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LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF CENTENARIANS IN THEIR SECOND CENTURY
OF LIVING: HELPS, HINDRANCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

By

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to come to a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians. Centenarians are people who are 100 years of age or older. The purpose was also to discover the helps and hindrances involved in their learning experiences, as portrayed by them. A metaphor of "the Dance" was used throughout this inquiry as a vehicle for the creative enhancement of insights, connections and descriptions of what Centenarians themselves shared with me concerning their personal learning experiences. The literature revealed very little information about learning experiences of Centenarians.

Eighteen people between the ages of 100 and 106 were interviewed once or several times in their own naturalistic settings or lifeworlds. Their settings or living situations included: completely independent living in their own homes, independent living with some assistance, intermediate care facilities and extended care facilities. There was no evidence of dementia among these participants.

These Centenarians reported rich late-life learning experiences which often included the acquisition of new

knowledge, the gaining of new insights or perceptions, the development of new skills, and various changes in behavior. The majority of meaningful learning experiences occurred through social interactions with family members, friends or other people from the community. These learning experiences usually occurred during visits or events in the Centenarian's own lifeworld, or on outings into the community. Relating and learning on a one-to-one basis was often preferred, however, some participants enjoyed small group discussions for more variety. Learning through the media and through a variety of activities was also reported.

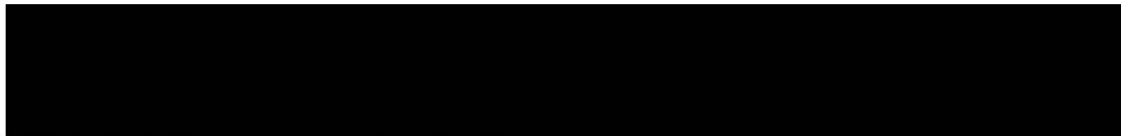
"Window learning" (learning through observing occurrences outside of the windows) was mentioned by several as a valuable experience. Learning to effectively use various devices for enhancing sight, hearing and mobility was also mentioned and demonstrated.

Centenarians gave some suggestions for more learning options that might be helpful. The four major hindrances to learning that they reported were: poor vision, poor hearing, poor mobility and illness.

Recommendations for future programs of education are discussed, followed by a few new questions that have been

raised concerning the topic of learning experiences in very late life. Some of my personal reflections give attention not only to the fascinating and rich experiences of learning in very late life, but also to the exhilaration of my learning experiences in mid-life through this study of learning in very late life. Through this research process, it has become clear that we as a society, as educators and as individuals can enhance learning experiences of our very elderly citizens in many ways that are not often considered.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Learning About Learning

This is a study about the learning experiences of Centenarians in their second century of living. This study is also about the helps and hindrances involved in their learning experiences in very late life.

The concept of learning in this study reflects the academic literature, the experiences of Centenarians and the views of the researcher. Perlmutter and List (1982) suggest that learning phenomena are complex and should be investigated from a broad perspective. From this perspective, there are more possibilities of inclusiveness of a vast array of learning experiences. Simpson and Weiner (1989, p. 767) refer to learning in this way: "To acquire knowledge of a subject or skill as a result of study, experience or teaching; to become acquainted with or informed of

(something); to hear of, ascertain." Boud and Griffin (1987, p. 27) commented that learning includes remaining open to the expected and the unexpected, reflecting, and "recognizing the gift of revelation in the learning process". Deighton (1971, p. 419) writes that "incidental learning is distinguished from intentional learning by the absence of explicit instructions to learn materials". In this statement he acknowledges the significance of both. All of these forms of learning are considered valuable in this study.

Merriam and Caffarella (1991, p. 138) discuss four orientations to the concept of learning: learning as a change in behavior - the behaviorist mode; learning as an internal mental process (including insight, information processing, memory, perception)- the cognitive mode; learning as a personal act to fulfill potential - the humanist mode; learning as interactions with and observation of others in a social context - the social mode.

Learning is often an information-processing activity in which information is transformed into a format or design that may serve as a guide for action or consideration. It may involve such processes as acquisition and modification of knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, and behaviors. Learning from the consequences of one's actions or

experiences is a form of "enactive learning" (Schunk, 1991, p. 102). In some situations "vicarious" learning (sharing imaginatively through others) may occur where there is an absence of some planned performance by the learner. "Common sources of vicarious learning are observing or listening to others (live, on TV or radio, videotapes, slides, filmstrips) and reading." (Schunk, 1991, p. 103).

An element of curiosity is often involved with learning. As a person becomes curious or inquisitive about something, (s)he may become more willing to invest time, thought and energy into this particular channel in order to reach new levels of consciousness, understanding, meaning making, interpretation, or perhaps action. It is as though there is an allotment or allocation of focused attention upon an idea, a situation or perhaps a dilemma that is calling for renewed learning. There is the setting aside of the many choices that the mind is selecting from, and the making space for new considerations related to the particular chosen option that has an aura of curiosity around it for the individual. I am experiencing this phenomenon of curiosity about learning in very late life. I am allocating much time, energy, space, and intensely focused attention to Centenarians and their learning experiences in their late lives.

