This narrative details the experiences which have helped cement the author's interest in working with elders. Her experiences with older people have been their own reward.

My interest in gerontology has been influenced by several experiences I have had with older adults rather than by one particular relationship. My grandparents had all died before I was born. Any sense I have of who they were as individuals has been gleaned from stories told to me by my parents. I know that my father's parents were poor Jewish immigrants who met in New York City. My father was their only son and, in spite of the poverty they experienced, was a spoiled child, insisting on, and being given, toys and clothes that his parents could ill afford. My mother's father was well educated, having received a degree from Amherst College, but worked as a clerk in an office. My mother's mother worked at home taking care of my mother and her siblings. Although I never met my grandparents, they nevertheless have had an influence on my life and my interest in working with the elderly.

Both my parents were storytellers, and it didn't take much prodding to have them tell me about their parents. My grandparents were all good people: hardworking, kind, generous, and loving. They valued family and friendship and taking care of each other. Hearing about them from my parents gave me a sense of where I came from and, although I did not know it at the time, influenced my interest in working with elders. I felt great affection and admiration for my grandparents, and respected what they had each accomplished. These feelings were in part responsible for my desire to reach out to older adults and to be a part of their lives.

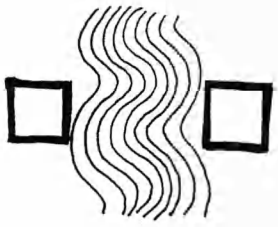
When I was eight years old, one of our neighbors was an older woman who lived alone. My friends and I were afraid of her, believing her to be a "witch." This woman is the first older person I can remember meeting, although through our church I believe my parents interacted with and introduced me to elderly people.

The older woman who lived in our neighborhood was, to me, an enigma. My parents admonished my sisters and me to never "take candy from a stranger." In spite of that and my fear of the old woman, I greedily took the cookies and milk she offered when I felt brave enough to ring her doorbell. She would invite me in and I would marvel at the clutter in her living room; magazines and pictures littered every surface and emitted a musty odor. Our new, pre-fabricated home was nothing like hers. I visited her as often as I could, but eventually my family moved to another town and although I didn't think of her often, I never forgot her. Memories of her kindness and need of company have stayed with me.

I remember visiting a friend of my maternal grandfather. The friend, Frank, was old, white haired, and stooped, and he had been blind from birth. He lived in an apartment with his wife and every object in their home had its own place. My mother cautioned me not to touch or move anything as he was quite adept at moving about and taking care of most of his needs independently, as long as he knew where things were. I was not to move a chair or an ottoman, nor touch anything in the bathroom. I was fascinated by how well organized their home was; with three young girls,

our home, while neat, did not have the same sense of order. I admired his ability to remember where everything was so that he wouldn't trip over furniture or grab a knife when he wanted a spoon. I was impressed by and liked Frank.

In tenth grade I wanted to be a physical therapist. Some friends and I worked with a young man who had cerebral palsy. His parents were hoping that he would be able to walk independently and were using the Doman Delacato technique. The exercises required five people to assist him, and his mother had come to our school to ask for volunteers to help. Once a week during the school year, my friends and I, along with his mother, would assist him in going through the patterning exercises. At the end of the year he walked, unassisted, to the front of the auditorium and thanked those of us who had worked with him for our help. In order to learn more about being a physical therapist, I volunteered that summer at the county nursing home. The Red Cross, which sponsored me, arranged for me to be placed in the physical therapy department and to have some time to speak with the therapist.



In the morning, I transported residents to and from their rooms for their physical therapy and served a snack while they waited for their treatment. After therapy, I assisted residents outside for picnics and helped the men in their game of bocce. I also assisted the activity staff with birthday parties, dancing for the residents and serving cake and ice-cream. The residents often wore their nightclothes, stained with spilled food, all day, and the men went several days without a shave. As many of the residents were either incontinent or not taken to the bathroom when needed, the odor of urine was pervasive. In spite of these conditions I found myself enjoying being with the residents, especially when they told me about their families and past lives. I enjoyed the stories they would tell me, and I enjoyed listening to the women gossip about each other and the staff. I wondered about the conditions they were living in and was told that their families didn't have the money to pay for care at home. Although I ended up deciding against physical therapy as a career, I found that I enjoyed working with the elderly. I wondered what it would be like to work in a nursing home, and thought that I might like it.

The following year, my high school guidance counselor talked to me about a career in social work, and after exploring it further, I decided that was the right path for me. While a college student, I did not have the opportunity to work with the elderly, and after graduation found myself working in mental health in a state hospital.

Although I didn't work on a geriatric unit, I had several elderly patients on my caseload and found again that I enjoyed being with them. Most of the older patients were women, and the therapy aides did not seem to know how to interact with them. The aides spent most of their time with the younger patients, and I found myself, in an attempt to compensate for the lack of attention they received, being drawn to the older women. I was reminded of the old woman I had known in my childhood. The women seemed lonely and disconnected from society; few had any visitors and it was unlikely that they would ever leave the hospital. I was told they were "institutionalized," many having lived in the hospital most of their adult lives. I was angry that society had allowed this to happen – the women were no threat to anyone – but my attempt to speak on their behalf went unheard. One incident was especially unsettling as it seemed to ex-

emplify the attitudes the staff had towards the older patients.

Grace was in her late 70s and had been a patient in the hospital for most of her adult life. In her attempt to make personal an impersonal system, Grace had claimed a favorite chair in the day room. She rarely left the building as she was considered too old to participate in the outdoor recreational activities. Her chair was by the window, and on warm days she could feel the breeze through the opening; when the sun was out it warmed her. The therapy aides decided to rearrange the furniture in the day room to make it more "homey," and it did look nice. They created various seating arrangements, and it was possible to imagine you were sitting in someone's living room rather than in a large, institutional day room. Unfortunately, in the rearrangement of the furniture, Grace's chair became part of one of the seating arrangements and was no longer by the window. Struggling with the heavy chair, Grace managed to move it to her favorite spot. Every time she did this, the staff would admonish her and move it back to its new place. Eventually the staff, weary of the effort, moved Grace's chair into the hall, which is where I discovered her. The hall was far from the window, and Grace had to be satisfied to sit in the hallway, like an errant school child being punished. I moved Grace's chair back to the window, but when I tried to speak with the staff about the situation, they were annoyed with my interference, unable or unwilling to understand the importance of that chair to an old woman who had little else in her life to call her own.

I continued to work with older people in my next job as a community-based case manager for adults with developmental disabilities. My interest in working with the elderly led me to be involved in discussions about program planning for clients upon retirement, apparently uncharted territory as no specific programs to meet this growing need existed. Older clients living in the community were expected by state regulations to remain engaged in activity, but all that was available for them was work in a sheltered workshop. "Retirement" was not an option.

A move to another city required a job change, and I was offered a position as director of social work in a long-term care facility. I wasn't sure that I would stay long as I had enjoyed my previous work. I ended up staying almost ten years. I realized that it felt as if I'd come full circle, back to where I belonged. Relationships I developed with the residents cemented my interest in working with elders. Our facility had a program where staff could volunteer to be paired with a resident who did not have family who lived locally. We were allowed time each week to visit the resident. I signed up immediately and ended up visiting with a number of residents on a regular basis, some with, and some without, family close by. The time spent interacting with the residents, helping the activities department with parties and programs, and taking residents outside for a "walk" was the most pleasurable and rewarding of anything I did. I learned much from the residents, from how to enjoy life to how to face death. I shared the joys of welcoming a new grandchild and the sorrow of losing a loved one. As director of social work, I felt the satisfaction of having a positive influence on the quality of life the residents experienced through facilitating staff development programs aimed at informing staff about the psychosocial needs of the residents and initiating group work programs for residents and their families. Of all the work experiences I had, working with elders was

the most professionally and personally rewarding.

I eventually returned to school to study for a Ph.D. I focused my course work and my research on the elderly, with a specific interest in older women. A small research study I conducted while a student focused on how social work students decide on a field of practice. Exposure to older adults, either from personal experience or through field internships, seemed to influence student decision making. My dissertation was a phenomenological inquiry into physician-elder communication. Today, as a social work educator, my focus on and commitment to the elderly remains strong. I encourage students, through classes I teach and through advising, to consider a career in gerontology, and I am actively involved in services to the elderly in my community.

As my own parents grew older I gained a new appreciation for them and the encouragement, support, and guidance they always provided me. Experiences I had with my mother as she aged influenced my interest in issues faced by elderly women. I am grateful to all the older people who have allowed me to be a part of their lives; they have been generous and patient. In social work, as in many professions, working with the elderly tends to be the road not taken, but for me, choosing "the one less traveled by . . . has made all the difference" (Frost, 1920).

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In Honor of the Lessons of the Elders

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As a member of the Saginaw Chippewa tribal nation, the author learned many lessons from the elders; including the importance of their culture and unwritten history, and how to attain inner peace. This narrative describes the positive memories and interactions the author had throughout her life, and how these experiences have influenced her profession as a social worker, professor, and gerontologist.

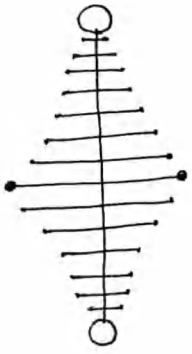
As a member of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, I have had a wonderful opportunity to observe and experience the aging process from an American Indian cultural perspective and an intergenerational viewpoint. I was raised with the traditionally grounded cultural value of respect for the elders. I was taught that the elders are treated with high regard and held in high esteem. The roles of elders are part of an intergenerational construct within the culture. They are often in the role of keepers of the culture, kinship keepers, teachers, mediators, unifiers, counselors, healers, and caregivers (Bahr, 1994; Emick & Hayslip, 1996; Ryan, 1981; Shomaker 1989). In some tribal nations, a person becoming a grandparent defines elderhood, in part. Bahr (1994) states, "The expectation that grandparents will play a major role in the physical care and training of their grandchild is common among most Indian people. In fact, it is one of the notable similarities among the wide diversity of tribes" (p. 236). In present day, these traditional roles remain true for many, but not all of the elders.

Hendrix (2002) defines the term "elder" in the American Indian community as "a position of leadership, based on experience, spirituality, and community services, rather than chronological age" (p. 8). There are variations from tribal nation to tribal nation, however. The Indian Health Services consider Indian elders as those who are 55 years of age and older, while there are some tribal nations that consider members as elders at 40 and 50 years of age. It is clear that there are many considerations when defining elderhood within the American Indian population.

The elders have played a significant role in my life and interest in gerontology. However, as a sign of respect for their privacy, they are not named. In fact, the elders view themselves as a collective who are fulfilling their responsibilities to the tribal nation by making contributions without individual recognition. In the American Indian culture, one is considered extremely skillful if he or she can make a positive impact on the tribal nation without receiving recognition for the good deed. Additionally, two of the elders referenced in this narrative are medicine persons who prefer their names not be revealed in oral or written form.

My story begins with my mother, who was born on the Saginaw Chippewa Indian reservation located near Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. She was then removed from her home on the reservation and taken to a U. S. government boarding school at the age of seven. She was placed in the boarding school along with her younger sister and brother. She remained there until she was seventeen years of age.

My father was raised off reservation land in an Indian settlement and did not attend a boarding school, avoiding being sent by being what has been termed in the community, a runner. When the government people came to remove the children in the settlement community, the children ran into the woods and hid. They remained there until an elder came



to let them know it was safe to come back home. This is one of the ways my father and other children in his community were able to avoid the boarding school experience.

The United States boarding schools were created to civilize the savage (Adams, 1995; Archuleta, Child, & Lomawaima, 2000; Churchill, 1997). Many elders have reported being treated harshly at these schools (Adams, 1998; Bloom, 2000; Jones 1995). The rules of the government boarding school were strict; the students were not permitted to speak their language, pray, or worship in their own cultural traditions. The children were severely punished if they broke the rules (Archuleta et al, 2000). My mother and many of the elders have shared several accounts of the maltreatment they experienced while living in the boarding schools. Through these accounts, I learned quickly that the school I attended in the city was extremely different. I couldn't imagine not being allowed to come home to be with my parents at the end of the day, during vacations, or for the summer months. The historical treatment and family experiences provided two lessons: 1) respect the elders for they will protect you and teach you how to survive; and 2) it is a privilege for children to be able to live with their parents.

Inclusiveness

My parents married and moved approximately one hour away from the reservation to the city to find employment. My father worked in an automotive factory and my mother worked in the home and was involved in several American Indian community efforts. I traveled with her to various American Indian communities within the State, both on and off reservation land, to meetings that focused on tribal issues. During the drive to the location of the meetings, my mother would talk with me as if I were an adult. She shared what she thought was going to occur at each meeting and then, on the trips , would analyze what had happened at the meeting. She discussed the roles members played during the meetings and the probable rationale for their point of view. This was my introduction to the political structures of the tribal nations and organizations.

