NEW MAPS OF LIFE

by

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Ann Zubrick

How can I make more life-giving choices about what to put into the world and how to deal with what the world sends back — choices that might bring new life to me, to others, and to the world we share?

I send this with blessings for your presence in the thresholds of your life.

Parker J Palmer

INTRODUCTION

I first started studying and teaching life-course developmental psychology as a graduate student in the mid-1970s. Fifty years on, I approach later life as a deeply personal experience: not just *becoming* older but consciously *growing* older. Later and late life is an invitation to reflect on our lives—to revisit our memories of events and experiences—both myth and story. To uncover meaning and deepen our understanding. In the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, life is a sequence of seasonal changes—each with a purpose. For me, it is an unfolding story to understand ourselves in relation to the Divine—called God, Soul, Spirit, the Tao, Buddha, Nature, or any of a thousand names.

Discussion about 'ageing' and the challenges of the 'ageing population' dominate in the media. Articles cover pressures on the health system, emergency departments, aged care requirements and staffing, an Alzheimer's epidemic, police reports of missing older persons who may have wandered, and others who have been scammed. Politicians and planners note that resources, services and staff to care for older people are in short supply and that 'the system is in crisis', at least in much of the Western world.

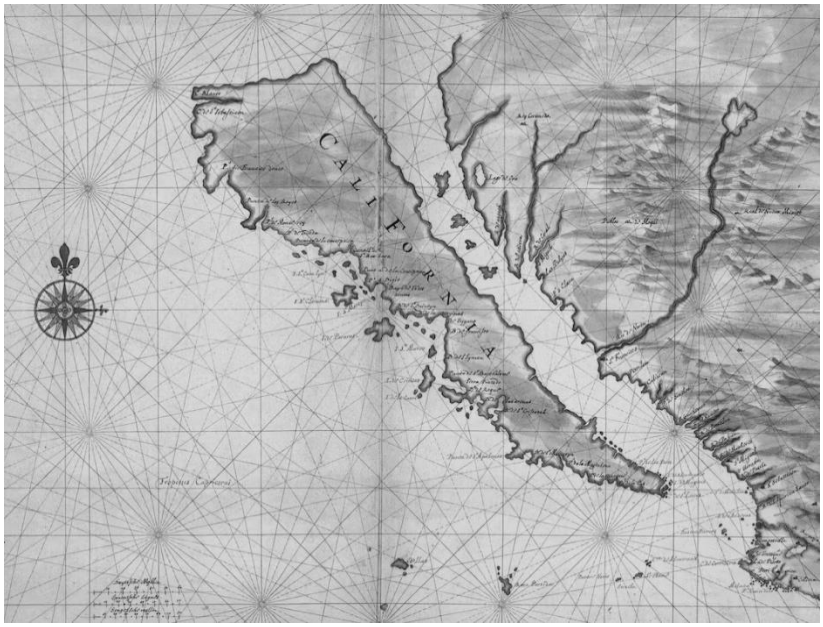
I've been thinking about later and late life since I was a child! An only child whose parents chose to work in Africa and Asia as missionary doctors for the Salvation Army, much of my childhood was spent in boarding school. My social world was children around my own age, young women house mistresses and teachers. I didn't grow up with grandparents or older relatives in my life. I was curious about the older persons in photos, films, illustrations, books and stories.

An introduction to some 'perils' of life were all around me in my earliest years. As a young child I saw many children and adults with missing limbs. The very sick—old and young—carried by family members desperate for them to receive treatment. Mothers strictly supervised and feeding their children in an enclosed area; ensuring children ate, drank and took medicine that might otherwise have been sold on a black market. Gifts my doctor parents were given by those who were grateful for the care they received. My father evaded death from a heart attack when I was seven, simply because he happened to be walking into a hospital to work and received immediate skilled care.

My map of life differs from many women of my generation. Family, education, marriage, work and career opportunities are ones I could not have imagined. At this time in my later, but not yet late life, I continue to be offered rich opportunities to grow in Spirit through my work and the people I meet. These experiences enrich me, others (I hope), and the world we share.

California Island

While in Australia some ten years ago to speak to Catholic Religious, and to launch her book *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully,* American Benedictine nun Joan Chittister began a presentation reflecting on the gifts and challenges of ageing and longer lives with this story about a map.



In the mid-17th century Spanish seafarers sailed up the west coast of the Americas to what is now known as the Baja Peninsula. The cartographers of the time, aware of the Drake expeditions, and good Cartesians as well, simply drew a straight line up from the strait of California to the strait of Juan de Fuca between Vancouver Island and Washington State.

Consequently, the maps that were published in 1635 show very clearly that California was an island. Now that might be only a quaint story if it were not for the fact that the missionaries of the time were using that map to travel inland.