Learning may involve not only the following of one's own lead into the topic of curiosity, it may also involve following the lead of others in society or of experts who seem to have more knowledge in that particular area. The learner may develop a broader understanding or knowledge base through the acquisition of new information or skills, and through new connections with old frameworks and interpretations of past experiences. As confidence in the particular area of interest is established, the learner may then divert from the lead of the experts, in order to pursue a more individualized pathway of learning. When the curiosity for a particular topic or idea has been satisfied or exhausted, a new curiosity may develop that begins to assume the position of requiring more time, space and focused attention. As we re-view our own personal histories, perhaps we may see recurrences of particular interests that our curiosity has led us back to many times. It is possible that some of our deep personal values are grounded in these followings of curiosities.

Learning may involve a "hunger". I told many of my friends two years ago that I was returning to University because "my brains are hungry"! I had (and still have) this insatiable hunger for new knowledge, understanding and awareness of myself, others, and the role that Education plays in this intricately convoluted dynamic. I am also intensely hungry

to know about life and learning in our very late years of living.

As learning occurs and as the learner acknowledges and validates this learning to self and perhaps to others, (s)he may experience feelings of elation. I have titled this phenomenon: "Learning: A Legal High". It is a "mind-trip" or a journeying of the mind, whereby exotic or untried places of understanding or meaning-making have been reached, leading to a sense of exhilaration.

The learning experiences of Centenarians involved in this inquiry may reflect one or several of the types of learning mentioned above. This study is inclusive of these various learning modes, experiences and definitions. If a Centenarian describes a learning experience that is of value, or that has meaning, then I want to more fully understand his or her perceptions and perspectives of that experience.

Learning, which may involve the acquisition of new information, insights, or behavior, is distinguished from memory which involves storage and retention of learned information or behavior. Thus, memory must include learning, but learning may not necessarily include proof of memory of information or behavior.

Learning is solving my own problems for my own special purposes. I measure my learning by my feelings of growing in life. I see that I am learning when I push my limitations in an area that I am most interested in!

Wendy (83 year old teacher and personal friend)

As a researcher, I have come to realize that I am a half-century old this year, and I see this as a significant landmark. I am half way to 100! I have experienced the dance of life and learning in my own creative manner, throughout these years. I feel as though I have not only enjoyed the expressions and processes of life's dance, but I have also been warming up for my next phases in the frolic of life and learning. I therefore want to know more about these next phases, and especially about the learning experiences of people who are living on the other side of their first century landmark.

I have a tremendous desire to understand more about Centenarian's present day learning experiences. Perhaps as they share their perceptions of their learning experiences in their younger lives and older lives, I may see some threads of continuity and therefore come to a deeper understanding of their present day learning experiences.

Jim Haynen, (1990, p. xv) in 100 Over One Hundred, a survey of Centenarians, tells of how he sees lively old hands, dancing and talking and remembering, "as they call us into the present and remind us of the past." I am aware that in another half century, I will join the ranks of Centenarians, people who have lived life for a full century or more. I am in the process of preparing myself and, hopefully, my society for an ever-evolving more positive experience in late-life learning and living. I believe this study may contribute to this vision.

"Experience" is another vital aspect of this inquiry and it is defined as "an actual living through of an event or events; personally undergoing or observing something or things in general as they occur; knowledge, skill or practice resulting from experience; to undergo, to feel, to meet with (McKechnie, 1962, p. 645). In this study, an experience may be used synonymously with an event in that both of them may be used in present tense. That is to say, we may presently be aware of an involvement in an event or an experience. Experience might also be used in the past tense. That is, we may live through an event, and then we might reflect on that event and view it as an experience.

Statement of the Problem

The bulk of existent knowledge is centered on the "average man", up to and around age 65. There is a need to extend our knowledge beyond age 65 as men and women extend their longevity. (Poon, Clayton, Martin, Johnson, Courtenay, Sweaney, Merriam, Sharon, Plees, & Thielman, 1992, p. 13).

The problem is that society and researchers have little knowledge about the learning experiences of Centenarians (people age 100 or older) at this late, yet vital phase in their lives. We know little about their perceptions of their own learning, their interests in learning, and the helps or hindrances that may be involved in this learning. We are also uncertain about the most appropriate physical settings for enhancing learning and discovery; perhaps community learning or perhaps residential learning are considerations. The educational interests and needs of this group are another aspect of the problem. Leclerc (1985, p. 137) defines educational need as "the gap between the present and the desirable state of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of an individual."

Despite recent, rapid growth of this elderly segment of the population, it has received relatively little research

attention (McPherson, 1990). Courses in the community and at Seniors Citizen Centers attract many older adults.

However, when I spoke to several administrators of these centers, they stated that there are very few Octogenarians (people in their eighties), Nonagenarians (people in their nineties), and Centenarians in attendance.

Statistics Canada reports that in 1991 alone, 1,200 Canadians celebrated their 100th birthday and that this is now the fastest growing group among elders in Canada.

P.E.O.P.L.E. Projections, (a central statistics branch of the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, Project 18), reports that in 1991, there were 2,167 people over age 90 in the Capital Regional District of Greater Victoria, and that there will be 4,380 by the year 2020. The Ministry has projected that in British Columbia by the year 1995, there will be 15,394 people over age 90, and by 2020, there will be 48,430 citizens over age 90 in British Columbia. There is, thus, a strong and urgent need for research concerning the learning experiences of our oldest populations.