As a family, we spent almost every weekend and most of the summers on the reservation visiting relatives and extended family members. We attended events, which were referred to as homecomings or camp meetings, that were held on the reservation. These events are best defined as a meeting of tribal members and their families to pray, participate in traditional ceremonies, dance in celebration, trade arts and crafts, and partake of traditional foods. It was always an exciting time because someone would be named, honored, adopted; or there would be a celebration by someone who had a good year. It was a privilege to be part of it.

I have had several special moments with the elders in my life. However, my first memory with the elders was at a homecoming event. At the age of five, I sat with the elders, both male and female, and listened to many of their life stories. Although I had some awareness of my body being different, I felt as though I was an equal participant in the conversations, a member of the group. There were times when I could not understand some of their conversation, because of the interchange of the Ojibwa language and English and, in part, my young age. However, I learned to read body language and the patterns of speech to gain an awareness of the emotions which accompanied the topics of discussion. The elders shared their boarding school experiences, their concerns for the young people, and the positive events that were occurring in their families such as naming ceremonies, honors bestowed, or the loss of loved ones. Often humor added levity to these discussions. As I sat with the elders, my mother strongly encouraged me to go and play with the other children and "let the elders be." The elders in kindness with a uni-

fied voice, that they thought I had an "old soul" and to "let me be." I was pleased to be allowed to stay with them and each time they met, after that day, I was included in their discussions. The lesson learned from this experience was the elders see you as an individual at any age.

So, You Are Not a Basket Maker

The elders were willing, and most of all patient, in teaching basketry, the art of beadwork, the making of shawls, the dressing of dolls as children's toys, and the creation of my own traditional dance regalia. They also shared the meaning and importance of each task and skill. Without their teachings throughout my childhood and adolescence, I would not be able to clearly understand my cultural heritage. They taught me not only the arts and crafts, but more importantly about life.

At eight years of age, I had my first basket-weaving lesson. Several of the elders, both male and female, were working on baskets and invited me to participate. I was comfortable with the elders as they taught me how to make the base of a basket with the reeds from the white ash tree. I tried several times to do as I was instructed. However, my basket base kept falling apart and the reeds would simply shoot out of my hands and onto the floor. I was aware that the elders were observing my attempts and mishaps, but they did not say anything to discourage me.

While working at the table, they took the opportunity to discuss tribal concerns and family issues, both challenges and honors. They also told stories, which often revolved around animals that acted out behaviors that transgressed a cultural norm. The transgressions resulted in a rationale as to how the animals looked or moved or why they lived alone. Even though I was frustrated with not being able to make even the base of a basket, I enjoyed listening to the life stories as well as thinking through the moral of the folk tales. After several attempts at basketry with little success, I felt I had let the elders down. I wanted to be successful, not only to be allowed to watch the elders calmly make beautiful items, but to be able to continue to sit at the table and listen to their stories. After a few days of joining the elders at the table, one female elder looked slowly around the table at each of the elders that had observed my lack of success. I understood there was non-verbal communication that had taken place, but I was not sure what it meant. She then made the statement, "Maybe she will be a beader." With that statement, I was simply moved to the next table of elders who were beadwork artisans. I learned numerous lessons from my basket weaving experience. Most importantly, I learned that if you are unsuccessful, you may just need to be doing something else that you can be successful at.

Beadwork is My Forte

The elders at the beading table made a space for me, and I became comfortable with this group of elders within just a few moments. They began their instructions on beadwork with no commentary on what I felt was a failure at basket weaving. Each elder shared the importance of the colors and designs of the different items he or she was in the process of creating. My first assignment was to thread a needle. I then began threading the needles for some of the elders who were visually impaired. I received quiet praise from the elders and felt good to be of assistance and successful at this task. Also, I thought they would share the news with the basket makers, so I felt I would be redeemed in their opinion of me.

I learned the elders at the beadwork table had their own concerns and discussions on tribal affairs and family issues, many of which were similar to basket makers. However, they told a different set of folk tales which I would not have had the opportunity to hear had I not left the basket maker's table.

My beadwork improved over time and became more complex. During childhood I made rings and necklaces and then progressed to the beading of belts and headbands. The elders, at what I have termed the "learning table," acknowledged the improvement in my work, and they indicated they looked forward to my next accomplishments. At that moment I knew I was a beader.

During my adolescence, I made traditional dance regalia for myself with the assistance of the elders, the aunties, and my mother. As a young adult, I created dance regalia for the children who were interested and enthusiastic about participating in the ceremonies and pow wows. I also taught them the meaning of the colors, designs, and utility of the items. The lesson learned from this experience was to enjoy your success and share your knowledge and skills with others.

Now, I not only enjoy creating beautiful items, but I think of all the elders who were at the "learning table." I often recall their stories, concerns, and sense of humor that was used to lighten the discussions. When I was older, the elders shared more of their hardships, not to seek sympathy, but to share their experiences so that the generations to follow will be knowledgeable and therefore more able to avoid similar life events. They shared the importance of strength, courage, and the care of others. When I am engaged in beadwork, I feel connected to all of the elders who have passed to the other side. I remember the conversations at the "learning table" and I feel their strength and power; it gives me a sense of renewal. The lessons learned from the elders are to share your skills, culture, humor, and peace. As an adult, my beadwork has brought treasured, peaceful, and reflective moments.

Meaning of a Woman's Shawl

In addition to beadwork, I learned to make shawls for traditional dance regalia. I was taught the traditional and practical uses of the shawl. In the past, children were wrapped in the shawls when they were carried. The shawls were used around the head and shoulders of women to keep them warm. An elder once told me, "You are not to borrow a shawl; you must have one of your own when coming to ceremonies and cultural events." The shawl symbolizes womanhood. That is why every young woman needs to have her own shawl.

The colors of the shawls represent each woman's own personality, role, and stage in life. The fringe on the shawl represents the numerous commitments a woman has and is cut evenly, representing all of the woman's commitments as equally important to her. The hand-tied individual lengths of fringe to the fabric of the shawl represent the connectedness. Therefore, the woman's traditional dance regalia is not complete without a shawl.

I have made my own addition as to how a shawl can be utilized that represents connectedness and family concern. The first shawl I ever made, which was a part of my traditional dance regalia, was used as a wrap for my mother at the time of her burial. She had requested that she be cremated, and her request was granted. Although I had difficulty with the thought of putting the container into the ground, and as much as I did not want to part with my shawl, it felt appropriate to wrap it around the container that held my mother's remains. Then I was more comfortable when I put the container in her burial plot with the permission of the medicine person. This experience allowed me to be at peace with the loss of my mother. The lesson learned from this experience was that you can utilize a traditional item to bring peace of mind.

Naming Ceremony

Red Horse (1980) describes the naming ceremony as a ritual that varies from tribal nation to tribal nation with some tribes "performing the ceremony shortly after birth; other tribes perform the ritual when the child is several years old. In either case, this ritual is illustrative of formal kinship adoption" (p. 465). Regardless of when the ceremony is performed, the name given to the member comes with responsibilities that the individual is to fulfill within the structure of the family, extended family, clan, and tribal nation.

Within the traditional culture of my tribal nation, elders name each member twice: once at birth and the second the person becomes a young man or woman. I do not recall my first naming ceremony, but my second ceremony is etched in my memory. It was a wonderful experience even though, at times, I felt uneasy being the center of attention. The ceremony was conducted over a two day period. The elders of the tribe observed my behaviors and interactions with others. They also consulted my mother at different times during those two days. I was curious as to the purpose of their discussions with her, but I felt it would not be appropriate to ask her what the elders had said. At the closing of the ceremony, an honor song was performed for me by the drummers, the elders, and the tribal community. The elders conducted a prayer and the name Breshiinh kwe (Birdwoman) was bestowed upon me. My name is significant to my family, extended family, clan, and tribal nation because it follows the clan line and it also provides a spiritual and familial place for me within the tribe.

During the honor song I stood in the middle of the sacred circle. Each elder and then each community member danced in the circle and then into the center where I stood. The elders were the first to offer their gifts to me. The gifts were put on my person or handed directly to me. These items included necklaces, pins, medallions, earrings, and hair ties. Many of the items were prized possessions and had significant meaning to the givers. For example, one elder presented me with his eagle feather fan that he had had for 37 years; another elder gave me her necklace that was part of her traditional dance regalia; a veteran gave me a part of his headband that was shaped like an eagle and beaded in the colors red, white, and blue. The value and sentiment of these gifts indicated that I was no longer a child, but a young woman who had earned the responsibility of these memorable and valuable items. The naming ceremony signified that I now had major responsibilities, not only to myself but also to my immediate family, the elders, and the community members. There were several lessons learned during the naming ceremony: the recognition of adulthood; the role in the community; the importance to the elders and community members; and that you have a name and an honor song in the language of your people.

The Transporter Role

In my early twenties, I assumed the role within the community as a person who provided transportation for the elders whenever necessary to assist them in traveling to funerals and other important community events. As a transporter for the elders, I learned of tribal issues, health concerns, methods of coping with loss, and the traditions that occur during the time of bereavement. Presently, even though I have earned three degrees, I still have the responsibility of assisting the elders with transportation. Of course, as a social worker

and a gerontologist, I have provided other services for the elders and to several tribal nations. However, my first "responsibility" to the community remains as a transporter. I am sometimes amazed as to how everyone has a role to perform without being asked, so that we can all take care of each other and no one is left out during life's most challenging times.

Formal Education

When I began college, an elder shared that she was pleased that I had this opportunity, but made the statement, "don't get lost." Her statement had several meanings: come back for ceremonies and celebrations while in college; do not get lost from who you are by behaving in ways that are harmful to your body, mind and spirit; remember to return to the community after completing college. Once I began college, the meaning of the elder's statement became clear. I learned that it was important to stay connected to the culture, for it helped define who I was and the rationale for the goals I strived to accomplish. Participation in the culture makes contributions to the balance needed for a healthy life. The lesson learned at this time was not to forget who you were and where you were from and to remain connected to provide a sense of balance and centeredness to your life.

Professional Social Work With the Elders

My first professional experience was a temporary position at the Lansing Indian Center in Lansing, Michigan. I was hired to contact the elders in the community who were 55 years of age and older to conduct assessments of their need for a congregate meal site. If there was a need for the site, the director of the Center offered the agency as the site. It was a great experience to visit with the elders in their homes to conduct the assessments. They shared their life stories as well as their current needs. After the completion of the needs assessment study, I knew that the congregate meal site would be beneficial for the elders. I was pleased when the congregate meal program came to fruition. For many years it provided meals and a meeting place for the elders who lived in the greater Lansing area. My mother, at the age of 55, became eligible for the benefits of this program. Later, in her last year of life when she was diagnosed with leukemia and needed assistance at her home, the elders who participated in the congregate meals became her companions as her health declined. They came to visit her, prepared her meals, and listened to her last stories.

The second position in my professional career was as an interviewer for the State of Michigan, State Office on Aging (Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, 1990). I was assigned to conduct assessments of American Indian elders in the eastern region of the State. This position provided a wonderful learning experience. I was able to interview elders from various socioeconomic levels and from the healthy aged to an individual who had had a heart transplant. When I interviewed the elders, I quickly learned that they were responding to the questions in story format. So, I patiently listened to their stories, completing the questionnaire as the responses to the questions flowed with an array of emotions.

All of the elders were unique in their own right. However, there was one elder whom I will always remember for her response to the question: "Is there anything you feel you need immediately?" She was a retired teacher who lived in a three-story apartment building with no elevators or air conditioning. On a warm August afternoon, I climbed the staircase to her apartment. She had referred to her living quarters as an apartment when I spoke to her on the telephone, but in reality those living quarters would most accurately be defined as a room with a kitchenette and a half bath. I knocked on her door that was ajar and I heard her voice inviting me to enter. As

I entered, I noticed that she was wearing a black patch over her left eye and a lightweight cotton dress. She sat on a narrow bed covered with only a single white sheet. Throughout the interview, she remained upright on the bed, leaning against the wall as a brace for her back. She would intermittently tilt her head toward the window next to her as if to catch a breeze, even though the air was still. She offered me a seat in a dinette chair that sat next to her bed. It appeared that this chair served as a nightstand when she did not have a guest.