So, given the information on that map, they developed the first great prefab boat construction project in human history. They cut their flatboats in Spain, shipped them over in pieces and then,

on the shores of Monterey, California, put them all back together again, to be transported on the backs of mules to the other side of California. Then they carried those boats 12,000 feet up the Sierra Nevada mountains for passage across the great strait which the map showed ran from the Baja to Puget sound.

But lo and behold the other side of those mountains was no seashore at all. It was what is now the State of Nevada and the beginning of the great American desert. California was the mainland!

It would be a rather funny story except for one thing that makes it tragic. When the missionaries wrote back to tell the cartographers and the Crown that California was not an island, no one believed them. In fact, they insisted that the map was certainly correct: it was the missionaries who were in the wrong place!

What's more, in 1701—almost 70 years later—they reissued an updated version of the same map. For fifty years, the years of the most constant, most crucial explorations of the California coastline, those maps went unchanged because someone continued to work with partial information, assumed that data from the past had the inerrancy of tradition and then used authority to prove it.

Finally, after years and years of new reports, a few cartographers began to issue a new version. And in 1721, the last mapmaker holdout finally attached California to the mainland.

It took almost a hundred years for the gap between experience and authority to close. It took almost a hundred years for the new maps to be declared official. Despite the fact that the people who were there all the time knew differently from the very first day.

What is Joan Chichester's point? The story captures much of the way we think about ageing and the experience of later life. One disconnected from the mainland 'rest of life'. She suggested that readers pay attention to the inhabitants' experience. It may be a destination you wish to reach.

Demographic Changes

In the last century, life average life expectancy in Australia increased by about 40 years. It continues increasing by roughly two years a decade. Women continue to live longer than men. Demographers predict that half the children in Australia born beyond 2000 may well live to be one hundred. The current number of centenarians is expected to double by the year 2050.

However, much of life—education, hours and years of work, urban and housing design—reflects life in the mid-last century. Norms and expectations about generational relationships and family obligations have not responded to changing demography. Worldwide, there has been strong resistance to increasing the age or other parameters governing eligibility for a pension and related benefits.

There remains resistance in Australia to providing child-care and early education places to children whose mothers do not meet work criteria. Families with young children whose mothers work are privileged over those whose mothers are not employed. There is overwhelming evidence that quality early-years education has long term benefits shaping the life trajectory and outcomes for *all* children. It also redresses intergenerational disadvantages. Everyone gains from a sense of belonging, purpose and worth present at every stage of life.

LONGEVITY

It is time to talk about longevity—rather than ageing. The term ageing is appropriate when describing the body's biological changes. Longevity captures how long we are all living. Over the past 100 years, advances in housing, public health, medical care and treatments, and education mean that many more of us will reach our eighties and nineties.

Living into a tenth or eleventh decade is now a worrying prospect for people because of the real risks of deteriorating health, losses and social isolation. A longevity society focus is one intent on improving both *how* we *age* and how we are *cared* for across the life course.

In adding these years to life last century, little attention was given to the 'gift of years'. Only 'ageing' got longer, and not often healthier. We stayed with the view that additional years simply meant a growing number of old people who become ill, need care, and do not contribute productively.

The challenge is to envisage century-long lives for *most* people. Lives which are satisfying and lived well for as long as possible.

The world in which I and many of you were raised was designed for the young. For a person born at the start of the 'baby-boom', the focus was firmly on *families* with young children and largely set parental roles. Half the girls in my high school class left school at 15. Only five of the cohort of 120 girls who started high school with me went onto tertiary study. Some became teachers and nurses. Most married in their early twenties and immediately started having children. In the 1960s, an administrator in the hospital I worked in told me, "There will never be equal pay for women. You are not a bread winner."

Many consider life in three distinct stages: roughly two decades of education, four decades of employment, and up to two decades of 'retirement'. In centenary life spans people may well be in the labor market in some capacity for an added twenty years, not simply for economic reasons, but because their relationship to both 'work' and purpose has changed.

A ninety- or one-hundred-year life will mean longer working lives. We are likely to make several major career shifts. Or, as the world warms, and opportunities change, to relocate and adapt to different, confronting circumstances. Working lives that extend for many decades in a period of rapid technological and social change means rethinking 'life-long education'.

Imagine lives where people move more easily between periods of earning, learning, and sabbaticals to acquire new skills or directions, periods of caregiving, volunteering, renewing and refreshing.

Some educators suggest reshaping the early years of schooling to ensure that children experience and reflect upon opportunities for 'unlearning' as well as learning. Others describe the value and importance of group learning and projects which draw on the views, perspectives and experiences of *all* in the group.