Many questions might be considered. Why do Centenarians discontinue participation in groups when, according to Altergott (1988), elderly people value interpersonal contacts? Are they interested in formal groups or informal

groups? How much "disengagement - decreased interaction between an individual and others in society" (McPherson, 1990, p. 135) are they actually choosing or perhaps submitting to, as they discontinue participating? Perhaps there are barriers that seem insurmountable, yet are indeed approachable, with renewed creativity and proper assistance. If Centenarians are choosing disengagement, how can this be accomplished gracefully and perhaps be viewed as a meaningful learning experience?

Ventura and Worthy (1982) state that "lack of interest" is the major barrier to participation by the older student. This then leads to the question of what extremely elderly people are interested in? McPherson (1990) discusses the "activity theory" whereby some older individuals slow down but keep active in their areas of interest, or perhaps re-engage or replace lost roles. Some may be pleased to give up activities for more restful days. What are some of these areas of interests or replacements or discardings? What do we as educators need to know in order to provide interesting learning experiences for our very elderly citizens?

If these life-long learners desire to remain at home, or are in intermediate or extended care facilities, how can we facilitate improved learning in their own settings? Perhaps some of them would prefer to have learning experiences out

of their place of residence, yet they encounter transportation difficulties.

Perhaps too much emphasis in the past has been on the "problems" of aging, as opposed to the opportunities or challenges of aging. Perhaps "ageism" is involved, whereby stereotypes and attitudes about very elderly adults might be causing negative attitudes that may produce a "form of prejudice that may lead to discrimination against others on the basis of actual or perceived chronological age" (McPherson, 1990, p. 236). Are we neglecting these people because we think they are just too old to learn or are not interested in learning new things in their late lives?

Midwinter (1982) writes of the serious lack of mentally stimulating courses for elderly people. In my readings and observations, much attention is being given to the physical needs of our older citizens; some attention has been given to their emotional needs; a minute amount has been directed toward their intellectual needs. I believe it is time to address this topic in more depth.

Midwinter (1982) reminds us that as elders become more involved in some type of intentional learning process, they begin to regain elements of a sense of control that is often lost and grieved in their lives. They also regain an

eagerness to meet the challenges of life as their bodies complicate situations through natural degenerating processes. Through this transformation evolves the sensation of enhanced enjoyment and pleasure. "If one is not to please oneself in old age, when is one to please oneself?" asks Vita Sackville-West (Fowler and McCutchen, 1991, p. 267). There is a need for identifying more of the elements of personal perceptions of learning, enjoyment and enlivenment in elderhood in order that life may be experienced as fulfilling rather than merely tolerated.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to come to a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians as they perceive their own learning in their second century of living. The purpose is also to discover the helps and hindrances involved in their learning experiences, as portrayed by them.

In many cases, as we have facilitated courses that included very old adults, we have only been able to guess at what they care to learn about or to expand upon at this phase in their lives. Because of this, we have not developed unique and appropriate programs or approaches to suit their learning interests and needs. We have also neglected the

special attentions that must be given to comfort and settings for enhanced learning experiences of the very elderly.

Through this study, I hope to identify some of the issues around learning in late life. I also hope to reveal more of the perceptions, helps and hindrances of learning experiences of the elderly, and particularly of Centenarians. Learning more about learning in late life may lead to improved group or individual learning programs, and therefore, improved quality of living.

Throughout a systematic search of the literature, little information was revealed about the learning of Centenarians. To learn from and to teach older adults satisfactorily may demand a willingness to re-think strategies of the past. Raised levels of self-confidence, more feelings of well-being, and longer periods of diversion from pain and poor health may be experienced by older persons participating in appropriate courses or individualized learning settings. Through creative, more informed approaches, perhaps these elders may experience more feelings of life satisfaction and happiness.

Older learners often fear attending courses because of the "impostor syndrome", (Brookfield, 1991, p. 44). In this

lies the fear that others may discover one's lack of knowledge in a certain area and consider that person as dumb or stupid. Safety in the group, whereby each person's contribution is esteemed and respected is of essence. There is a need then, to celebrate the proficiencies of each person's life. Much attention must be given to the value of their vast array of experiences and their needs for revisiting these experiences.

Significance of the Study

A very large population of baby boomers will soon be reaching retirement age. A significant number of them will live on into their second century. These demographic numbers suggest that Canada must examine the needs of its oldest citizens. Often people report that they feel happier and healthier when they experience a sense of renewal through refreshing insights and learning. Vigorous minds often maintain self-sufficiency at a higher level. Within this phenomenon lies the potential for heightened perceptions of self-satisfaction in life.

Individual self-esteem is a very high priority in North America. I believe our elders, as well as our youngsters, deserve the benefits of this current priority. Self recognition of being a learner and of being the teacher or

facilitator can also have very positive effects. Beard (1991, p. 77) reports that most teachers have at least one pupil to pay tribute to them, especially if the teacher has the privilege of crossing the "century line"; but she writes, "it isn't often that an 87 year old pupil greets a 100 year old teacher with a bright red apple".

Many educational practices of the past have not been conducive to attracting elders into the classroom, for formal or informal learning. Midwinter (1982, p. 14), suggests that we attend to the changes necessary to bring education from the austere and aloof practices of the past and present "to educational opportunities more naturally linked to the ordinary lives of ordinary people."

The Metaphor of the Dance

The metaphor of "The Dance" will be a basic foundation or framework in my expressions of journeying and insights throughout this inquiry. Many things are unclear.

Steinbeck (1970, p. 41) once said, "There's a way to do this thing, but I don't know it." When things are unclear in my life, I often dance. I am comfortable with dancing, anywhere, anytime; with music or without music; with strangers in a foreign land or with my closest family members. Through dance I connect with my confident, creative, and greater understanding self.