As I sat in the chair and began to comprehend her living situation, I felt saddened for this woman who had dedicated most of her life to being an educator. She responded to my questions in a direct manner. She was knowledgeable of the disease processes that were occurring in her body and spoke of them as if she were talking about someone else. She indicated that she had impaired vision due to cataracts and diabetes. In addition, she was diagnosed with emphysema and congestive heart disease. As the interview came to a close, I asked her the question about her immediate needs. She responded, "Honey, I have seen everything I have wanted to see and done everything I have wanted to do. Now, I want to go to the doctor when I am sick, go to church on Sunday, and stay warm." I brought the interview to a close and as I left her apartment, I felt uplifted and wondered if I would be able to make the same statement when I am at her stage of life.

After my life experiences and the two employment experiences with the elders, I decided to learn more about the aging process and the needs and services available to the elders. The best fit for my educational needs was the Master's in Social Work degree program at the University of Michigan and the Institute of Gerontology in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was satisfying to learn about the field of gerontology and how I could be of assistance to older adults.

My field placement for the MSW degree was at the Tri County Office on Aging. I was assigned to conduct needs assessments to determine service needs of the older adults in the tri-county area. Again, I found myself out in the field conducting home visits to assess the needs of the elders. However, this time I was also in the classroom, learning more about the population, issues of older adults, disease processes, and implications for social work. Upon completion of the MSW degree and the gerontology certificate, I worked at Michigan State University as a clinical social worker in the counseling center. Although the work was primarily with students, I continued my tribal responsibilities with the transporting of elders. As a professional social worker and gerontologist, I presented at conferences, conducted in-service training sessions on aging for tribal organizations, and invited the elders to events on campus, such as the feasts sponsored by the American Indian students.

While earning a Ph.D., my first teaching position was at the local community college. I was hired to teach a course entitled Health and Aging. There were only seven students enrolled in the class, but it was a wonderful opportunity to share with students my newly acquired knowledge of aging coupled with my personal and professional experiences in the American Indian communities. I enjoyed teaching and decided to continue to do so as a professor in social work with a gerontological focus.

The first offer of a full-time professorship was made by Arizona State University, which I accepted. Again, I had the opportunity to work with the American Indian elders as a consultant for tribal nations and to present at conferences that were attended by many American Indian elders from the tribal nations in the southwest United States. In addition, I was assigned as liaison to the students who were interested in gerontology field placement sites. I visited the agencies and met with the field supervisors to monitor the students'

progress. This was an opportunity for me to become more familiar with agencies and programs that were beneficial for the elders. While at ASU, I was able to develop and implement a cross-listed course for graduate and undergraduate students entitled Policy and Aging. It was an enjoyable experience and the students were enthusiastic learners. Guest presenters were invited to participate in class and to share the important aspects of gerontological social work in a large urban city.

My second professorship position was in a rural setting at Central Michigan University. Again, I had the opportunity to design and implement a gerontology course, Social Work Practice in the Field of Gerontology. Social workers and gerontologists were invited to the class to speak on the issues of the elders in rural communities with emphasis on how they were expected to do more with less, especially in the isolated areas. I was also able to arrange for the students to visit and have breakfast with the elders at their congregate meal site on the Saginaw Chippewa Indian reservation. Both the students and the elders were pleased with the interaction. The students became more aware of the differences between the American Indian and non-Indian populations (i.e. younger, equal gender representation, environmental differences).

In my present position as an Associate Professor at Michigan State University in the School of Social Work, I have developed a gerontology course to be taught in the spring semester of 2004. The course will be cross-listed for both graduate and undergraduate students with a focus on social work practice in the field of gerontology. I am currently conducting research in the areas of American Indian grandparents parenting their grandchildren and the maltreatment and abuse of American Indian elders. My life experiences, training, and employment in working with both American Indian and non-Indian elders has increased my interest in the field of gerontology. I am involved in national and state gerontology organizations, and students seek me out as the professor of record for their independent study projects with a gerontology focus. I continue to offer consultations and conference presentations on aging and cultural issues. I have also had the opportunity to work with graduate and undergraduate students who became involved in my research studies, and we have co-presented at professional conferences.

This past semester I was able to secure a small grant, which was used to facilitate eight elders from an independent living center to visit a Foundation of Social Work course for three sessions. The elders were between 82 and 98 years of age. They shared their life stories with the students enrolled in the course on the topics of the depression, transitioning to the independent living center, civil rights movement, spirituality, the definition of wisdom, etc. The direct contact with the elders in the classroom taught the students that the older adult population is diverse, dynamic, and concerned for the well-being of the young people, their families, and their country.

As a gerontological social worker and an educator, I have implemented some of the lessons that I have learned from the elders at the "learning table" into the classroom. Students learn firsthand from the elders during interactions in the class sessions and in the elders' environment. Those students who were in the role of research assistants learned what the needs of the elders are by observing and listening to the elders' mishaps and successes, and that some successes come in the accomplishment of small tasks. These intergenerational interactions provide a forum for the older adults to talk with the students about their challenges, honors, culture, and concerns while providing a unique opportunity for the students to experience the elders' sense of humor and life events, and to learn how some elders have attained inter peace.

Finally, the elders in my tribal community are proud to have an earned doctorate, a social worker, a gerontologist, and an educator as their transporter. In reciprocity, when I have a need, often times the elders are the first to provide support even though our life experiences differ significantly. The elders have enriched my life. I was able to share my appreciation of their teachings by a display of my artwork for the month of November in 2001 at Central Michigan University. The art exhibit was entitled "In Honor of the Lessons of Elders."

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PEEP SHOW: THE MAKING OF A GERONTOLOGIST

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As a geriatric social worker, the author spent over a decade working with individuals and families as they prepare for the end-of-life. She was convinced that she knew all that was about to happen, only to discover with her mother's death she had missed the moments of life for seeing only the end. This narrative gives voice to an "Aha moment," revealing the complexity of life beyond the roles occupied by an individual.

Prologue

Giggling sounds, animated expressions, and sudden hushed whispers float from the room. A sea of pillows supports Frances in the hospital bed. At her side, Margaret sits close to the head of the bed. For these friends of a lifetime—nearly sixty years—this is their first face-to-face visit since Frances' diagnosis. Intuitively, both sense only too well that it will most likely be their last. Margaret comes for the day, her daughter having driven her the five hours to see her good friend. The women continue where they had last left off. Margaret has been sending letters, inspirational notes, and quotes throughout the summer, and they have talked by phone a few times. Margaret has visited with all her family and the shared friends of the women. The women sit today talking, summarizing their lives, the early joys, the hurts, and the dreams actually happening as planned or that were surprises. The women fulfill an obligation of their lifelong friendship.

A bedside lunch is served for the two friends, a summer meal of chicken salad on croissants, garden harvests of fresh green beans, raspberry pie, and iced tea. The lunch lasts for hours as the friends eat slowly, as though savoring each morsel. Frances pauses to cough, and then they continue to chat. The mealtime experience continues. A glance into the room reveals the two women eating an apple: in shared sacrament fashion, one bites from the apple and then passes it to the other. This ritual is repeated until the two consume the apple. The talking resumes. When I check in later, both women sleep. The head of the hospital bed is lowered a little, and a few pillows are removed. Next to the hospital bed, slumped in the chair, her feet strewn across the hospital bed and her hand resting on Frances' shoulder, Margaret sleeps. Satiated, both women enjoy a peaceful moment.

The old familiar bedroom of Frances's daughter is now the makeshift center of the dying woman's world. The hospital bed is positioned in the center of the room to allow her to look out into the house as well as to allow others to be able to look in on her. Her last days are lived out in this arena. Family, visitors, and health care providers all enter into the sunlit room to see Frances. Little do they know a voyeur watches and notes their every word and move.

The Drama: The Beginning

May 1994 came as most Mays, a sign of the nearing end of the school year and the beginning of summer. While this particular May began the same as all Mays might, by the time it ended, my life would be forever altered.

My mother age 68, with no major heath concerns, had a terrible cough, thought to be pneumonia, while she was on vacation that month. After returning from vacation, she saw her regular physician the Friday prior to Memorial Day. The doctor ran a few tests, sent her for x-rays, and determined that she had a blood clot in a lower lobe of the left lung. Mother was hospitalized. More tests, more questions. Only three months previously, she

had reported for her yearly physical exam including extensive testing, after which she had been deemed to be in excellent health. Yet, my father was now convinced *something* was wrong. The Tuesday following Memorial Day, the family physician told my parents that my mother's abdomen was full of cancer. "What?" they questioned. "She never smoked, she ate good food, she had no bad habits—was not obese, she did not, she was not..." But, yes, there was something wrong.

One could say I had arrived. Credentials read: "Nearly ten years post Master of Social Work Degree. Additionally, ten years full time—and then some—employment as a social worker with a Geriatric Evaluation and Treatment Team for inpatient and home care, as well as with an ambulatory outpatient clinic." I was six years post graduation with my graduate certificate in gerontology. I had completed the coursework for my Ph.D. in social work and was ABD (all but dissertation), working on my dissertation: "Video Enhanced Discharge Planning Education for the Older Adult."

I had a vast amount of experience with families at the end of life, *how-to* approach: discharge disposition from home to hospital to nursing home, nursing home to hospital, and need for *more* care, 24-hour skilled care, and when no care will change the inevitable. I could discuss a family's need to prepare for death, end of life, lingering life, hovering death, decreased capacity of almost any body function. I was an *official* hand holder, shoulder to lean on, a *voice* who could be called to explore all the *what ifs* at the end of life. Options—coping and caregiving—were all commonplace within my world. I was a professional caregiver and supporter who stayed through to the end. But, somehow, these were simply lines on a vita; an education was about to begin.

At the time of my mother's diagnosis, I lived four hours away. She called me that afternoon and asked that I come home to help. My perceptions of the *help* needed was for me to share with her what I knew about what to do next, to just be there, to listen, and to rally as good families do in crisis. The decision had already been made: FIGHT this with all our might. The family consulted the only oncologist in their small town. He was to see my parents the next day. However, the primary care physician was a family friend and had already spoken with the oncologist who reviewed my mother's case. The *best course* had been determined. At this time, my mother remained her usual cheerful self, hopeful as ever, simply dealing with just a rather large stumbling block. No one in our family had had cancer, so no one had died of cancer. Clearly this was one of those you-get-treatment-and-get-on-with-living-your-life types of things.

Unfortunately, it was not. In a little over a month, the shift to terminal care had been made. My mother returned home only briefly during this first month. I stayed a few days with my parents after my mother discharged from the hospital, but left so they could have some time alone together. While sitting on the patio the first evening home, my mother began to cry. She spoke of knowing how to live, but of not knowing how to die. This was the only time she voiced a fear, an uncertainty of what lay ahead. She did not want to talk, but just wanted to let it out. During this time my parents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary privately, as they both wished. My father took my mother out for short trips in the car to see a few friends and my two brothers who lived nearby. My mother bought a wig to prepare for losing her hair. I spoke with her daily; she was so full of hope.

Following the administration of a chemotherapy treatment, my father left my mother in the care of a nurse while he went to bring their car around to get her. The nurse escorted my mother in a wheelchair to the front of the

hospital where my father was to pick her up. In the interim, my mother suffered a stroke, which seemingly went unnoticed by the nurse. My father was insistently clear that this was not his wife of fifty years whom he had left only moments before. Something had happened. My mother was returned upstairs to the hospital. My mother, who lived life to the fullest, would not be jumping this bump or returning quickly to her roles and living her life.

The Middle

My mother's complications moved her care to a holding pattern. She needed to be stabilized and re-evaluated before receiving more cancer treatment. My mother was transitioned to an in-house rehabilitation unit, which was a combination of extended care and rehabilitative services. I complimented myself for doing the best discharge planning, family conferencing, and resource developing of my geriatric social work career. I prided myself on knowing what was coming next, for preparing my father and two brothers and their spouses along the way. During my mother's stay—less than 14 days—I worked full time on her *case*. The local hospital staff appeared grateful not to have another family to deal with. The oncologist would start to talk, and I would interpret for my family what this meant in terms of my mother's care.

My health care career had prepared me for working with the difficult families, physicians, nurses, and outcomes. I found myself overdoing to help everyone to understand what was happening, what one day's tests would tell about the care for the future. I saw what hope looked like from truly rational individuals I knew: they wanted magic. The doctor would speak, and it was as though my family no longer understood the English language. They were sure messages other than what they had heard had been given and that some additional tests could provide different answers. Denial could not accurately describe my father's state of mind. This rational, pragmatic individual could not understand how the doctor could consider discharging my mother when she could not walk, was now incontinent, seemed to be thinking fuzzy most of the time, and was in such poor health. He had believed my mother would stay until she was better. To him this meant the way she was when she initially came for treatment. At first, it seemed the cancer took a back seat to the crisis of my mother now requiring full-time care. Then the third strike came: the oncologist and family physician concurred that aggressive treatment of the cancer was not an option and that comfort care was the more appropriate course to take.