High quality 100-year lives

In 2018, the Stanford University Center on Longevity gathered some 50 experts from a range of academic disciplines—medical sciences and specialties, social sciences, economics, climate science, education, business leaders and policy makers—to address some questions:

- What would a 100-year life look like if it were very *high quality*?
- What might you be doing at 70, 80 and 90 years of age?
- How would childhood, adolescence, and middle age need to change to get there?

The report arising from these conversations, *The New Map of Life*, is easily accessible online.

The report suggests that changing demography may now best be understood as 'rectangular', not the past population pyramid, or now 'honey pot' shape. The demographic distribution we are moving towards as birth rates continue to fall, and people live longer, will mean roughly equal numbers in each age segment. Whether we retain four labels—childhood, youth, adults, elders—remains to be seen

The tension surrounding longer lives is related to the rate at which life expectancy has increased and continues to increase. Each generation comes into a world shaped with knowledge, infrastructure, and social norms of those times. We are becoming only slowly aware of the extraordinary advantages of longevity. Long lives are not the problem. The problem is living with systems and circumstances designed for lives shorter than the ones we now have.

Most children today are also on track to live, learn, work, and retire in systems and institutions that were set up when their grandparents were children.

- 'Retirements' that span four decades (65-105) are financially unattainable for most individuals and certainly for governments.
- Education that ends in the early twenties is ill-suited for longer working lives and changes in work.
- Housing, neighbourhood, and community structures need to accommodate persons of *every* age and stage.
- Social norms that shape or dictate intergenerational responsibilities, not only between parents and young children, but also among adults, fail to address individual, developmental differences and family structures that include four, or five living generations.

Leisure, work, education, and family interweave throughout life, as people go from birth to death. The boundaries between work and personal life will blur further and will need ongoing negotiation within families and communities as work and caregiving opportunities or responsibilities continue to change.

We need times in life and places to stop, rest, change courses and/or repeat steps along the way. Old age is not there simply to last longer. Childhood, youth, and mid-life need to be re-thought and re-shaped too.

Observing and learning: changing policy

Policy changes take investigation, consideration, argument and time. This is happening, notably by the International Longevity Centre located in London.

The Centre reports on a range of initiatives—many auspiced by local government or community organisations. For example, as part of urban redevelopment, shops on the upper floor or floors of older shopping centres—buildings no longer fit-for-purpose—are being converted into single-bedroom apartments for young adults or older adults to rent or purchase.

Particular attention has been paid to kitchen design to mitigate fire risk and allow easy emergency evacuation from the building. Street level premises are allocated to businesses suiting the needs of *both* resident groups—hairdresser, small supermarket, pharmacy, café, coffee shop, newsagent—and, of course, available to anyone in the neighbourhood.

Such 'age friendly cities' initiatives highlight the value of shaping and enabling informal exchanges, practical support and friendships across generations.

Workplaces are changing and slowly accommodating to changing life and family patterns. Manufacturing, mining, construction and physically demanding work pose different challenges for workers in mid-life, from those in desk or service jobs which can more easily be adapted.

Stanford University in California, and the International Longevity Centre in the UK are commissioning research and beginning to redesign some services and supports to sustain and well use longer lives. Replicating, modifying and assessing ideas in practice is now starting on a small scale.

One example involves the use of autonomous voice-activated driving vehicles in selected areas of London to take older persons to key appointments and return them safely home. The number of older residents no longer able to drive in inner London and a shortage of both volunteer drivers and taxis, hampers attendance at medical and legal appointments, among other things. A pilot program in suburbs of San Francisco has shown taxis and other vehicles ordered by voice and run using AI to be an effective solution. The Greater London Council is now willing to implement its own trial.

People may well be anxious about the financial implications of living 'longer than I expect to.' In the UK, planning is progressing as part of 'future pensions' provision. It is a savings scheme into which the Government will contribute annually for every new baby now born in the UK. Small annual Government contributions will accumulate, taking advantage of compounding interest. Direct deposits may be made later into a child's account if/when as older children they contribute to community work such as weeding, planting, or assisting at events. Accounts are there to be drawn down later in adult life for education, upskilling, training or other agreed purposes that extend working lives. This money is available *only* pre-retirement. It is not an aged pension. It's a scheme to allow adults to retrain to extend working lives.

Changing personal practices

People whose work supports their emotional lives live longer. This is true for artists, musicians, conductors, and Catholic Religious whom I describe below. Work that feeds the spirit and is valued by your peers and community provides both meaning and purpose to life.

Healthy, satisfying longer lives are wonderful gifts. Making and taking time to accept opportunities and challenges can come at every age and stage. I encourage you to value and talk about what you see working in families, communities, workplaces and among Friends. Try things and accept invitations that may seem 'a step too far' and see what you learn and gain.