"We use movement in our daily lives as a fundamental means of communication" (Hawkins, 1964, p. 4). A nod of the head, a shrug of the shoulders, clapping, or a rocking of the torso in laughter or grief are all spontaneous gestures that may be included in our daily movements and therefore, our life-dance. Fundamental body movements such as swinging, weight shifts and locomotion are often part of our daily "body friendly dance" (Kerr-Berry, 1994, p. 44). These movements change and transform as we live in and draw upon our life experiences.

In the eye of my mind, the body, the dance and the movements are inseparable. "Dance is grounded in human movement" (Fraleigh, 1987, p. xv). Through our movements and through our dance, therefore, we often demonstrate our personal manner of existing in the world. With our bodies, minds, spirits, and experiences as the source, we make our choices and we move in our life-dance accordingly.

As I perceive the movements of others, I experience an "inner mimicry" (Hawkins, 1964, p. 4). Through this mimicry I play with movement, physically, mentally, and spiritually and through this engagement, I experience a more profound connection with the other person and with myself. In this place I may come to a deeper understanding of the values of

others and of myself. Therefore, this is for me, a form of communication and understanding that is inspired by daily movements of the lived body.

Through the dance metaphor I also envision more vivid connections and relationships between Centenarians, learning experiences, research and myself. It is as though I am a dancing figure, moving sometimes gracefully and sometimes haltingly through these diverse facets.

Another aspect of this metaphor includes my physical approach to understanding. Through physically active movements such as stretching, deep breathing, baking, walking, biking, or resting, I more gracefully form space in my consciousness. Here I encounter diverse elements of creative imagery and expression, as I reflect on engagements with myself, others and the Question.

Zorba scratched his head and said, "I've got a thick skull boss, I don't grasp these things easily. Ah, if only you could dance all that you've just said, then I'd understand..."

Nikos Kazantzakis

Zorba the Greek

I believe that I am facing my own death-dance more fully these days, even though I am planning on dancing its final steps more than 50 years from now. Because of this, I am exploring more of the possibilities and creativities of my life-dance. Is it this way for the elderly? What insights do they have that I want to know and grow with? I believe these living and dying occurrences can be more enlightening for each of us if we pursue various methods of sharing these events with each other.

Mine is a solo dance at present. As I review the work and study I have done this past year, my heart beats faster and my spirit skips with emotion as I encounter the jewels of learning that I have so carefully stashed in files and drawers and on shelves and in my memory. I am humbled by the enormous challenge of gathering my own particular valued insights and incorporating them into a unique pattern that reveals the most meaning for me. It is a time of connections, where themes from my own meaning-making, meet themes of longer-lived dancers of life.

Margaret Ott (1982, p. 4) in her ultimate definition of life, described it "not as right or wrong, but as a dancing of positives and negatives; an improvisation through time and space, because, of course, it's all rhythm." Ahead lie new rhythms of discovery as I relate to Centenarians

concerning their perceptions of their personal learning experiences in their late lives.

Influences In My Life Dance

Several people and events have influenced my desires to do the dance of learning with older adults. I was raised by parents who were older than most parents. Because of this, I had the benefit of experiencing them in a more relaxed mode, with less quick and frantic movements and decisions that can sometimes come with younger parenting.

My Mother lived to be age 79. She became much more adept at un-earthing her values and fears and adaptations in living, as cancer slowly moved in on her physical life, until her spirit completely shook free of her body. She and Dad decided to do the dance of living, with her dying at home, if they could manage it together. They were amazing in their adaptations as new phases of the dying process emerged. The rest of us in the family came and went and immersed ourselves in this dramatic, tearful, and joyful dance. I can remember the hospice nurse asking Mom, just four days before she died, if she could tell us what was happening to her. Mom said, " I can feel my 'self' going farther away, and that's O.K." Through my tears, I had a

vision of a merry spirit playing on the wings of new freedom.

My Father is now 93. He is a tremendous inspiration to me as I whirl around this dance floor of life. His exuberance for new learning coupled with his eagerness of having new light illuminate old experiences is encouraging for me in long-term life planning. He has a small second-hand bicycle business which he greatly enjoys, because it keeps him active and challenged and it brings people to his home (which he still maintains beautifully). He is an excellent cook and is very clever in his adaptations to physical changes of his body. He proudly reported of how he "figured out" how to get the new glass up onto his flat-topped roof, for replacing the skylight window that he broke when he was up cleaning off leaves. There were many intricate steps involved, but he managed this project without breaking the new window glass nor his own neck!

His freezer is bulging again this fall with all of the fruits and vegetables that he has stored from his garden and fruit trees. His fruit picking devices that he has created are amazing. He recently graduated from a refresher course in safe driving. He is very enthusiastic about new ideas for adapting to changes in his personal life and to changes

in society. He reads many hours a day but enjoys learning mostly from discussions with family members.

As we gathered at Dad's home recently, we were talking about sometimes eating tofu in order to keep our cholesterol down. He suddenly rushed (in his own unique rushing rhythm) to get a paper and pencil in order to take notes so that he could ask for the right thing at the grocery store. When some of us discussed the trials and stresses of being menopausal, he cried in the realization that that must have been what was happening to Mom at one very difficult phase in their marriage, but of course neither of them had known anything about what was happening.

