Retirement: The Bridge to Elderhood

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Purpose: We need to open our hearts and minds to give ourselves permission to create a path to the second half of life with fulfillment of our personal goals. Some want to create art, some want to travel, and some want to grow beautiful gardens. Whatever we choose, if it is right for us, then it is right.

Perspective or Theoretical Framework: Based loosely on the works of Zalman Schacter-Sholomi and others there is a movement growing across the country regarding conscious aging. Elders in other cultures around the world are treated with reverence. Older Americans are pushed aside for the most part and forgotten. Elders have wisdom and knowledge that we cannot afford to dismiss.

Results: People who have read the literature and attended retreats across the country report dramatic improvement in health and purpose in the last half of their lives. The State Teachers Retirement System in California has estimated that the average retiree will receive an average of 30 years of payments. We often hear of people living to over 100 years. We need to improve the quality of their lives.

Practical Contribution: A healthy, alert elder will not need as much medical assistance and thus keep costs lower for the rest of society. An eighty year old completing a marathon inspires younger people to live healthier lives. When we see examples of people doing yoga in their nineties, we are more likely to get up off the couch and start moving. CRLA members are known for their leadership and this is but another venue.
Moving into Elderhood can mean so many things to each person. Take a few minutes to write about something that you would like to do in retirement and how you came to this thought. Did you have a special moment of awareness, a wonderful mentor who inspired you, or is this just a special interest that you haven’t shared before?
BECOMING AN ELDER

By Cathy Carmody
Written on a Choosing Conscious Elderhood retreat
In British Columbia, August, 2012

Leaving behind my journey of struggling and racing through
the white water of many rivers, I become the river,
creating my own unique way.

Leaving behind my self-imposed role as a tree upon
which others have leaned, I now become the wind,
with the freedom to blow whenever and wherever I choose.

Leaving behind the boxes I’ve created in my life, crammed with
roles, responsibilities, rules and fears,
I become the wild and unpredictable space
within which flowers sprout and grow.

Leaving behind the years of yearning for others
to see me as somebody,
I soften into becoming my future,
with permission from SELF to
continually unfold as I choose, without concern
for how others may see me.

Leaving behind years of telling and teaching,
I become instead a mirror
into which others can peer and
view reflections of themselves to consider.

Leaving behind the urge to provide answers for others,
I become – in the silence of this forest retreat
– the question.

Leaving behind the rigor of my intellect,
I become a single candle in the
darkness, offering myself as a beacon for others
to create their own path.

I become an elder.

Cathy Carmody died in 2017; her website, www.cathycarmody.com, continues to
be a source of inspiration. She gave permission for others to share her poem as
long as she is credited as author.
When are you going to die? In fifty years, twenty, ten, five, today? Last time I checked, no one had told me. I often wonder, when listening to the news, did the person who died in the auto accident on his way home from work remember to tell his family how much he loved them? Did he live well? Did he love well? Perhaps the only thing that is certain is that he still had things in his “in basket” that weren’t yet done.

The truth is, none of us has any idea how long we have to live. Sadly, however, we act as if we’re going to live forever. We postpone the things that, deep down, we know we want to do—telling the people we love how much we care, spending time alone, visiting a good friend, taking that beautiful hike, running a marathon, writing a heartfelt letter, going fishing with your daughter, learning to meditate, becoming a better listener, and on and on. We come up with elaborate and sophisticated rationales to justify our actions, and end up spending most of our time and energy doing things that aren’t all that important. We argue for our limitations, and they become our limitations.

I felt it appropriate to end this book by suggesting that you live each day as if were your last on this earth. I suggest this not as a prescription to be reckless or to abandon your responsibilities, but to remind you of how precious life really is. A friend of mine once said, “Life is too important to take too seriously.” Ten years later, I know he was right. I hope that this book has been, and will continue to be, helpful to you. Please don’t forget the most basic strategy of all. Don’t sweat the small stuff! I will end this book by sincerely saying that I wish you well.

Treasure Yourself.
Reference List:

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Websites:

Center for Conscious Eldering  www.centerforconsciousseldering.com

Changing Aging  http://changingaging.org

Elders Climate Action  www.eldersclimateaction.org

Sage-ing International  http://sage-ing.org