Many Quakers show it is perfectly possible to be 80 or 90 and be actively involved in communities, protests, Meetings and organisations.

Already in our Meeting, I hear Friends' stories of moving to work fewer days, assessing competing responsibilities, creating time for volunteering and creative projects—many involving new skills, and working in diverse teams to change a small piece of the world.

Personal and community care

Loving, and feeling loved, is a pretty hardwired prerequisite for managing one's life. If we are, and have been, privileged to be loved, we are more likely to be able to love, to respond generously, accept and enjoy the complexities that life offers, including care.

The boundaries between work and personal life will blur further and will need ongoing negotiation within families and communities as work and caregiving continue to change.

Rosalyn Carter spoke of the need for *each of us* to recognise that somewhere in the life course we either:

- have been a carer
- are a carer
- will be a carer
- are being cared for

When adults under 50 are invited to reflect on the prospect of living to one hundred, they rapidly arrive at an understanding of how difficult that is likely to be if life, work and family demands stay as they are now. How we *age* and how we are *cared* for will require multiple nuanced solutions.

None are gender or age specific obligations, yet half the population (women, more often) is expected to remain available for family caregiving needs either full-time or for many hours each week. Women in midlife increasingly step in to provide *both* elder and childcare.

All of us—say over 70, and in good health—have opportunity to reflect upon what might make for a meaningful and satisfying one hundred years. It is inspiring to read stories of centenarians captured as part of the One Hundred Year Project. Younger persons who responded to an invitation to paint a portrait of a centenarian were profoundly changed by conversations and stories shared about their subjects' rich, long lives.

The challenges ahead will require different routes, different experiences, and experiments to share and from which we can learn. If later in life we can work *pro bono*, do so. *Pro bono* work is slowly changing the nature and shape of volunteering. Organisations benefit greatly when they acknowledge the different gifts and experiences of their volunteers. Working *pro bono*, with clear commitments on both sides, can be less stressful than adhering to ever increasing volunteering regulations.

Intergenerational conversations

Parker J Palmer observes: "If our common life is to become more compassionate, creative, and just, it will take an intergenerational effort." His book, *On the Brink of Everything*: *Grace, Gravity and Getting Old*, is an excellent resource.

The Rachel Carson Landmark Alliance offers an opportunity each year for adults and children to work together to submit poems, writing, and longer essays on the theme Intergenerational Sense of Wonder/Sense of the Wild. It's a reminder that wherever nature endures, it offers opportunity to reflect upon the nature of change, healing, adaptation, and renewal. Being in nature makes all of us happier, healthier, and better equipped to tolerate difference, change and plough on with our lives, with difficult conversations and actions, in the belief that we and others can face and deal with life's challenges.

Examples of photography, poems and essays on this website are inspiring. So too are the accounts from the 'intergenerational team' that accompany each submission.

None of us has done anything to earn the awe and wonder we witness in the world around us. It is a reminder that there are constant opportunities to learn and change, redirect futures, mend rifts, and transform lives.

LIFE IN CATHOIC RELIGIOUS ORDERS

When it comes to ageing well, nuns and others in religious orders could teach the rest of us much of value. American neurologist and epidemiologist David Snowden [Snowden, 2001] pointed this out more than 20 years ago, following a study that remains of interest to scientists looking for clues about diseases such as Alzheimer's. What is or may be protective in this way of life for our later years?

The "Nun Study", as it is known, started in 1986 as a longitudinal examination of older Catholic sisters in one order: Sisters of Notre Dame Congregation in North America. It has since been expanded and extended to include both men and women in other Catholic Orders. There are now more sources and writers reflecting on the quality and longevity of persons participating in different forms of religious life.

At the start of Snowden's study, nuns, all of whom were aged seventy-five or older, were assessed to ensure that they had no known cognitive impairment. Participants gave permission for their

health records to be accessed, to undertake regular medical and cognitive tests, and agreed to donate their brains for post-mortem examinations. They were regularly assessed until they could no longer participate due to illness or death.

The Sisters, a teaching Order, were more than willing to contribute to the study, seeing it as a way of continuing their ministry in education.

Sister Mary, born in 1892, taught students in the early years of high school for 42 years; a role from which she finally retired aged eighty-four. She would not admit to being 'retired.' Snowden quotes her insisting: "I only retire at night." When formally assessed aged 101, she was still performing 'remarkably well' on the assessments and memory tests. Following her death and autopsy, her brain showed 'tangles' typically and consistently associated with Alzheimer's Disease. She is not the only person among the Religious to have a diseased brain at autopsy and yet to be functioning well.

There remains no explanation for this astonishing finding.