A few months ago Dad sadly confided to me that he suspected that his legs would be "the first thing to go" with his body. His balance was getting much worse, he had severe leg pain and was taking strong medicine (with undesirable side affects) to alleviate the pain and improve circulation. Shortly after this discussion, I ordered a book I had seen advertised in a Seniors magazine called: How to Improve Your Balance, by Perkins-Carpenter. I gave this to him on one of our visits. Two weeks later when I called him at his home in Kennewick, Washington, he was so excited, he could hardly finish his sentences. He had read the whole book, had begun the exercises, could see a marked improvement in

his balance, was having almost no leg pain, had seen the doctor, had been taken off of the leg medicine and was feeling much better. I was so positively influenced by these happy feelings that I have since ordered the book for myself. Dad's doctor ordered one, and several other people are doing the same. As I observe the exciting learning experiences that my father is involved in, I become more interested in what other elderly people are wanting for their late-life learning experiences.

I am also appreciating the focus of not only seeing Dad as an enthusiastic learner, but also as a very happy teacher, while sharing his new discoveries. I, like Dad, have this need to learn and to share my discoveries. This is part of my "learner/teacher" dance. What do I need to do in order to prepare the way for others and for myself to get the kinds of learning and sharing we want in late life? I am living and dreaming in this question.

I never had the joy of being with grandparents. Three of them were dead before I was born. The one who did live for about 10 years of my life spoke only Norwegian, so when I had my one and only visit with her (due to great distances to travel) we could not communicate very well. I often looked at her pictures and dreamed of sitting on her lap as she sat in her wheelchair. I imagined it would be lovely to

share our life's discoveries. Perhaps my desire to fill this Grandparent gap in my life is partly involved in my enthusiasm for learning about late life.

When I was teaching Kindergarten through Grade 7 in a one-room school house in a remote Native village in northern B.C., I had the honour of relating to some of the oldest adults there. Bear Lake Charlie was 106. He spoke very little English. Because of this, I was unable to converse much with him. However he communicated an enlivened attitude toward awareness.

I watched Bear Lake Charlie one day as he moved in the bush on snowshoes at -35 degrees Celsius. His breathing formed clouds of steam about his head and face and frost perched tenaciously on his eyebrows, eye lashes, face hairs, and fur fringe of his hood. He was checking snares to see if he had caught any wild rabbits or grouse in them. Each track or disturbance in the deep sparkling sugar-snow warranted his careful examination. At times he paused in a partial-crouched position with total focus on a set of tracks. He seemed to ponder how the animal might be thinking and where it might journey next. This could be a clue for improved placement of the snare wire.

Food supplies were running low in some families due to harsh weather conditions that discouraged trucks from starting. These were the only modes of transportation to town. The 80 miles of poorly developed roads were not plowed in severe conditions either. Bear Lake Charlie was learning and adapting with each careful observation of the wild critters he lived with and survived on. His movements had slower, more methodical rhythms than those of the younger hunters, and they were very effective.

When we gathered for a special potlatch later that day in the village, Bear Lake Charlie still danced to the same lively rhythm that all of the rest of us danced to. Thum Thum, Thum Thum, Thum Thum, went the hand drums, and not one of us resisted the compulsion to dance. I still carry that rhythm in my heart, as I carry those images of Bear Lake Charlie in his dances of "second century living".

I am seeing dramatic changes occur for most elderly people, changes which are often uninvited. These may include physical deterioration, loss of spouses, family members and friends, and the necessity of moving to another location. What are some of the patterns of change-adaptation in the land of long-term living? "Demands for change will always be with us in complex societies; the only fruitful way

ahead is to carve out our own niche of renewal and build on it." (Fullan, 1991, p. xiv).

How do I do my dance of change, as I encounter the dance of the elders? How shall we dance together and what shall we discover? deBeauvoir (1970) suggests that we fit as much meaning of everyday life into our lessons as is possible. We must become enlightened as to those everyday meanings in late lives.

I am also seeing that refreshing stimulation for aged thinking patterns can be uplifting. Stagnation is a curse to the minds that crave exploration and realizations of newness. One elderly friend said, "We are grateful for the opportunity to gain a new and fuller perspective on our lives". Many of us will experience both the joys and the hardships that may come with living longer than previous generations. How can we capitalize on the adventures of these new horizons, rather than flounder in them as though we were dropped into another undesirable and unfriendly culture? Perhaps we re-create life through the discovery of new connections of old pathways. Somewhere between the feelings of balance and the feelings of falling, we dance. Expressions of our transformations may come in waves of new and colorful patterns. Reflections on these unfoldings

often heighten self-awareness, nurture self-esteem, and tickle the appetite for renewed realizations.

As I met Thelma (age 70) in the park one day, I told her of my incredible passion to be with very elderly people and to find out more about how they view learning in their lives. "Oh! That's exactly the spark that keeps life going!" she exclaimed with great enthusiasm. I saw that spark of life in her eyes and in her smile as she spoke.

Thelma then shared her experience of major challenges of the past week. Her husband was admitted into a long-term care home after three years of Thelma's caring for him as Alzheimer's disease modified his dance of life. The same week her dog, which was her only remaining companion at home, developed kidney stones and had to have surgery. The dog was on his first recovery walk with her the day of our chat, and his was a slow and careful dance.