The art of addressing hospice services with my family was just that—an art: the nuances of discussing *terminal;* the prognosis of less than six months; and the shifting from "We're-gonna-fight-this-and-win" to "consoling, a retreat of aggressive care" to "compassionate care." To this day, I know my father never gave up hope for a miracle, a cure, or just a plain mistake, that it was not happening. However, he reluctantly accepted the notion of hospice services, as I had seen in other families, saying only "if it will help your mother." But the agreement was tentatively held together by "We'll see if we really need it"—a pledge of day-to-day hope. The logical father I had always known was emotionally lost. He had no role models for the life he was now living.

The Ending

It was a long hot summer. My mother received at-home care for over three months. She left the world gradually, shifting from directing activities to having the day's activities centered around her care and needs. The care was neither remarkable, nor difficult, physically or emotionally. It was just long. I had never participated in day-to-day care, 24/7 as referred to in caregiver support literature. I grew weary of juggling her physical care

needs with the emotional needs of all the rest of the family. The hospice agency assisted in all aspects, but could not take my place as daughter or as experienced geriatric social worker—this was my profession. She died in the early morning, Saturday before Labor Day. My father was at her side—knowing when she took her last breath.

The Chorus

You are certain, I suppose, that I lay claim to the champion phrase, "Now that I have walked the walk," or "Since I have been there, I now know the reality of end of life." Or perhaps you assume that I now feel I have such great insights about truly knowing what families experience at the end of life. No, I do not have anything that dramatic to say, nor did I experience such.

What I did learn seems so big, yet so obvious—something I had never considered, really, nor knew I did not know: I learned of my mother's world as I observed her those months with her friends—her interactions, sharing, secrets, laughter, tears, perhaps all uninhibited as a result of the stroke. But more likely, I learned she was living her life as she was dying. Authentic to her world as a human being, she was no longer concerned or bridled with her roles of being a wife, mother, grandmother, faithful church parishioner, and community volunteer. Her focus was not on caregiving to all the world. I was able to see her as a person totally separate from me and the life she had given me.

Many times during those three months, I was an outsider looking in, as though a voyeur at a peep show—my mother apart from me, her family, her responsibilities, and her obligations. Television, movies, and novels are all filled with experiences of children learning of their parents' secret lives. This was no secret. This was who she authentically was, but her daily life had overshadowed it. I watched, observed her interactions unnoticed. Mother was unaware that I was there or that I was tuning into what was transpiring. Many of these relationships had been a part of her life for nearly 50 years, some a little less than five years, and others somewhere in between. The friends were not strangers, occasional acquaintances, rare visitors. These women had regular and ongoing contact with one another. They had shared in the course of each other's family life—the trials and the triumphs. Now they were not concerned with each other's families; instead, they were focused on my mother and her impending death. I was given the gift of being an observer, not a participant.

To this day, it seems odd that at 35 years of age I had this surreal experience, to have experienced being the cognitive observer rather than the emotionally involved family member. I came to this experience with my mother to provide care. I believed I knew much about the end of life. My years of education, professional work experience, and practical life experience in the area had prepared me for just this type of situation. Entering into this caregiving role, my concern—and that of everyone who knew me—was the emotional toll this experience would take: the reality of going through the process of losing one's own family member. That was not the impact I felt. I speak not only of the expected emotional toll of this experience, but also of the fact that I was given an awareness of an unexpected loss—my mother—the profound loss of failing to see her complexity, the depth of the person she was—failing to *see* my mother as the whole person she really was. I had understood that death was a loss—the separation of the person from the living. I had repeatedly provided educational format on "caring at the end of life." I knew this. Through my education and career, I had become steeped in the human behavior literature exploring the theme of separation and individuation in the family.

Prior to this experience, my attention as a geriatric social worker had been on the fam-

ily and comfort of the individual, both physically and emotionally. I had not clearly seen the individual; I had only seen the roles and responsibilities the individual occupied. This experience has shaped my practice and teaching. As the end of a life nears, the depth of human connections, the exploration of all the relationship ties of individuals, and the summation of a lifetime is not merely the passive event of an individual retelling and verbally revisiting his or her life. It is a dynamic process involving many people: the dying person, the family, the informal network. The emotional support system of the individual—those individuals with whom the dying person has varying depths of relationships—rallies not only to provide help, but also so they too can work through what is about to transpire: the loss of a human being. The living will experience a part of themselves dying with the person. The impact of living a full and rich life gives rise to a complicated, multidimensional individual who is dying, leaving the world of the living and all that has been known to them. The survivors, those who will remain, question life's purpose, strive for some sense of equilibrium in sorting out whether they did everything they could do or whether they helped the dying person enough. In this process, they can be at peace with going on living.

Epilogue

Today, I remain profoundly affected by my mother's death. I have the all-too-familiar wishes that she were here to have witnessed my accomplishments, to have a relationship with my children, to lighten my sad days, and to cherish my joys. However, my mother influences me most on a daily basis in my professional life. I know I have a much keener sense of the depth of human existence beyond the narrow confines of the roles we each play. The intricacies of the person go far beyond their family, their circle of friends, the roles they are. Those intricacies are threads within the tapestry of the person. I have witnessed the presence of a human soul. My mother's death provided me a keyhole perspective, of the delicate balance of the complexity of the individual. We share life, but we are also separate, multidimensional individuals. Each person—no matter how connected we are to each other or how well we think we know one another—is a separate person. This individual is the essence who each of us is. I now shape my work and that of my students to consider that uniqueness in our work with individuals.

As I am Now: My Professional Journey

Molly J. Ranney, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

The author's path to social work was influenced by friendships with two older women that she met in young adulthood. The friendships with these women not only helped her discover her career path, they also helped prepare her for life. The lessons the author learned from them are now influencing her teaching. This narrative describes the author's journey from student to professor.

In my junior year of high school, I decided that it was best for me to go away to college. Coming from a single parent family, I always felt as if I owed it to my mother to succeed at whatever I did. While the drive to please my mom helped me to always do well in school, it also made it somewhat difficult to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. By going away to college, I hoped that it would be easier for me to detect my own career interests. Ultimately, I chose to attend a private religious college two and a half hours away from home.

My mom dropped me off at college on freshman orientation day. I remember thinking: What possessed me to do this to myself? Why would I choose to go to a college where I knew no one and had no transportation to go home to see my family and friends? I felt sick to my stomach and wanted to tell my mother that I had made a horrible mistake, but I didn't.

My first days away from home were difficult: I felt very homesick. I missed my family and friends terribly. Fortunately, I met other college students who felt the same way and together we began to adjust to college life. To help my adjustment to college life, I became very involved in campus organizations, with most of my activities centering around the women's movement.

Feminism

My mother always described herself as a "feminist," not by choice but because of life circumstances. She had married a man from one of the wealthiest families in the small Midwestern town where she grew up. My mom gave birth to twins, myself and my sister, 15 months after she was married and another daughter 15 months later. According to my mother, it was after the birth of my younger sister that my father lost his job and chose not to seek another. My mom applied for public assistance, began working the night shift, and eventually filed for divorce.

When I was four years old during the mid 1960s, my family moved to California. We lived with my aunt and uncle who helped my mother get on her feet financially after the divorce. My mother was always good at math, so she was able to get a job as a book keeper and office manager. As a part of her job, she managed the payroll and immediately noticed great wage disparities between male and female employees. When she brought this to the owner's attention, he told her it was because men were the main providers to their families. The owner's justification for paying my mom less, the sole provider in our family, was based on his belief that my father should be forced to pay child support. This experience and others like it resulted in feminist beliefs dominating the household.

Throughout my childhood, my mother was very active in the community. Despite being a working mother, she found time to volunteer with the P.T.A., her church, and the Democratic Party. During my junior high school years, my mom became very active in the League of Women Voters and the National Organization for Women (NOW). When I was in high school, passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) became the

main focus of my mother's attention. I was 15 years old when I attended my first political rally at the Los Angeles Federal Building in support of the ERA.

During my first few months of college, it seemed natural for me to become involved in the local NOW chapter. In my freshman year, I helped organize a NOW conference on campus to educate college students on the ERA. During the planning of this conference, I became friends with one of the professors that taught literature on campus. She encouraged me to take her class on women's literature because of my interest in feminism.

In the women's literature class, I discovered writers (e.g. Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte) that I knew either very little or nothing about. I felt very empowered reading these books because most were about the issues women faced in young adulthood. There was one book, however, that I found very unsettling. May Sarton's book, *As We are Now,* about older adulthood in a nursing home, both intrigued and frightened me. One quote, in particular, concerned me:

> Old age is really a disguise that no one but the old themselves see through. I feel exactly as I always did, as young inside as when I was twenty-one, but the outward shell conceals the real me... (Sarton, 1973, p. 80).

If older people felt like 21 year olds, then I wondered if young adults and older adults had more in common than what I previously thought. Also, I wondered what it was like to be old and be able to look back on your life. And, how does an older person deal with regrets?

I discussed my concerns with the instructor, who suggested that I explore the issues raised in the book for the term paper by conducting an oral history of a nursing home resident. The professor told me about Nancy, a 103-year-old woman, who lived in the nursing home around the corner from campus. I felt nervous about meeting Nancy because I had never met anyone that old before. I feared that she may be too frail to talk and maybe wouldn't be very interested in me. My fears were quickly alleviated when I met Nancy because she immediately reached out for my hand and said how happy she was to meet me. We discussed the class assignment and agreed to begin the oral history the next day.

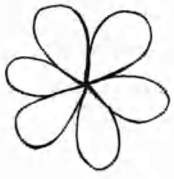
The oral history took two weeks to complete because we did a little bit each day. Nancy openly shared the story of her life and was more than willing to answer any of my questions. Nancy and her family were farmers. She talked about always having a baby on one hip while she worked in the fields. Like all farmers, they experienced good years and bad years. At one point she held up her hands and compared them to mine. She said, "You have the hands of a child, I have the well worn hands of a farmer." Nancy described how she lived through World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. She had family members that had died in each war: a brother, nephew, and others. Nancy had outlived all of her close friends and most of her family.

As I listened to Nancy, I wondered how my own life would unfold. At the time, my beloved uncle, whom I had lived with when I first came out to California, was terminally ill. I was very frightened about life without him because he was definitely my father figure. He taught me to drive, lent me the money for my first car, and was the person whom I turned to when I needed advice. Even though I did not initially discuss my own life with Nancy (because that wasn't part of the assignment), I found great comfort in listening to her oral history. If she could survive all of the losses that she faced, I felt certain that I would somehow find the strength to survive mine.

When I shared passages from *As We are Now* with Nancy, she openly discussed the

challenges of life in a nursing home. Nancy described her life as being much better than what the book described, but also stated that she hated being dependent on others and would prefer to live on her own. In Nancy's opinion, most older adults would prefer to go to a nursing home versus living with their adult children. Nancy also believed that all women were natural feminists because they are the backbone of their families. Nancy's beliefs were far more progressive than I had expected, which intrigued me.

Even after the assignment was completed, I continued to visit Nancy at the nursing home on a daily basis. Over time, I listened to the story of Nancy's life and began to share my own. For some reason, I felt more at home sitting and listening to Nancy talk about her life than I did in my own dorm room. This realization caused me to seriously think about my career path. I had chosen, in part, to attend a religious college because I thought I wanted to become one of the first women pastors. While I enjoyed taking religion classes, I felt as if my views towards religious institutions were much more radical than most of my classmates.



I continued to visit Nancy on a daily basis throughout my Sophomore year of college. By talking over my career choices with Nancy and others, I realized that the college that I was attending did not offer enough educationally for me. It was tough for me to even think about leaving because I had made a lot of friends, including Nancy, but I realized that I could no longer struggle to find ways to pay for an education that did not meet my needs. I went to see Nancy on the last day of the semester and told her how much her friendship had meant to me. At the time, Nancy was 104 1/2 years old. I agreed to visit her as often as I could. Fortunately, I was able to visit Nancy several more time before she died at 105 years old.

Career Path

The first day at the new college was very exciting. Hundreds of courses were offered, the campus was very diverse, with over 30,000 students in attendance, and many students were on work study, like me, unlike the previous college that I had attended.

I decided to major in nutrition and obtain a certificate in gerontology. I chose nutrition because I was thinking of joining the Peace Corps when I graduated and wanted to acquire a skill that could be of use to other countries. For the nutrition major, I volunteered in a Women, Infants, and Children (W.I.C.) clinic to gain practical experience in the field. At the same time, I began to volunteer for Meals-on-Wheels. While I enjoyed the work at W.I.C., I felt much more intrigued with the Meals-on-Wheels work.

The type of work that I did with Meals-on-Wheels was a little different from that done by other volunteers. I helped a blind couple (the Jungs) with their grocery shopping once a week. While I became very close to both the husband and the wife, it was Mrs. Jung with whom I developed a strong friendship.