The Nun Study started when little was known about Alzheimer's Disease. An important finding was that *both lifestyle and education* may deter changes such as Alzheimer's in later life. The Sisters with higher education and a cheerful outlook to life were less likely to develop dementia and lived longer.

We are bombarded now by articles describing and promoting 'successful' and 'healthy' ageing. It is reasonable to ask why and how some individuals achieve impressive health and cognitive outcomes while others do not. One downside to a focus on longevity may result in measuring and valuing individualism and productivity.

The Nun Study highlights something completely different. Nuns living well into their nineties and beyond one hundred years accept and live with a sense of peace, purpose, and prayer that instils wellbeing as they reach and experience late life.

Religious Life in a Convent

Each day is framed with worship, shared meals, conversations as members walk around the convent, time in the chapel, activity as health and energy permit, with help as needed.

A priest says Mass each morning and all may come. The corridor is filled with walking frames. Pews have been replaced by well-spaced comfortable chairs that facilitate getting in and out of independently. The priest can walk easily to offer communion to those seated. Those who are mobile walk to the front of the Chapel.

The Chapel remains open for private prayer, reading from the Scriptures, *Lectio Divina*, and quiet contemplation. The Chapel is the heart of community life. Sisters decline conversations and offers to relocate them where they might receive 'better care.' Daily time in the Chapel makes life worthwhile. Moves to receive aged care, even literally 'next door', for medical attention may result in great distress; notably for those who remain.

Mealtimes in the dining room are not hurried. Attention is paid to those who may need assistance of some kind. Changes are noted and accommodated quietly without making them obvious.

Individuals' stories are all deeply known within and held by the whole community. Personal stories have been written and continue to be updated and recorded for future use at funerals, and to record this time in community life, as it comes slowly to an end.

The nuns' rich social engagement and mutual support contrasts dramatically with the widely reported 'epidemic of loneliness and social isolation' increasingly spoken about at conferences on ageing and reported in research literature. *The Convent community is family.*

In one convent I visit regularly, the Sisters have given consent and encourage undergraduate nursing and health science students to come and speak freely with them about their current and past lives and experience of growing older. It is a "time to share our lives and work which is so different now. Sometimes we even 'shock' them with what we did and saw when we were their age!"

The Sisters and Asian women who provide personal care or assist in the dining room befriend one another. There are no 'us and them'—only 'us'—involved in *mutual* care.

Orders facing an uncertain future

In my own invitations to meet with, listen and facilitate sessions for members of four Religious Orders I often hear them comments on "keeping (their) whole life available to God's invitations to be faithful, and of service" as they age.

The road maps for ageing well in each Order are grounded in their Founder's work and mission. So, they do vary. Worship and conversations within the Orders are filled with deep sense of gratitude to God for their collective life's work. They know one another's stories, share, and celebrate together regularly, while also supporting those in the Order experiencing pain, loss, illness or at the end of life.

I observe the value of sharing the journey with their peers; facing shared challenges in a ***communal*** setting—not seen as residential care. They are 'ageing in place,' among those with whom they may have worked and worshipped since they joined the Order. The ***community*** is sharing the experience together; offering and learning what is needed for support and understanding.

Those in Leadership roles within their Orders are tasked to deal with significant challenges. Catholic Religious Orders in Australia are now rapidly declining in numbers. Their leaders speak plainly—highlighting, scoping, and planning for this future. They prayerfully consider uses for buildings, land, and finances in the context of legacy. This involves addressing in an integrated way practical, emotional, and spiritual needs without knowing for how long it may be needed or forms it may take.

While there is much to 'let go', there is also much to celebrate, acknowledge, and 'hand over' to those willing and charged with the responsibility of overseeing Foundations, donations, scholarships in line with the 'charism' of each Order.

One Order has 'gifted' a convent and surrounding gardens and grounds to be developed for housing and an early childhood centre available to low-income families. The Order wishes to enhance life and well-being through what is both built and created; to be an example of a cohesive, peaceful community for those who live there. The leadership, governance, and oversight of this development of prime real estate will be in the hands of lay persons committed to ensuring the legacy of the Order.

In my work with Orders, I celebrate being with people committed to transforming individual and later life into new opportunities. Each Order has sustained presence and work through time of major social change and often in remote communities. They have done extraordinary work under difficult circumstances. Now, coming to the end of life they engage with purpose to address what is needed each day, and for the end, not only of lives but of times. The presence of God *and* of others are equally important as they relinquish responsibilities and increasingly engage in reflection and prayer. These practices shape their health, wellbeing, and ageing.

As we grapple with concerns in our own Local, Area, Regional and Yearly Meetings, I wonder if we might we sit with this question:

- What do these changing times *represent and invite* for us as Friends?