Thelma had also suffered a terrible fear that she was going deaf, but her daughter discovered that the phone was out of order which impaired hearing for anyone using it. Thelma also had panicked with the fear of blindness because she suddenly could not read the labels of anything in the grocery store, but a friendly shopper noticed that she had lost one of the lenses in her glasses. Thelma laughed heartily as she told me these two last events, and then

cried hopelessly for her loneliness, all within the same dance movement. It was a privilege to be with her in these profound expressions of feeling. Thelma did not plan life like this, yet she is living it with all of its surprises, tensions, and revelations.

I stand in awe of the incredible adaptability of elderly people. Martin, Poon, Clayton, Lee, Fulks, and Johnson (1992) wrote that the coping of the elderly may be an entirely different phenomenon that we do not yet understand. I am impassioned with the desire to learn more about the creativity and learning experiences involved in the adjusting and re-adjusting to the agonies and ecstasies of late late life. My personal self and my professional self are stretching and straining for new discoveries. I sense tremendous significance in my choices for personal living and for professional contribution. I must know more.

These are just a few of the inter-connected influences and links in my life that have directed me into this area of research. I have the feeling that there will be numerous things learned that I have not yet imagined. I believe there will be much personal value in many areas for myself and others as this unfolds. "The quest for self is linked with the quest for knowledge, feelings and personal value."

(Chene, 1991, P. 343) I sense this link in myself and in older adults.

We, as compassionate citizens and educators of the world community, would do well in giving more attention to these late-life members of our societies. Perhaps they are quite capable of teaching us much about their learning experiences amidst the battles and enjoyments of late life living and dying.

Preparations

In earlier phases of this dance of learning with older adults, I spent time with people in their 80's and 90's. There I discovered the value of having one-to-one personal conversations. In their own natural, quiet, and relaxing settings, feelings and insights were easily discussed and trust levels were established. With their permission, I took notes or made recordings as we spoke. This seemed to be very acceptable with each person. Therefore, I will use this approach in my discussions with Centenarians.

However, since my focus is on learning experiences of Centenarians in their late years, I will also use some interview techniques whereby I introduce a few questions or topics into the conversation. Eisner (1991, pp. 176-177)

encourages us to be aware of the "prefigured focus" and the "emergent focus" as we proceed with our inquiry. We go into our research with a focus that we have developed (prefigured), and we then remain open to the surprising elements of the inquiry that unfold (emergent).

Mettler (1975) writes that, as members of a group become aware of each other's movements in a dance, they begin to create movements together; from this evolves the "movement theme." I will be attentive to movement patterns and themes during our conversational interviews.

I am involved in the process of contacting Centenarians. This is difficult as they are not easily found. I hope to relate to not more than 18 Centenarians. I have joined a Seniors Center in order to participate more fully in this facet of life in our community. I am, at present, enjoying collaborating once a week with 15 other senior women as we work, play and learn in a course on "Memory". I am also participating in a writing course with some quite elderly Seniors in the group. This should not only add to my fun in life, it may also add to my insights and connections concerning learning experiences of late life.

I hope to come to deeper understandings through Centenarian's personal quotations, my descriptions,

thematics, and combined interpretations of myself and Centenarians, about their learning experiences of late life. I appreciate Eisner (1991) where he comments that evidence is never incontestable; there will always be alternative interpretations. This might be considered by some, as one of the limitations of this inquiry. However, it may also be seen as the unique development of one person's inquiry into the learning experiences of a few Centenarians in the early 1990's.

I will also be including some of my learning experiences as I come to a deeper understanding of learning experiences of Centenarians. Along with these matters, I will record what I have learned about research. I will also be journaling on a regular basis in order to examine more fully some of the intricacies of this inquiry process.

Conceptual Framework

A Conceptual Framework has been developed for this qualitative research approach, in order to enhance the assembling, organizing and analyzing of information from and about Centenarians, concerning their learning experiences. I have gathered ideas and concepts for this framework from a variety of resource people, books, personal experiences with seniors, journaling, dreams, and deep reflections about what

it is that I really want to learn. There has been much revision, despair, revision, elation, revision and despair as I grapple with the intricacies of this framework. I am finally accepting the reality that I will probably still be revising this framework as I gain new knowledge and understanding from Centenarians themselves.

There are five sections in this conceptual framework. The first one is "Setting the Stage: General Group Themes". Here I will watch for characteristics that are unique to these Centenarians who are living in the second century of their lives. Some topics involved in this section may be: naturalistic coping skills such as slower pacing or napping, energy levels at various times of the day, and personal challenges in their present day lives.

In the second section, "Learning Experiences of Centenarians", the emphasis will be on Centenarian's perceptions of personal learning experiences in their present lives. We may discuss such topics as: interests, settings for present learning experiences, helps for learning, preferences for individual or group learning, activities they are involved in, groups they are involved in, and suggestions for improved learning experiences.

The "Continuity of Learning" section will deal with personal history, and the connections between Centenarian's perceptions of past and present learning experiences.

The topic of "Barriers to Learning" will also be suggested to these Centenarians. In this fourth section we may discuss hindrances to their present day learning experiences such as: physical problems, transportation, comfort, or interest levels for programs offered.

Finally, the idea of journaling or diary keeping by these Centenarians may be suggested, in order that they might capture and possibly share with me, the more subtle perceptions of their personal, daily learning experiences.