Every Friday was my day to visit the Jungs and assist them with their grocery shopping. We would go through the same routine each week. Mrs. Jung would give me the shopping list that she had typed on a Braille typewriter. I would drive Mr. Jung to the grocery store a few blocks from their house and help him find the items on the list. When we returned to the house, I helped Mrs. Jung put the groceries away and then we would sit down and talk.

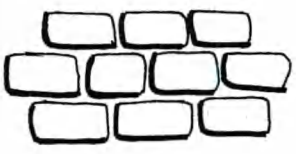
Mrs. Jung enjoyed telling me about her life. She had taught poetry for the Braille In-

stitute and also played the piano. Mrs. Jung was very proud of the fact that she gave birth to a child who was not blind. Even though she had lived a very traditional life, Mrs. Jung was a firm believer in the need for women to go to college and to be able to support themselves financially. As such, Mrs. Jung was always very interested in how I was doing in school and how I was facing the challenges of young adulthood.

Over time I became frustrated with the nutrition major, a frustration that I shared with Mrs. Jung. Through our conversations, Mrs. Jung pointed out to me that I seemed to be more interested in human relationships than in nutrition. Mrs. Jung also mentioned that my interests seemed similar to the social worker that helped her get MediCal, Meals-on-Wheels, and books for the blind. With Mrs. Jung's encouragement, I went to the college career center to find out about the social work profession.

At the career center, a job announcement was posted for a part-time case management job at Lutheran Social Services (LSS). While I wasn't looking for a job at the time, I decided to call and schedule an interview. I actually had been collecting food and clothes for LSS but had never visited the agency.

My first visit to the agency was both troubling and informative. The agency was located in the center of a very run-down neighborhood. The windows on the apartments were broken, very young children were playing in the street unsupervised, homeless people were sleeping on the bus benches, and prostitutes were soliciting for business during the middle of the day. While I had been to neighborhoods like this before, I did not expect to find it in this area because it was only a twenty-minute drive from my home. I had always thought of my own neighborhood as being composed of mostly low- or middle-income families, but compared to this area; my neighborhood seemed affluent.



When I arrived at the agency, the social worker could tell that I was very troubled by the conditions that I observed. Before we began the interview, she described the economic and other challenges faced by the clients that the agency served. She also told me about her background and the social work profession. She had recently graduated with her Master of Social Work (MSW) degree and had worked in the field for several years. Since I knew very little about social work, I found the jargon (e.g., empowerment, systems theory, cycle of poverty) she used to be a little confusing, but I liked what she was saying. Fortunately, I got the job and began reading everything that I could find on social work.

I decided to finish up my Bachelor's of Science (B.S.) in Dietetics because I was almost finished by the time that I discovered social work. While I was at LSS, professors from the Department of Social Work at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) visited the agency to meet with the interns. Since I was a field preceptor, I had quite a few opportunities to talk to the professors. On one of the visits, the professor asked about my educational background. I told him I was finishing up my B.S. in Dietetics and wanted to apply for the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work program. He encouraged me to apply for the MSW program and offered his assistance. Around the same time, I began a new class for my gerontology certificate and found out that the professor was from the Department of Social Work. He too offered his assistance and told me about the Older Adult and Family Concentration of the MSW program and encouraged me to apply, which I did. Fortunately, I was accepted into the MSW program.

Personal Development

I was able to continue to volunteer for Meal-on-Wheels and did so for six years because I had every Friday off from LSS.

Over time, my friendship with the Jungs became something that I depended on.

A year after I began at LSS, my uncle died. At this very difficult time the Jungs were among the few friends that understood the severity of the loss. This was my first major loss and the depth of my pain over the loss of my uncle felt unspeakable. Similar to Nancy, the Jungs were able to empathize, without my having to explain how I felt. Their empathy was very therapeutic.

The Jungs began coming to some of my family events, and my mother also became very close to them. This proved to be an important connection because my mother struggled with my decision to become a social worker. My mom always equated higher education with the only guarantee of a woman's financial security and wanted me to choose a profession where I could make a high salary. By observing both my friendship with the Jungs and my love of the job at LSS, my Mom was able to come to support my decision to be a social worker by applying to the MSW program.

Slowly, I began to do more and more things for the Jungs. In addition to helping them with their grocery shopping, I would take them to doctor and dentist appointments. I did not initially equate their growing need for help with increased frailty, but that, in fact, was happening. After a few hospital visits by Mr. Jung for heart problems, I became very concerned as to what would happen to Mrs. Jung if he died. Mrs. Jung was also very fearful about this and talked about it quite a bit. Mr. and Mrs. Jung had been able to maintain their independence by working together as a team. About six months after his first visit to the hospital, Mr. Jung died of a heart attack. I was devastated over the loss but was also frightened about what would happen to Mrs. Jung. After the funeral, Mrs. Jung told her son that she wanted to try living alone in her home. I felt proud of her, but also nervous because many people were against her decision.

I continued to help Mrs. Jung with the weekly grocery shopping over the next year and was very inspired by her courage to live alone. Even though she was obviously grief stricken over the death of her husband, the challenges of living alone seemed to give her a new sense of purpose and increased her confidence. During this time, I too was doing many things for the first time (e.g., presenting at a professional conference, participating in an internship, writing a thesis) as an MSW student, and Mrs. Jung was an important role model on how to not be afraid of new challenges.

Our weekly conversations centered on women's issues. Since she had outlived her husband, Mrs. Jung was more committed than ever to the notion that all women (single and married) need to have their own lives, interests, and careers. She always wanted to know about how my career as a professional social worker was developing and was very supportive of my work. While I had others that were supportive of my decision to get a social work degree, none seemed as interested as Mrs. Jung. She seemed to enjoy hearing about every success and challenge that I faced.

During this time, Mrs. Jung's poetry writing also focused on women's issues, especially relationships. She was particularly interested in sibling and friendship relationships between women. Mrs. Jung submitted most of the poems that she wrote to a journal for blind poets, called *Sight Unseen*. Over the years, many of her poems had been accepted for publication. On one of the weeks that I visited, Mrs. Jung gave me a poem that she had written for me:

To Molly: A Friend
How may I well describe a friend,
His depth, his breadth well comprehend?

Is it as strong as Gibraltar's rock
Or anchored fast like ships in dock?

A sturdy limb that none can bend—
Do these words well befit a friend?

Or is it like a gentle breeze
Or pale rose song among the leaves?

Great you, quiet joy O friend.
You have my love until the end.

By: G. Jung

Mrs. Jung died shortly after she gave me the poem on friendship. In retrospect, I think it was her way of saying goodbye to me.

Prologue

After I graduated with an MSW degree, I worked in a variety of direct practice settings (i.e., home health, mental health, hospice, Adult Day Health Care) with older adults. As a result of this experience, I had the opportunity to work with many older adults who also positively impacted my development. Ultimately, my strong interest in aging led me to apply to a doctorate program. In May 2000, I graduated with a doctorate degree from the University of Southern California, and I obtained a full-time teaching position the same year.

As a social work educator, I still draw from the lessons that I learned from Nancy and Mrs. Jung to help me with my teaching. Currently, I am the instructor for an intergenerational service learning class for undergraduate students called the Residents Awareness Program (RAP). The program was developed in response to a request made by older adults at a local retirement community for the university to develop a program where students lead intergenerational discussion groups with the residents (Rice, Black, & Kelly,1994). Most of the students are pre-social work majors, in their early twenties, and their participation in this class is their first exposure to gerontology. Through the students' reflection papers, I see that they are learning some of the same life lessons that I learned in my early twenties. I have seen them realize that young adults and older adults have a lot in common: the key to aging successfully is being willing to adapt when confronted with challenges across the lifespan. It is a privilege to be a geriatric social worker.

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Middle-Aged White Lady Lost in the Blues

Rosemary McCaslin, Ph.D., California State University, San Bernardino

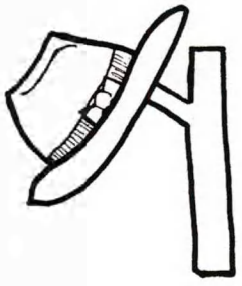
A critical life experience that shaped the author as a gerontological social worker was a friendship in her early adult years with an elderly, first generation bluesman. This chosen friendship with an elderly person much different from herself, at a time when she was forming her adult identity, had a profound effect on her understanding of late life and of intergenerational and interracial interactions. It also left the author with a lifelong love of the blues.

Like most gerontologists, I could tell you stories of the beloved older people in my childhood: the grandmother whose unconditional love saved my mental health, the church ladies with whom I spent the night in case they had a medical emergency, and the various ethnic nursing homes our choir serenaded. But I want to tell you a different story, a story about a friendship with an elderly bluesman during my college years that had a profound impact on my views as a fledgling adult seeking my path in life. That relationship shaped my understanding of late life, the importance of intergenerational interactions, the need for interracial dialogue, and many other central issues that led me towards a career in social work and gerontology. As a bonus, it left me with a lifelong, abiding love for the blues.

A Critical Intergenerational Encounter

In 1967, I was a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin. It was a complex, difficult, and exhilarating time to be young. My friends and I were in the habit of stopping at the Chuck Wagon, the food concession in the student union, on our way to class for coffee and to see whether anything more educational than our courses was going on that day. The focus, form, and control of education was being actively questioned and redefined. Students felt it their prerogative to decide which lessons were most needed at the moment: Anthropology 101, a teach-in on the war in Vietnam, or a spring day in the park.

One memorable morning, as I spotted my friends and sat down groggily with my first cup of coffee, I looked across the table to see a dignified, wizened, elderly black man. By way of introduction, my friend said simply but with great respect, "Rosemary, this is Mance Lipscomb." I did not yet fully understand who this new person was, but something in the situation caught my attention at a deep level. I knew that this was someone I very much wanted and needed to know; I knew that I had just stumbled upon an important opportunity for learning. I did not make it to class that day.



Over the rest of that day (and many more days and nights to come), I learned that Mance Lipscomb was a first-generation bluesman from Nacogdoches, deep in the East Texas piney woods. He was a self-taught guitarist, who could not explain why it had been natural for him to pluck the strings of his instrument rather than strum them. With no access to musical innovations, he discovered his own equivalents, such as using a pocket knife as a capo to depress the strings of his guitar, raising the pitch and creating a unique vibrato. He had been a popular and sought after musician within his own community for most of his life. He retired from his work as a sharecropper and, eventually, as a musician as well, sensing that the world had moved on and his time and music were of the past, the story of many talented men and women of his generation.

But, meanwhile, the larger world of which he knew next to nothing was changing in more positive ways, and a new generation of largely white, urban audiences emerged who were hungry for this music that was in danger of

being lost. Mance was one of the bluesmen whom the Lomaxes tracked down, recorded, and enticed back into performing. As he was led through the college circuit, he discovered a new set of "grandchildren" who were interested in not just his music, but also his life and his wisdom. It was a match that well met the needs of both generations.

Things I Learned from Mance

Over the next several years, Mance came to Austin frequently to play at the Vulcan Gas Company, the local hippy rock concert venue. After his shows, we sat up late into the night at a friend's house while he told his tales nonstop to the adoring, motley crew of white kids who had adopted him as a mentor. (At 19, I could never stay awake as long as he could at 70.) He spoke of the mindless tedium of work in the cotton fields and the focus on music that relieved his boredom. He drew pictures with words of a rich life of family, friends, and weekend social gatherings. Although his stage patter was full of jokes about drinking to excess, he admitted to us that he was a lifelong non-drinker, studiously avoiding following the path of his abusive alcoholic father. He filled in the gaps in our knowledge of our own history in ways our own grandparents could not or would not. Here are some of the things Mance told us:

• He was 65 years old before he ever stepped through the front door of a white person's house. (My mother told me that, as a child, she was confused by her mother's insistence that black neighbors must come to her back door.)

• He grew up at the turn of the century when the grandchildren of slaves were working the same fields as their grandparents, now for a dollar a day. (I remember as a small child seeing people, all black, bent over double in the cotton fields. Perhaps I saw Mance.)

• He found that music made such mindless work tolerable. He and his friends tried out and refined new songs in the fields during the day, before performing them on the weekend at the local "cakewalk." There were no commercial bars for black performances (any more than there were hotels that would accommodate blacks). So the locals had to bring their own refreshments, featuring home baked cakes, to the ice house or church hall where they gathered for secular entertainment. The best cakes were given as prizes to the best dancers.

• He had lived a largely 19th-century life with no exposure to the technology taken for granted by others. When the Lomaxes first recorded him, then played it back for him, he was shocked and confused over where his voice was coming from, having never before seen a tape recorder. At his first concert appearance at Berkeley, he was similarly confused over his discovery of microphones and amplification systems.