JOURNEYING TO SOUL

In my early forties, I accepted a position at the University of Hong Kong. I was appointed to set up and teach a new degree program: the first course to train Speech Pathologists. My Chinese-speaking staff had the task of systematically describing and studying speech and language disorders in Chinese. That is to develop ways to accurately diagnose and treat communication disorders in a tonal and logographic language.

I needed a place to worship. I was a member of the Uniting Church in Australia: a Sunday School teacher, Elder and Chair of the Parish Council. I had been given a letter of introduction to a Methodist church on Hong Kong Island. The congregation was largely expatriate with occasional visitors—mostly British. The Minister spoke the Queen's English. Liturgy, sermon and hymns were all totally familiar. It felt deeply uncomfortable.

In a Saturday edition of South China Morning Post, a notice caught my attention:

"Quakers meet in the Bishop's Common Room opposite the Anglican Cathedral in Central District every Sunday at 10am."

I attended my first Quaker Meeting the next morning. I never left. After returning later to live and work in Perth, I joined Fremantle Meeting.

Early in my time in Hong Kong I woke one morning after what Carl Jung would call a 'big dream'. I immediately wrote it down.

> I am driving a small blue car through the Korean countryside on a beautiful sunny day. I know for certain that I am in Korea because the signs are written in Korean! These symbols have a meaning. I know that I am searching for a route that will take me to Seoul. My problem is that I can't read any Korean. It's not my language.
>
> Which symbol represents Seoul? How do I work this out? How will I know if I am headed in a direction that will get me there?
>
> I am not anxious. However, I am very grateful to see a small dwelling further along the road. Just one building. Nothing alongside it.
>
> I park the car. As I walk towards the building someone opens the door and beckons me inside. I sit on the floor among a group of people of all ages. I recognise no one. No one speaks English. I am not sure what language they share but they clearly can communicate with one another.
>
> Much of their communication appears to be single words and gestures. I think I understand some of the gestures. I may at least have the gist.
>
> I feel welcome. The people are curious about me. We try gestures and I offer my name. Easy to say, 'Ann'. Smiles and repetition all around!
>
> We share food together. I recognise none of it, but it is all delicious. Someone gives me a container of food for the journey.
>
> I'm gently ushered to the door to be sent on my way.
>
> I leave satisfied and confident that I will somehow find a way to Seoul.
>
> (At this point I wake!)

I sought assistance from a counsellor whom I met with for many months. Dream work was a wonderful help as I found a way through mid-life.

I learned that: Sometimes we need or are forced to journey without a map. Directions are often of little assistance and misleading when you're not confident about where you are headed.

I find myself returning to this dream and have done several times over the last 35 years. I did when I recently participated in a wonderful course at Silver Wattle Quaker Centre on "Windows to the Soul."

My 'career' has changed. I continue on an extraordinary journey through a beautiful landscape.

I remain aware of the desire to make my way to Soul.

Spiritual perspectives on life and later life

We all inevitably come at some stage in our life, to the question of our meaning and place in the world. We each have our own versions and timings of these questions, and we each respond differently to life's prompts.

We begin to ask ourselves what is life about? What is it all for? More pressingly what has *my* life been about? What does the future hold, both for this world and any future meaning after death?

If we are fortunate to have had a chance for conversations earlier in life, we may re-visit some questions we asked or were encouraged to ask at an earlier time in our lives as we faced circumstances that forced us to confront the truth that life comes to and end at some point.

I could not defer these questions in midlife as my father died when I was 34, and my mother when I was 46. My experience leading up to and with the death of each of my parents I now see as both a privilege and a gift. They each led extraordinary lives when maps of life were much simpler and in other respects also highly constrained. Both people of faith, they approached the end of life with gratitude and grace.

Much of my own early life took place in contexts where there was significant political and social uncertainty. With love and nurturing we can learn while young to manage complexity, suffering, joy and to recognise occasional miracles!

Part of our own journey in life is to find or create ways to age well. There is no simple formula, a way to enter later life without disturbing our complacency or comfort. We need to disabuse ourselves and those who speak only of 'successful ageing'.

Is success living a long life regardless of its quality? Do we focus solely on 'quality of life?' How do we measure that? Whose perspective are we taking? There are difficult discussions to be had, often with doctors or other professionals some of whom are not well equipped to listen or facilitate such conversations.

I have experienced two contrasting groups of older persons: those who think about the life journey, make changes, and embark on developing an inner life. They observe patterns that work for them. They feel and stay connected to others. They observe and experience a beyond… in rituals, music, art, words, worship or other meaningful practices.

They differ from those who retain the attitude of midlife: an outward journey deferring to others, anxious and often full of fear, unsure of how to manage what's to come. They may be described as physically 'great for their age' but inside they are uncomfortable, fearful and often lonely.