Questions or topics for "conversational interviews" (Appendix A) flow from this conceptual framework. I have developed these questions in very much the same manner that I developed the framework. The "conversation" may involve a sharing on both of our parts about anything that comes up as we visit. The "interview" will involve questions and topics that I might suggest for more focused discussion around learning experiences. I am aware that these questions may need revision as I move into the field and relate to and learn from Centenarians themselves.

Definitions of terms - as used in this study.

Activity - Any specific action or pursuit (McKechnie, 1962, p. 20). An activity may be anything that a person describes as keeping them active, physically or mentally, or perhaps both. They may perceive an involvement of their power or energy within the activity.

Centenarian - a person who is 100 years old or older.

Education: (Classifications used by Coombs, 1985).

Formal Education -institutionalized and often having a grading system; having hierarchical structure; spans lower elementary through universities.

Non-formal education - an organized systematic educational activity to provide selected types of learning for particular subgroups.

Informal education - unorganized, unsystematic, and even sometimes unintentional. May include media, library, travel, recreation, hobbies, and interactions with others.

Helps - Aid; assistance (McKechnie, 1962, p. 845). In this study, "help", or "helps", will be used in trying to understand what types of things are helpful to Centenarians in their late life learning experiences.

Hindrances - impediment, obstruction (McKechnie, 1962, p. 861). "Hindrances" may be used in order to more fully

understand what types of things might be getting the way of satisfactory learning experiences of Centenarians.

Nonagenarian - a person who is in her or his nineties.

Octogenarian - a person who is in his or her eighties.

Older adults - In this study, this term refers to an individual who is 55 years of age or older.

Oldest old - In this study, this term refers to people 85 years of age or older.

Perception - consciousness or awareness of objects or data through the medium of the senses (McKechnie, 1962, p. 1330). There may be insights or knowledge gained through perceptions, with the potential of deeper understanding.

Prefigured focus - having a specific observational target versus Emergent focus - allowing the situation to speak for itself. (Eisner 1991). I am aware of my prefigured focus of learning experiences of Centenarians. However, I also am open to the surprises that may emerge as they and their situations speak for themselves.

Summary

How will we continue to inspire ourselves and others with visions of improved learning experiences for our older

citizens? What adjustments must be made for individuals, or in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings, in order to accommodate our extremely elderly learners?

McPherson (1990) states that specific policies and programs need to be designed to meet the distinctive needs of our oldest cohort of North Americans. Maiden and Peterson (1987) write that the oldest old were the least likely to use educational programs and that this is very important information for agencies and the government and educators who are responsible for delivering services and programs aimed at the well-being of the aged. Will the enriched learning experiences of the elderly only become a major issue when the absence of it becomes something of a social nuisance? We must as a society work toward the provision of imaginative and creative opportunities which will do much to affirm the value of later life as a positive and creative stage. Midwinter (1982) writes that education for the elderly, in its revised and vibrant forms, has, in essence, hardly begun.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

General Approaches To Learning

The concept of learning is central to this study of Centenarians. It is, therefore, important to address some basic approaches to this concept. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) wrote:

"Since there are dozens of learning theories and volumes written describing them, we have explored different orientations to learning, any of which might include numerous learning theories. The behaviorist, cognitivist, humanist, and social learning orientations were chosen for their diversity and for their insights into learning in adulthood." (p.137)

Merriam and Caffarella elaborated further by defining behaviorist learning as a change in behavior, with the focus on overt behavior, "which is a measurable response to

stimuli in the environment" (p.137). The cognitivist perspective focuses not on external behavior but on the internal mental processes. Here the interest is on "how the mind makes sense out of stimuli in the environment - how information is processed, stored, and retrieved" (p.137). Cognitivists have concerns about how aging affects adults and their ability to process and retrieve information. The humanistic orientation to learning places emphasis on "human nature, human potential, human emotions and affect" (p.137). Here learning is considered a function of motivation where choice and responsibility are involved. The concepts of andragogy and self-directed learning are grounded in humanistic viewpoints. The perspective of social learning places emphasis on the social settings where learning is occurring. "From this perspective learning occurs through the observation of people in one's immediate environment. Furthermore, learning is a function of the interaction of the person, the environment, and the behavior." The processes of modeling and mentoring are of importance in this orientation.

There does not appear to be a specific operational definition of learning that is accepted by all theorists, researchers and educators. However, many definitions employ common criteria in various forms. "One criterion for defining learning is behavioral change, or change in

behavioral capacity" (Schunk, 1991). Learning may involve developing new behaviors and attitudes or revising existing ones. Often learning occurs through "practice or other forms of experience (e.g., observing others)" (Schunk 1991).

Learning may be intentional or unintentional. Allen Tough, (1971) wrote that "highly deliberate" efforts of learning take place all around us. Moore (1992, p. 19) stated that "the twisting of a familiar theme into a new shape is sometimes more revealing and ultimately more significant than acquiring new knowledge and a new set of principles". People engage in this process of learning much like they might engage in the process of dancing, through personal and often highly individualized measures.

Adults as Learners

Darckenwald and Merriam (1982) discussed the concept of adults as learners and noted the importance of the "self actualization of the individual". Here the focus is on developing the "self". Content is not usually the goal. Personal development and social transformations often evolve through a heightened sense of freedom, equality and closer personal relationships. Emphasis is more often on learning

than on teaching and the primary vehicle is the individual or group, with the teacher as facilitator.