• "Shine on Harvest Moon" is a blues ballad. When performed as such, it includes an introduction (expanded on verbally by bluesmen) that tells the story of a country boy trying to woo a young girl. The girl is shy and afraid of what might lurk in the woods at night (there being no paved roads in rural, black communities). So the boy prays for the clouds to part and the full moon to light her way and give her the courage to make it to their appointed assignation.

Such missing pieces of information were critical at a time when we were struggling to resolve our own "white liberal guilt." After all, our own ancestors had played direct roles in circumscribing and impoverishing the life of Mance and his family. And yet, Mance seemed to accept our friendship at face value; in other words, he showed no signs of holding against us the "sins of our fathers." I understood his

attitude as part of the wisdom he had attained over a long life. Mance's acceptance of me and my friends is no doubt an important source of a conclusion I eventually reached, that feeling guilty over things past that I could not change was a waste of energy. That energy was better directly towards the responsibility I clearly did have to contribute to changing my world in the present. And that understanding eventually led me to a career in social work.

Things I Now Understand

I have long said that one of the reasons I work with older people is that I am able to learn so much from them. I have learned unrecorded history from those who lived through it, and I have learned much about what it takes to survive in the long haul. (The elderly are, by definition, survivors.) Mance was the first person with whom I experienced these benefits of intergenerational relations, but it was many years before I discovered words and theories to explain the dynamics involved.

Mance was already approaching old age with a sense of integrity (Erikson, 1964), but the happenstance of finding a new audience allowed him to go back to earlier adult tasks and achieve a richer summation of his life. It was clear at the time that Mance saw his new young friends as an alternate set of grandchildren. He once told us, sadly, that his own grandchildren all listened to Motown and had no interest in his music. He had resigned himself to the fact that his music would die with him. Finding other young people who valued his music and life lessons gave him a new chance to assess the value of his lifetime and to pass on his accumulated wisdom.

Through his new intergenerational relations, Mance returned to the Keepers of the Meaning (versus Rigidity) stage identified by Vaillant in his empirical validation of Erikson's theories (Vaillant, 1977; Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980). Vaillant posited that the development of wisdom and concern for the preservation of culture occurs after or late in the stage of Generativity through activities intended to "pass on the torch." In order to pass on the values that should guide the next generation, each individual has to take stock and determine what basic lessons have been learned and conclusions drawn in the course of his or her lifetime. Having done this work facilitates achieving a sense of integrity that is based on a fuller consideration of what one has accomplished. Past failures are examined and their lessons passed on as well, giving them a new, positive meaning.

This aspect of later life seems to be what Erikson also described but did not define in his last book as "grand generativity" (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnik, 1986). In exploring the reworking of earlier life stages by people in their eighties, Erikson noted that elders must express a type of generativity that goes "beyond middle age's direct responsibility for maintaining the world" (p. 74). He further notes that this grand-generativity "incorporates care for the present with concern for ... today's younger generations in their futures, for generations not yet born, and for the survival of the world as a whole" (pp. 74-75).

As Erikson demonstrated eloquently (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnik, 1986), people can and do grow and change throughout the life span, reworking earlier developmental stages as new opportunities and understandings arise. Mance spent his youth and much of adulthood as a sharecropper and musician whose environment was restricted by segregation to a small local community. Yet, his world was rich and complex, centered on family and friendship. He "retired" once within that same context, at peace with having had a life well lived and only a few regrets about issues the larger world would not allow him to address. But then the world moved on and he was invited to join a larger, more multifaceted environment full of previously denied opportunities. As he became acclimated, he increasingly took advantage of these new

possibilities, not only to have a second career, but also to become more fully the person which he was capable of becoming. He emerged from this redefinition of self with even more to pass on to future generations, and more to account for in the balance of his own life.

Young adults, in turn, need adults older than themselves as mentors (Levinson, et al., 1978). In establishing identity as a young adult, one must discover and explore the self apart from parents and family of origin. Yet, there is still need for guidance, as multiple aspects of life are experienced for the first time in work, relationships, politics, community, and many other systems needed to sustain adulthood.

Mance, and no doubt others like him, were unique and invaluable mentors for me and many other young adults. As much as the Mance Lipscombs of the world had been restricted to segregated communities, Anglos had also been denied the choice of most normal relationships with people from cultures other than their own. Growing up in Jim Crow Texas, I did not know a black peer until college; only assimilated Latinos existed in my world; and virtually no Asians. And a "mixed marriage" was one between a Baptist and a Methodist! (I did know one Native American who took great pride in teaching children about his culture.) As fledgling adults, we were woefully ill prepared to face the environment outside our own enclaves, even while our country was bogged down in war in Southeast Asia.

Early in my career as a still-young M.S.W., I supervised a prototype information and referral service that was one of the original Administration on Aging model projects. As the program developed and expanded to include outreach, it seemed logical to me to seek out elderly paraprofessionals of like ethnicity as the seniors we needed to reach (Anglo, Black, and Latino). This was perceived as such a novel idea in the mid 1970s that it drew the attention of the state's governor. As I began to give presentations about new program outcomes achieved through the efforts of these older workers, I discovered that most professional audiences heard only half of what was being said. They understood that working or volunteering was "good for older people." But they had trouble attending to data indicating that older workers could do things younger professionals could not (such as convincing reluctant clients to come to the mental health clinic). Out of frustration, I edited a book presenting examples of the use of older workers and volunteers in a variety of mental health programs in the U.S., Canada, and Israel (McCaslin, 1983). I now understand that the potential contributions of older people were obvious to me in large part because of my own early adult friendship with an elderly mentor.

For most (but not all) people in this country, the environment is considerably more diverse today. And yet most people's childhoods will necessarily be largely restricted to their parents' social world, still too often culturally insular. An important aspect of young adult identity development must be to learn more about the people and cultures for which their early exposure has been limited, defined by not only ethnicity but also age, physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Whether through college, the workplace, travel, or other means, young adults must expose themselves to a broader range of people and lifestyles if they are to be productive adults in an increasingly global environment.

The elderly are a valuable, unique resource that we waste at our peril. The needs and abilities of younger and older generations are often more congruent than are those between parents and children (McCaslin, 1992). Wisdom that can be accrued only over time should be put to better use than is now the case.

The Blues

As a secondary but life-enriching benefit, my early friendship with Mance left me with a deep, abiding love of the blues in all its many forms. The blues speaks to the human condition and communicates across divisions of culture, age, time, and place. The same performance can touch equally the youthful pain of lost love and the mid-life fears of loss of parents (the original love object) and ultimately the loss of self (McCaslin, 1987).

The influence Mance Lipscomb had in my life came back to me after a particular mid-life experience. I had suffered a series of losses over a year and a half (death, surgery, a geographic move, divorce and more) that left me crying myself to sleep each night. Driving down an unending Los Angeles freeway, scanning radio stations, I happened on a blues piece that suddenly reduced me to tears right in the middle of traffic. I tracked it down to a recording by a contemporary Texas bluesman (Moore, 1990) and played it often as part of my "grief therapy." Blues, at its best, is played in the key where the heart breaks.

Conclusion

I might have found social work and gerontology without Mance. I did have wonderful childhood memories of grandparents and other elderly friends. I was raised in a Christian tradition of always being watchful for those who need help or simple solace. But I am certain that the formative young adult experience of a voluntarily chosen friendship with an elderly person much different than I made me a different gerontological social worker than I would have been otherwise. It left me more alert to later experiences that drew me toward this field. It left me with a more balanced view of the needs and strengths of older people. It left me with a concern for the largely untapped potential for different generations to teach and support each other. And it left me with an appreciation of the universal joys and pains that flow through and enrich the entire life cycle. I hope to always have the blues that Mance Lipscomb first opened my heart to.

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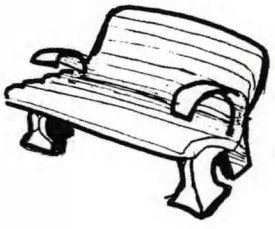


CALL FOR NARRATIVES

Special Issue

The Spirituality of Human Service
Guest Editor: Edward Canda

This special issue focuses on the role of spirituality in social work and allied human service professions. **Reflections** seeks narratives that encompass diverse religious and non-religious spiritual perspectives about such topics as:

- Ethical dilemmas encountered when addressing spirituality in professional service and how they are resolved or lived with
- The sense of spiritual calling to service, how it was heard and responded to
- Spiritual bases of practice wisdom
- Ways that helpers connect their personal spiritual life and traditions together with professional helping contexts
- Applications of explicit spiritually based helping activities in professional work
- Connections between spirituality and practice as a social administrator, community activist, or political and social policy advocate
- Spirituality as a source of resilience, strength, and empowerment for both worker and client/consumer within the helping relationship
- Moral imperatives for compassion and justice in human service
- Experience as an innovator who brought spirituality into clinical practice, macro work, or social work education
- Spirituality in relation to the work of the researcher, teacher, and scholar
- Spiritual wellsprings for theoretical and philosophical innovation in human service

Contributions should blend significant personal stories, accounts of professional work, self-reflective insight, lessons learned that may be helpful to others, and connection to relevant background literature.

Mail manuscripts to: Edward R. Canda, Ph.D., Professor, University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, Twente Hall, 1545 Lilac Lane, Lawrence, Kansas, 66044-3184. Phone: 785-864-8939. Email: edc@ku.edu. Home page: www.socwel.ku.edu/canda.

Manuscripts are due by: January 30, 2005

Still Vibrant And Active Past Age Eighty Five: A Life Story Which Has Inspired My Career Focus

Fiona M. Patterson, DSW, University of Vermont

The following narrative describes how a former social worker, now in her mid eighties, helped the author realize how important intergenerational relationships can be for those in the helping professions, both personally and professionally.

Introduction

It has been from Barbara, whom I have now known for more than twenty years, that I have learned some powerful lessons related to my present work with and advocating for elders. She taught me that age is no barrier to important and fulfilling lives; that older women often have amazing strengths gained in spite of – and perhaps through - fixed gender roles and difficult life experiences; that creativity and the arts can significantly enrich family life; and that elders are often an under appreciated resource within our communities. In addition, this special woman helped me to see the importance that intergenerational relationships can have for social workers, both professionally and personally.

Barbara's rich and full life has included a distinguished professional social work career combined with extensive family responsibilities. While she chose to work in child protection, personal circumstances extended those interests, as she has taken on responsibility for raising a second and then a third generation of children. Her lifelong caregiving has endowed her with an ageless quality, as she seems effortlessly to straddle generations. Not defeated by multiple losses and challenging circumstances, she has maintained rich cultural interests and a strong sense of the people, places, and traditions that make up her family. Among many difficult episodes, the most dramatic personal turning point in Barbara's life came when a car accident caused the death of her oldest daughter and seriously injured a young grandson. Her life journey, which began in small town America during World War I, has also been touched by many of the large and defining events of 20th Century American history: the suicide of her best friend's father after the stock market crash at the beginning of the Depression; her brother going to fight in World War II; a sharing of 1960s idealism relating to the civil rights and peace movements with her husband and children; and the death of a family member to AIDS in 1988.

Methodology and Focus

Barbara has been both a friend and a professional model for me over the years. When, as part of my social work doctoral program, I took an elective course in personal life histories, it was her narrative that I requested. The way in which she recalled and constructed her life experiences gave me the chance to witness:

> . . . the importance of making meaning in all human affairs. Human beings build themselves into the world, not with their meager supply of instinct, but with the capacity to construct and construe a world from symbols, images, icons, language and ultimately stories and narratives. (Saleebey, 1997, p. 243)

Barbara's life history, along with stories of my own, will be quoted here to illustrate five types of knowledge which I have gained from her. These themes or areas include: 1) the connections between gender expectations and actual activities throughout life and especially in old age; 2) the dimensions and evolution of the helping role and how it relates to the profession of social work on both micro and macro levels; 3) evolving meanings and endurance of family in terms of place and multiple relationships; 4) the lifelong enriching power of creativity and the arts, especially in forming intergenerational connections; and 5) the role of adversity and loss in building personal strength and resilience.

When I first became acquainted with Barbara in the mid 1980s, I was a hospital social work director with an MSW. The patient situations I was working with often involved elders and their families. At the time, I had no vision of continuing my education and becoming a college instructor with a commitment to focusing my teaching and writing on aging, or seeking to work with students and faculty peers to find more creative ways to understand and advocate for elders. Truthfully, I had internalized some of the dominant ageist assumptions about how interactions with old people tend to be dreary and dull because this age group is of little importance, frequently sick or disabled, losing their capacities, and not likely to live much longer. Since then, my views have changed radically, a shift for which I give Barbara much credit.