Walking later life together, old and young, carer and cared for can learn much by sharing their stories. Rich conversations help us to reinterpret the past, to understand more fully what happened in our lives from another's reflections. We gain immeasurably when we engage in rich conversations and trust one with another—not just with 'therapists'. As we reflect on our biographies, we begin to understand the past and anticipate the future, while living more fully in the present. We are

enriched sharing the restless journeys of lives in this kind of community: facing life's challenges with authenticity.

It can be helpful to spend some time writing down for yourself, at any age, your own ideas about what growing older means to you. Try recording your assumptions about later and life. What might being 80, 90, 100 hold for you? On what are your responses based?

Assumptions are often linked to fears that may well be ungrounded. It's useful to return and revisit your reflections periodically.

Observe and listen in a way that makes the world stop

I and many F/friends with whom I am in conversation find inspiration in the poems of American Pulitzer Prize winning poet, Mary Oliver, who died in 2019.

In a conversation broadcast with Krista Tippett, Mary Oliver talks about walking slowly in the woods, as 'saving her life". Observing the simple beauty of the world shaped her ability to translate beauty into poetry which 'goes all the way through you.'

Mary Oliver spoke about recognising that "sometimes it's time for a change in ourselves, in our lives, in our circumstances." She wanted that 'I' to be the possible reader of her poems. She asks us as we listen aloud or internally to the words—to listen in a way that makes the world stop!

I still recall the first time I encountered her poem "The Journey"

> One day you finally knew
> what you had to do, and began,
> though the voices around you
> kept shouting
> their bad advice—
> though the whole house
> began to tremble
> and you felt the world tug
> at your ankles.
> "Mend my life!"
> each voice cried.
> But you didn't stop.
> You knew what you had to do.
> Though the wind pried
> with its stiff fingers
> at the very foundations,
> though their melancholy
> was terrible.
> It was already late
> enough, and a wild night, a
> and the road full of fallen
> branches and stones.
> But little by little,
> as you left their voices behind,
> the stars began to burn
> through the sheets of clouds,
> and there was a new voice
> which you slowly

recognised as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

This poem of transformation entered me deeply in mid-life as an invitation to reflect upon and reshape my story. It continues to do so.

Many of us have this same experience hearing an Advice and Query that 'speaks to our condition'. Someone's spoken ministry reaching deeply into us when it was most needed.

A new self does not walk away from the world, but into it. It remains a readiness to stand up to our deepest knowing and to express that life in whatever way we can, through the challenges and joys of it all.

In Japan, the Ten Ox Herding pictures of the Buddhist tradition represent a similar teaching. The herder starts out, disappears altogether on his journey, and ends up returning to the world with his ox, apparently the same as when he left in the first place. Everything is the same, yet everything is different.

In being willing to 'save the only life we can save' we are responding to our call.

QUAKER LIVES: ELISE BOULDING

Quaker writings and history are filled with extraordinary stories of lives lived boldly and adventurously. There are inspiring examples, many far from the 'norm' of their time. Among them is Elise Boulding.

An Episode of *On Being* several years ago featured a conversation between the host Krista Tippett and a Professor John Paul Lederach, who had long been engaged in peace building. In that conversation, Lederach mentioned the concept of *200-year present,* a practice described by Elise Boulding the American Quaker sociologist, founder scholar and major contributor to the academic discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies. Elise died in 2010, aged 90

John Paul shared a story from his student days when Elise Boulding spoke of the 200-year present and encouraged students to think about the current moment in the frame of the 200-year present: a timeframe encompassing past, present, and future.

Boulding offered audiences and students this simple exercise.

- Consider that you live in a 200-year present.
- Return to the youngest age that you can remember. Who was the oldest person that held you? Calculate or estimate their birthdate. Consider as well as you can the world in which they lived at that time.
- Now think about the youngest member of your extended family. Imagine them experiencing a robust life. To what decade might they live?

Holding these calculations in mind, Elise would say, "You were held and touched, and you will touch the lives, of people that encompass a 200-year present."

Now many more of us are likely to touch and be touched by two hundred years of living experiences. If the oldest person in your family is close to ninety or a hundred years of age, trust that the person you are thinking of born after the year 2000 is likely to live for a hundred years too. Touching these two individuals, even indirectly, connects you a hundred years into the past and a hundred years into the future.

You may well ask: Why keep a *200-year present* in mind? For Elise Boulding it provided perspective to the work she and many others were engaged in and their commitment to peace.

More broadly, examine the thoughts that come to mind as you reflect on this possibility. Consider the lives (words, thoughts, and actions) of the people that lived before you and have had great effects on **your** life (including a commitment to your existence and life in the first place). Consider the possibility that your words and actions too could be a determinant in shaping posterity for the better.