Before I actually met her, my teenage daughter Jill had described a new friend who lived with her grandparents. Gradually, I learned that Barbara was a social work supervisor at the child protection agency, and that she and her husband – another social worker – were bringing up three grandchildren whose mother had died. The first family member I actually got to know was Barbara's granddaughter Lara, a bright, lively and intense young woman who frequently spoke lovingly of "Grandmother." She told my husband and me that our family should come over some Saturday night to meet them all for dessert and to play cards.

That's exactly what we did, and we found a warm, intellectually stimulating, fun- loving, and somewhat unorthodox family. They lived in a half house in an urban neighborhood which was beginning to go downhill. We later learned their house had been burglarized three times and they had been accustomed (though not reconciled) to the sight of drug dealers on the street corner. The immediate family consisted of Barbara, her husband, Jim, Lara, and her younger sister, Molly, with frequent visits from their brother, Jimmy, and Barbara's two remaining daughters and their families. Their house had high ceilings, a well-used fireplace, a prominent grand piano, lots of books, and framed photographs of family members on every available surface. Barbara always seemed at the heart of everything going on, enthusiastic and supportive and, when needed, a gentle but firm disciplinarian.

Gender

As a woman, I have, unavoidably, become aware of how sexism and ageism combine to limit the ways in which female elders are perceived in American society and – through internalized sexism and ageism – how they sometimes see themselves. My own assumptions, once examined, included negative stereotypes of old women as unattractive, unimportant, and often a burden. These images become etched in our psyche early on through the media, through often constraining public policies, and through the behavior of family members or friends towards their own parents or grandparents. In addition, research indicates that assumptions about female roles and experiences profoundly impact how women elders construct their own life stories. Ruth Ray, in her study of aging and life-story writing, describes this pattern of self

description by older women as outlined by feminist critic Sidonie Smith:

> . . . she is typically self-effacing rather than self-promoting; oriented toward private rather than public life; responsive to others' needs and desires before her own; more likely to foreground relationships and subjective states over accomplishments; and anecdotal in her means of expression. (Ray, 2000, p. 77)

It is fascinating to explore how such patterns were learned for the current generation of elders and how they may connect to earlier gender restraints. Although she appears to have been a lifelong pillar of female strength, Barbara's narrative was instructive about this:

> One of the things I don't really remember myself except that it was told to me so often was my father's remark when I was born which was "all this trouble just for a girl. . ." I did grow up thinking girls were not quite as good as boys. He made up for that remark in his feelings about me and I never felt that my dad wasn't crazy about me, but I always did sort of assume that [girls were inferior]. And that's why it was hard for me to move along with the times as far as the women's lib movement was concerned.

When her time came to have children and she produced three daughters, Barbara recalls the same kinds of feelings, especially when the second one was born. "Even in my family there was always this feeling that boys were a little better than girls. My uncles said 'can't you have anything but girls?!'"

Yet she clearly saw strong women throughout her life, even if their success was often honed within the limitations they had been given. She tells a story about the mother of her best friend while growing up which illustrates these kinds of strengths. In this case, the family had been wealthy, lived in a large house, and owned an impressive car. When the Depression came, though, they lost everything and the father killed himself.

> The mother of these six kids is one of the people I admire most in my life. She was so wonderful. She moved into a little place in town and went back to teaching school – she had a degree – and she taught 3rd grade.

Similarly, when Barbara was first married she unassumingly took on the role of providing an economic base for the family and twice worked to support Jim as he attended a seminary and then, later, an MSW program. While this kind of arrangement was common by the 1950s, Barbara emphasized that it was distinctly unusual between 1939 and 1942 when she did it. Indeed, there is a sense in which, while the moves in their married life were formally initiated by Jim's career changes, his wife was actually leading from behind. Though she never completed her degree – she began an MSW first and then worked for many years in child protection – Barbara seems to have motivated Jim to give up the ministry and go into social work as well.

I feel that Barbara is a person who has aged gracefully. She is a strong, older woman and a model for me as I age. I, too, have experienced some of the gender expectations and constraints she described but work towards her way of moving beyond them and affording them minimal importance. She has

a wonderful sense of herself as a woman with a feminine interest in looking and dressing well, but without any fixations about appearing to be different from what she really is. I remember that, in her 70s, Barbara was persuaded by one young family member or another to have her ears pierced. Afterwards she said to me, with a chuckle, that she should have done it earlier because with the arthritis in her hands it was too difficult to get the earrings through the little holes!

Helping Roles & Professions – From Individual to Community

Some time after I got to know Barbara, I was invited to join the citizen's advisory committee of the local child protection agency, of which she – now retired – was also a member. In this capacity, I was able to get a glimpse of her professional side and to understand how much she was loved and respected by the staff she had worked with. Her contributions to the board incorporated her knowledge and wisdom, as well as her excellent organizational and advocacy skills. Always with a warm sense of humor and basic humility, Barbara would be quick to speak up if she felt the conversation was not relating to supporting families and children, or was wasting everyone's time. I learned from her how to focus a meeting on the subject at hand and then move on.

Barbara's narrative includes several stories and hints of her pull towards helping others, increasingly in a professional role and clearly with a group focus and a sense of community building. Although Barbara's earliest interests centered around writing, her future husband inspired a different direction. She began in college as an English major but "no doubt from Jim's influence, I got a 'save the world' complex and changed to sociology and psychology."

Barbara's description of her time at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work is a fascinating history of macro and micro professional trends of the 1930s.

> I lived in a settlement house called The House of Industry" down on Katherine Street in South Philly where I paid $8 a week for room and board, plus I worked there. It was a very popular set-up for social work students then [1937]. At school, though, I found a great division between Freudian and Rankian theory. . . [My placement] agency was so Freudian and the supervisor scared me! She talked very softly and kept trying to analyze me.

Barbara didn't finish the graduate program for this and a number of other reasons, though she jumped right into a career in social work, first in Children's Aid in the north and then in Public Assistance and Child Welfare when they moved south. By the end of her formal career, Barbara had worked for 20 years as a foster care worker and supervisor, eventually reaching an administrative level as high – or higher – than her husband.

Her advocacy work frequently spilled over into the rest of her life. When visiting her oldest daughter and husband who were living in Jamaica, for example, a conversation with Barbara indirectly motivated them to adopt a child:

> I was telling her that at that point we were having a terrible time placing bi-racial children. It was the height of this stress on difference. Blacks were feeling that they didn't want black kids adopted by whites, but whites wouldn't adopt black kids, and there were not enough black homes for them, so they would just sit in foster care waiting for something to happen in their lives.

After this conversation, her son-in-law Neal apparently called her agency because he decided that many people of mixed background lived in Jamaica and it would be all right for them to adopt a multi-racial child. Thus, Molly joined the family.

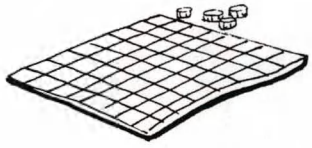
During the 1960s, Barbara and her husband chose to move into the inner city as part of a community commitment that they felt was important even though they had to help their youngest daughter through a difficult, racially mixed high school experience. Later, Barbara was to inherit the complex problems of both a handicapped grandson and an African-American granddaughter who has struggled through adolescence and single parenthood. In both cases, she drew heavily on her social work skills and experiences and, whenever possible, a sense of collaboration and community building. As writer Mary Pipher points out in a discussion of the potential roles of elders such as those with Barbara's experiences and talents:

> We live in a time when community reconstruction is what will save us. If we give our elders our time and our respect, they can teach us how to do it. They can teach us about civility, accountability, and connection. Their knowledge of how to tell stories, how to live together, how to nurture children, and how to share the work will help us build better communities in the future. (Pipher, 1999, p. 85)

I have learned from this part of Barbara's story that there are always connections between the personal and the professional, individual and group goals, which give us insights and inspiration to do a better job in each kind of situation. Thus, as I now visit and care for my own elderly mother, I both learn things which can inspire my teaching and writing and bring ideas from my work which can, I hope, improve my connections with her as she struggles with life in a nursing home community.

Family Meaning and Continuity

Personal stories and family relationships are mediated through the individual's voice as constructed within a qualitative interview. For elders this can include meaningful review and redefinition of events throughout the lifespan:



> Language and narrative are central to human relationships and the creation of meaning; we understand ourselves and our world through interpretive frameworks we have adopted by living and interacting in specific communities at particular times in history. (Ray, 1999-2000, p. 57)

In Barbara's case, stories about relatives, caregiving, and important relationships permeated her narrative. Looking back, it is clear that the seeds of her lifelong people skills and care provision were planted early and impacted by family.

> Father was raised by his grandparents. My great grandparents lived in a big old house which used to be a farm. They had twelve children of their own and Daddy was the son of the oldest boy, and his mother died when he was born. His grandparents just took him in and they did that also with the child of one of their daughters who died when she gave birth. So there were 14 kids in that house. Dad's aunts and uncles seemed like brothers and sisters.

When Barbara was first married and Jim was a minister, they took in a 15-year-old foster child from the local Orphan Home

whose mother had died and whose father was not able to care for his five children. This became a long-term relationship. "To this day she calls me every couple of months to talk on the phone. She lived with us until she was married. I stood up as the mother of the bride."

In addition to her extensive, regular parenting and grandparenting roles, Barbara has combined her professional knowledge with personal commitment during her long involvement in the care needed for her grandson Jimmy. This has required masterful advocacy in a complex and often unresponsive system. In the 4 a.m. pre-Thanksgiving accident where her oldest daughter evidently fell asleep and the car went over an embankment, Jimmy, sitting behind his mother, "was thrown, he wasn't in his seat belt and he was thrown and the car was on top of [him]. Nobody had a seat belt on." After surgery, he remained in a coma for almost a year. He was moved to Boston, which was close to one aunt and uncle but Barbara and Jim had to go home to work and to get the other two children back to school. It was an agonizing separation for her and, eventually, she managed to get Jimmy transferred to a special children's care center near their home so that more intense family involvement could do its special magic.

> . . . we went to see him every day and we could just see a difference every day! You could see his eyes following you and you could almost see his expression as they took him out of the ambulance. There was recognition in his eyes, I swear there was, and I kept thinking what if we'd had him closer and could have gotten him out of the coma sooner!

Over the years since then there have been many moves for this young man to different kinds of facilities, often places with few residents his age. There have also been various struggles to get communication tools for the one hand he can use and to gain access to therapy, additional surgery, and more education. Jimmy evidently was an exceptionally bright and creative child and the most profound struggles by his family have been to keep his spirit going, getting him to write notes and stories, and to maintain a sense of hope for his quality of life. It has been a Herculean effort, which only someone with Barbara's professional experience and determination could oversee, especially while dealing with the other parts of her role as grandmother and family matriarch.

Her family life has long centered around the summer house near a lake and active arts community where she now lives.

> In the summer we came out here from the time I was 10. . . My grandfather bought the house right after it was built which we figure was about 1922 or 23. . . It's just been a house that is so full of a lot of activities for so many years.

When I interviewed Barbara in the fall of 1995, I drove down hilly, winding country roads until I came to her quiet, leaf-strewn town. Her road is narrow and lined with quaint, wooden summer homes. Her house resembles the others with its wide porch and French doors opening into a large living room. What is different, though, is the side ramp, indispensable for Jimmy's wheelchair and helpful for Barbara, then 79, as she navigated the house quite nimbly with her quad cane. The kitchen and downstairs bathroom have various pieces of adaptive equipment for Jimmy's visits, but these devices now are also useful for his grandmother. When we made tea, I realized that a loving family who doesn't want her to climb up had organizied the cupboards to put everything important within her reach.

Barbara's strength comes from her family and the traditions that she has been in-

volved in maintaining through five generations and around one particular place and house. This sense of connection and continuity is something that we are tending to lose in contemporary life and which elders can play a critical role in promoting and maintaining. While I perhaps understood this in a general way, Barbara has provided a wonderful example of how it actually happens through the efforts of one elder. I have used my learning from Barbara and her life to help students focus on grandparents as sources of ongoing learning and support, especially by encouraging the young to interview and share stories about such older family members. In addition, I was inspired to organize a multi-generational conference which focused on the critical and affirmative roles – and narrative voices - of grandparents who are currently raising grandchildren.

Creativity and the Arts

Barbara's mother was a trained musician, and creative arts have always played an important part in her life. She recalled being stage-struck as a young teen and hanging around the rehearsals at the playhouse near her summer home. She and a friend learned all the lines by the time they got to see the play and would gladly do any odd jobs that the theater people requested. Barbara also took elocution and ballroom dancing lessons, and was involved in school plays. She has played the piano – taught initially by her mother – since her childhood and still likes to play duets at family reunions, a pattern she learned from song gatherings after dinner when she was young. Similarly, as a young woman, she loved dancing and playing dance music.

As a minister's wife and a mother who stayed home with her children for about ten years, she found abundant outlets for her creative energies. There was a special room in their unfurnished attic which became the children's favorite place to play and an area where she began to write children's stories (a few of which were published) while her daughters were in school. She talked fondly about the magic of the attic for theater:

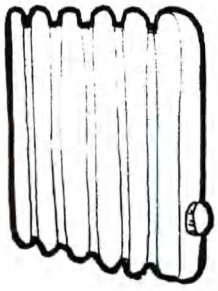
> That room was their dressing room and the rest of the attic was their stage. They had lots of fun in that room. . . I always wanted to act and so when the kids got the idea of putting on shows, I got the idea to have what was called the "Let's Pretend Club." . . . I got the plays from some of the material I had had. We used to invite friends and let them sit on suitcases or whatever in the attic to watch.

During the same period, Barbara was active with the church library committee, starting a collection, serving for a while as librarian ("which I had no training for"), and then writing a Library Line column for the local paper that, she added, continues to this day.

One vivid memory I have of a wonderful time with Barbara was when the two young friends, my daughter and her granddaughter, had an assignment to write a scene for a play. Somehow, they decided it would be fun to write a pre-act and post-act for *Macbeth*. They completed these neo-Shakespearean tragedies shortly before Thanksgiving. Jill and Lara came up with the idea that we should cast the plays with family and friends and have an all-day party to act it out, complete with an elaborate banquet scene. Our multigenerational troupe dressed in costumes, hid scripts behind tin foil shields or other props, shared an historically appropriate feast, and had a wonderful day, capturing the entire drama with the help of a bulky and unwieldy early video recorder. One highlight for me was a three-witches scene in front of our fireplace. Barbara and I were joined by a family friend who took out her front teeth dental plate to add to the atmosphere!

For Barbara, the arts have clearly been an outlet and a source of inspiration. Creating bridges between multiple generations through the arts was something she motivated for me. Recently, with Susan Perlstein from Elders Share the Arts as keynote speaker, I organized a conference to bring together students, elders, and community social workers to explore and celebrate the possibilities of intergenerational arts programs. A book on the topic, co-authored by Perlstein, describes the final preparation for a project with elder Holocaust survivors and young Asian refugees:

> Now we add the chant, spoken into microphones by different readers, and music. The result is a powerful intergenerational statement about the courage we all have in ourselves; we continue on in life, no matter what the obstacle. The piece also demonstrates that if we work together we can all help one another, regardless of differences in age or culture. (Perlstein & Bliss, 1994, p. 34)



Overcoming Adversity

It seems difficult to believe that Barbara, with all her vibrant energy and determinedly positive outlook on life, has gone through a series of challenges and losses that could be utterly defeating to any of us. Not only did she lose her daughter to the incompleteness of sudden accidental death but the same event precipitated her grandson Jimmy into a life of major disability and limited functioning, physically and emotionally. A few years later the children's father, Neal, became ill with AIDS and eventually died, while Barbara's husband, Jim, suffering through the new parental responsibilities – and specifically the strain of lifting the then teen-aged Jimmy while home for a weekend visit – had a heart attack which led to his death. Another enormous and ongoing challenge has been her relationship with her granddaughter Molly. This young woman experienced various challenges in high school and, finally, in spite of the best efforts of a counselor and her grandmother, dropped out in March before her scheduled graduation. Since then she has had two children, troubled relationships with several men, career starts and restarts, and some substance abuse problems. Barbara, by then in her late 70s, stepped forward to be Molly's coach in the delivery room during the birth of her great-grandson, an experience she found very exciting and touching. As grandmother and more, she continues, in spite of questioning the wisdom of it, to be a key support person for this granddaughter's little family, including opening up her home to them on many occasions.

> I could say to her now, "You're 24 years old and you don't need to depend on me so much" – but oh those kids! She comes when she runs out of food, or money to pay her bills, and now she has a pretty steady job but I have to help out because of the kids. She's got me now because of them!

It is the larger family – with its complex relationships and celebrations – which still sustains Barbara through these challenges. As she explained at the end of her story about the time of the terrible accident, "We stayed at [our youngest daughter's house at Cape Cod] through Thanksgiving. We had Thanksgiving there and we thought it would be terrible but it wasn't. I don't know but you really get close to the rest of your family at a time like that." Her granddaughter Lara has been a special joy in her life and she sometimes refers to her as "the good that came out of the bad." They share many interests – especially in the arts. It was through music, for example, that Lara – accomplished on several instruments – met her future husband who shares her enthusiasm for church bell ringing.

Lara's completing her Ph.D. seemed to represent the graduate education that Barbara aspired to but never attained for herself. Barbara has also celebrated Lara's accomplishments as she has followed her grandmother's interests and published two novels for young readers. The two remain very, very close and visit back and forth even though Lara and her family now live in Europe.

Her other family members have similarly turned out to be vibrant and fully realized people. Barbara's remaining two daughters and their children are involved in all parts of her life and have provided amazing support as well. A celebration that I was not able to attend was organized by the whole family as a surprise 80th birthday party for her. They also visit often and are frequently in her conversation. On the days that I interviewed Barbara, several calls from one or another of them came through. Clearly, all her love, caring, fun, and sense of humor have been passed on to her entire family and have strengthened many others.

Barbara's handling of adversity taught me that there are always ways to carry on with patience, determination, and a willingness to accept the support of others. Of course, increasing age brings multiple losses that, for some, are too much to bear. But, as social workers and as people, we must remain open to ways of imagining options and advocating for the help that elders need to make the best of what they have in their lives. And, as Mary Pipher emphasizes, there is much for us to learn from how older people overcome adversity:

> Being with the old, I've learned things about survival. I've come away feeling calmer, more accepting, and more grateful. I don't know if I'll be able to be as courageous and kind as many of the people I have met, but at least I'll have had good role models. I have pictures in my head of courage and dignity under tremendous adversity. (Pipher, 1999, p. 37)

I, too, have learned through Barbara and others not to fear aging but to see the strengths and potential in learning from and moving beyond personal challenges, as well as embracing public policy advocacy for this population group. Two favorite ways in which I have done this are through teaching the wonderfully affirming narrative about two elder Alaska women who survive a harsh winter alone (Wallis, 1993), and by becoming involved, with students, in our active state advocacy organization as it heeds elder voices and lobbies for their issues (COVE).

Conclusion

It seems to me that Barbara is a quite extraordinary person for any moment in history and especially as a woman who lived through many of the social and historic changes of the 20th Century. She has moved with impressive grace from the quiet, idyllic, homogeneous, small-town America of the 1920s and her youth, into the complex, multicultural, contradictory, fast-paced and world-oriented culture of the early 21st Century. She has lived through years of breathtaking change – in technology and communication and attitudes, towards gender, work, ethnicity, community, America's place in the world – and she has had to deal not only with relatively routine and predictable moments of change and crisis (graduation, marriage, the death of parents and of a spouse) but with dramatic and jarring and unexpected events that have had a profound impact on the way she is able to live her life. Through them all, Barbara has maintained her dignity, humor, love of life, and strengths in relating to people. She also has exemplified strong social work skills in her personal as well as professional life and relationships.

What I personally have gained from Barbara's life, strengths, warmth, and enthu-

siasm is a determination to be a social worker, teacher, family and community member, and then an old woman who can use my caring and advocacy skills to better the life quality of all types of elders as they traverse a society not strong in awareness of or sensitivity to their needs and choices. This involves promoting – in the widest possible sense – family patterns of caring and interrelationships; working with students to motivate and excite them to connect with and find positions in which to support older people; advocating for aging policies that are equitable, financially adequate, and responsive to individual gender and cultural needs; and permeating services and service providers for elders with models of client autonomy, dignity, and respect.

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MOVIE REVIEW: *CALENDAR GIRLS*

Agathi Glezakos, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

The film "Calendar Girls" depicts the true story of a group of women in middle and older adulthood who are compelled by a shared ideal to challenge gender-based protocols and institutional expectations. One mature woman's determination to find a way to raise money for the local hospital sets a group of her female friends in motion. As a group, and with mutual support and encouragement, the women dare to consider a fund-raising method that eventually attracts local, national and international attention and helps raise a sum of money beyond everyone's wildest expectations.

In the town of Knapely, in Yorkshire, England, middle-aged Chris (Helen Mirren) uses her ingenuity, sense of social responsibility, and leadership and collaborative skills to engage members of her organization, The Women's Institute, in a fund-raising project. While waiting in the "relatives' room" with her long-time friend, Annie (Julie Walters), when John, Annie's husband, receives radiation treatments, Chris concludes that a new couch is needed. Her chosen means of raising funds – selling a calendar with the pictures of Institute members naked (or "nude," as they prefer to say) – violates the organization's protocol for member behavior and invites diverse reactions from husbands, children and community members. The uncontrollable laughter of two young female clerks in the studio in which the nude pictures are developed, the disdain with which Chris' adolescent son (who keeps a magazine of nude young women under his mattress) reacts to the project, and the ridicule he is subjected to by his classmates as a result of his mother's action, reflect the prevalence of ageist attitudes in a youth-oriented society. The opposition of the women's husbands (including one who practices infidelity) reflects culturally condoned patriarchal practices. The reaction of the local, national, and international press to a calendar with pictures of nude older and middle-aged women confirms the universality of biased gender and age-based belief systems; ironically, however, it is due in part to these very biases that the project ends up being such a tremendous success.

Eleven women, at different stages of adulthood, pose; one for each of the first eleven months of the year (they pose as a group for the December photograph). The women are modest and much concerned about the propriety of what they have agreed to do. Their deliberations, comments and expressions of embarrassment as the photographer makes suggestions of how to position their nude or semi-nude bodies reflect their socialization into cultural gender and age-based expectations of behavior conduct. However, their involvement with such an innovative and controversial project broadens their horizons as they discover their ability to make an impact beyond their immediate families and social organization. Each successful step in their endeavor empowers them to move forward with more determination and stronger commitment to the project. As Chris realizes that their work can make a difference not only in furnishing one hospital room with a couch but in supporting cancer research, she explores and uses multiple ways to advertise the project

and promote calendar sales. She and the other calendar models give interviews; as the word of their project spreads, they begin to encounter reporters when they open their doors to pick up the morning paper or the milk delivery.

Their reputation as daring older women eventually attracts the attention of the Hollywood movie industry, and they are invited to travel to Hollywood for interviews, appearances on television shows, and shooting of commercials. During their visit, the women receive Hollywood's lavish treatment, strengthen their sense of self-confidence, are empowered to challenge stereotypes, and have the depth of their friendships tested.

The movie is beautifully shot, with lingering shots of the green pastures and blooming trees and flowers that make up the Yorkshire landscape. The dialogue is smart and entertaining. The internal and interpersonal tribulations that each woman experiences following her decision to participate in the project are presented honestly and realistically; the audience can easily identify with every step in the women's decision-making process. The impact that collective action can have on women as individuals is presented powerfully. Witnessing how these unassuming and traditional older women are electrified and transformed by an idea that promises to bring them new (and perhaps even scandalous) adventures confirms the power of the human spirit and the toxically limiting effects of stereotypes. We see a 55-year-old woman whose dress and overall demeanor make her look much older than her age responding to the invitation to be a calendar model with: "I am 55 years old, and if I am not going to get them [her breasts] out now, when, then?" We then witness how her involvement in the project leads to her transformation into an elegant, confident, and sexy woman – a woman who is, in virtue of being freed from expectations of what a 55-year-old woman *should* be like, a much happier woman.

Reflecting upon the experiences of the older women of Knapely can spur us to revisit our conceptions of the human capacity for personal growth and social contributions during older adulthood. Such an alteration can lead to the dispelling of myths about aging and reduce the negative effects of age, role and gender-based stereotypes.

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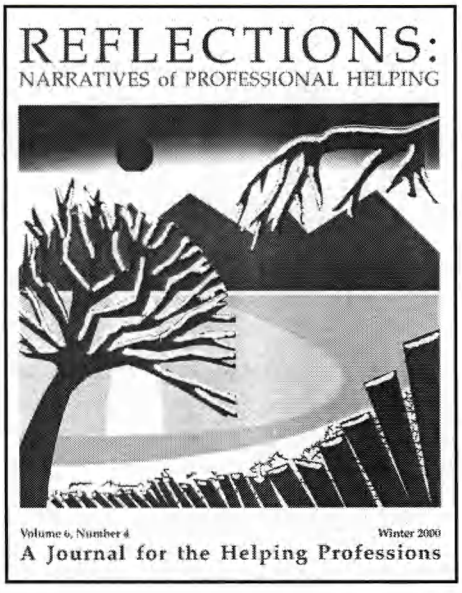

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