We often think of ourselves or our forebears living at the beginning or the end of a particular time. Indeed, we are often cast that way by generational labels so commonly given to define both attributes, thinking and time.

Boulding's 200-year present places every one of us in the middle of time. Our individual and collective actions are important for the future.

She wrote:

> "…this 200-year span belongs to us: it is our life space. It is the space in which we should be thinking, planning, and making judgments. Evaluating, hoping, and dreaming. This opening up of what we normally think of as our future and our past and making it a part of our present experience, makes changes more comprehensible: an enormous strengthening force in a period of very rapid change. "

On November 3rd, 1995, Elise Bolding offered these remarks on being awarded the Ikeda Centre 's First Annual Global Citizen Award:

> "While preparing my remarks I concluded that the only way I could talk about peace culture in the 21st century was by placing us in a larger present. I felt that using the two-hundred-year present to talk about the changing world towards peace, justice, love, and sharing was the only way to build adequately on what is already happening. After all, we are not inventing peace from scratch. People have been at it for centuries. And to talk about the two-hundred-year present as something we are present in, you and I, means that we have these colleagues and co-workers that link us to experience larger than our own lifespan."

Does the idea of a 200-year present make sense to you? What difference does it make to a culture if we think of ourselves as embedded in time rather than at the beginning or the end?

All those who worked with Elise were united by a common concern to ensure that cultures and structures of violence are replaced by cultures and structures of peace.

She understood the importance of paying attention to the past (not just to learn from its mistakes) but to share what had been learned from practical solutions to past problems with those making decisions in the present. She experienced and valued cross-generational wisdom

We have a similar responsibility to learn from our Quaker history as we devise ways in which we can listen to and engage with one another in these times of rapid and disruptive change. Will the decisions we make in this present enable the new-born baby to realize its potential for a long, satisfying and purposeful hundred years from now?

AUSTRALIA YEARLY MEETING ADELAIDE 2024

A highlight of Yearly Meeting was being surprised by a visit from George Fox and some of the Valiant 60. We celebrated his 400th birthday with cake and singing the George Fox song as we swung in a long line around the Meeting room. A lively YM concert was held later that day.

At the end of AYM 2024 Young Friends and Junior Young Friends spoke out boldly and bravely. It followed a Formal Session which turned into something of a 'threshing session' considering the future of Yearly Meeting: location, venue, time of year and format.

Young Friends' message was clear. They valued the opportunity to be with and learn from older Friends at Yearly Meeting. While they enjoyed their times together as Young Friends, they valued and wanted the Yearly Meeting experience of being with Friends of all ages, quirkiness and diversity. They would come *if and only if* Yearly Meeting was held *in person*, and at a time in the year that fitted their increasingly complex worlds and lives. They highlighted the importance to them of both our Testimony to Community and the value of generations together.

Importantly, Young Friends enjoyed appreciated opportunities for multi-generational experiences and relationship-building in the Meeting. To grow and develop through intergenerational relationships. To worship and celebrate together. How might we bring that same spirit, focus and inclusion to intergenerational Business Sessions?

We continue to add years to our lives, but remain uncertain of our ability, as a society and as individuals, to add life to the years we have gained. We have begun exploration and are drawing some new maps. These are maps of connection, possible directions, stopping points, unexplored terrain, and unthought of destinations. It will take Silence to bring many of them to the Light of day.

> *I beg you…. To have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you know, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then someday far into the future you will gradually, without ever noticing it, live you way into the answer*.
>
> -------Rainer Maria Rilke

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PREVIOUS QUAKER LECTURES

2024 *A Queer Gift: Stepping Beyond the Mindset*
Rainbow Quakers Group

2022 *The Search for Truth*
Verica Rupar, Professor of Journalism, AUT

2021 *Stories of Belonging: A Journey across Aotearoa*
Anjum Rahman, Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono

2020 *Moriori: Peace at all costs*
Maui Solomon of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust

2019 *Crime and Punishment*
Terry Waite, British humanitarian and former hostage

2018 *Can Religion Speak Truth?*
Elizabeth Duke, Kiwi Quaker

2017 *Transcending Neoliberalism*
Jane Kelsey, Professor of Law, University of Auckland

2016 *A Peaceful World: How can we make it so?*
Marion Hobbs, former cabinet minister

2015 *What We know. What We Say. And What We Do*.
Bryan Bruce

2014 *Standing in this Place*
David James, Jillian Wychel, Murray Short, Linda Wilson

2013 *Enough! The challenge of a post-growth economy*
Jeanette Fitzsimons, former Green Party Co-Leader

2011 *Changing the Prison System*
Tony Taylor

2010 *Honouring the Other*
Kevin Clements

2009 *Kiwi Dragon*
Bill Willmott