As adults mature, they become more aware of their needs to orchestrate patterns of learning that are best suited for their individual learning needs. Knowles and Associates (1990, p. 9) stated a psychological definition of an adult as "one who has arrived at a self-concept of being responsible for one's own life, of being self-directing." Knowles went on to say that as adults, when we find ourselves in situations where others impose their will on us without our participating in making decisions affecting us, "we experience a feeling, often subconsciously, of resentment and resistance". Kniveton (1990) stated that adults want to feel as though they have participated and contributed to their own learning progression. Brookfield (1986) suggested that the collaborative spirit, combined with mutual respect among teachers and students, may heighten the perceptions and experiences of learning.

The concept of " Andragogy" was introduced into North American literature by Knowles. Knowles, (1990) defined Andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn." (p. 6) The central role of the teacher/facilitator in this approach is to promote an atmosphere which encourages adult learners to define their own goals and incorporate them into

learning. Houle (1972) quoted an important early observation by Lindeman (1926) who stated that "the approach to adult education will be via the route of situations, not subjects". Through reflection and the sharing of values and goals, enriched learning experiences of adults may be enhanced.

Another aspect involved in this directing of the self in adult learning is "Interdependence", rather than dependence or independence, (Griffith, 1987). Emphasis is on co-learning by the teacher and the learners. The dynamics of authority and power are consciously encountered. There is a perception of flowing into and out of this "interdependence" as individuals experience empowerment through acknowledgment of their own experiences, learning, and knowing. Action, discussion, and reflection are vital components of this dynamic unfolding. Here new ideas may emerge, among the similarities and differences that are encountered in this safe, nurturing atmosphere.

Various methods and approaches to adult learning are discussed in the literature. Howard (1989) discussed the need for transferring the adult learner's performance in the classroom to the practical experiences of their daily lives. This is a form of "Praxis" whereby knowledge, theory and practical approaches are combined for enhanced learning and

living. Brookfield (1986) presented a form of "Praxis" with a model of combining action, reflection and new action in dealing with theory and practice. Brookfield (1991, p. 151) stated that adults in their learning process may fear the practical application of the multitude of new ideas and concepts that they are dealing with in the classroom setting as they move out into their more personal environments. They may, therefore, retreat from newly learned approaches to older ones of the past. This is seen as a "two steps forward, one step back" rhythm of learning. Remnet, (1989) wrote about the learning process described as "experiential learning" (involving or based on experience), which often integrates cognitive and affective domains of learning. This integration may lead to improved synchronization of theory and practice and, therefore, more meaningful learning experiences.

In the learning process, adults may avoid involvement in organized classroom learning due to feelings of intimidation and inadequacies of their intellect. Gardner (1983) suggested that the problem lies not in our technology of testing and evaluating, but rather in the ways we often think about the intellect and learning.

There is the need to consider intelligences of various kinds, when working with adults of all ages. In the video

"Common Miracles", available through the Ministry of Education, seven intelligences were listed, several of which each person has in various combinations. These included: Introspection, interpersonal, spatial, bodily, musical, verbal, and mathematical. The question then is not "How smart are you?", but rather, "How are you smart?" Herein lies potential for every individual to feel intelligent in their own unique patterns. Gardner suggested that we expand and reformulate our views of what counts and what has value. In this way, adults may become more comfortably involved in group learning situations and begin contributing their own personalized views of learning experiences.

The learning process may be viewed as a dance. Brookfield (1990, p. 52) commented that in the learning process, people "discard some assumptions and reframe others" to fit their experience of reality. This process is seldom experienced in a neat sequential pattern and may be viewed as a kind of "Transitional Mambo". Morgenroth (1987) commented that people respond to each other's rhythms. Learning often occurs as people imitate each other's rhythms when they feel in harmony, and as they resist certain rhythms when they feel conflict.

Older Adults as Learners

Three age categories for older adults emerged from a review of the literature. Maiden, Peterson and Steven (1987) used: Young Old - 60 to 74 years of age; Old Old - 75 to 84 years of age; Oldest Old - over the age of 85 years. The term Oldest Old, which consistently included people over the age of 85 was used by several authors including Martin (1988), Rosenwaike (1985), and Suzman and Riley (1985). In this section, learning after age 60 will be discussed.

"Geragogy" is a term used to define the process involved in assisting the elderly person to learn (John, 1988). This learning may occur in various natural settings of an older person's life including group settings. Peterson (1983) reported that most older adults who were involved in group learning were participating in courses at Community Colleges. Numbers were lower in church and other community groups, and they were lower still in university courses.

Research has shown that most older adults are involved in three main types of learning: learning in a non-formal setting which may include organized systems for selected types of learning, but with no exams; informal learning which often is unorganized, and sometimes unintentional or serendipitous learning; and formal learning which may be

institutionalized and often with a grading system. (Brady, French and Peck, 1989; and Clough, 1990).

Many adults fear loss of memory and many older adults fear poor learning along with memory loss (Perlmutter and Hall 1985). Withnall (1989) discovered that there were often concerns over exams and assessment, yet students age 60-64 who were involved in examinations for courses were among the most successful. Toole, Pyne and McTarsney (1984) noted that as people aged, they showed less memory for sequences of 6 or 9 movements of a lever in a pattern. Younger people were reported to remember these patterns better. Novak (1985) stated that making materials relevant to regular daily life enhances memory and meaning.

Older learners also reported fears of writing, of tests, and of looking foolish. Novak also found that as older people used their memories more, their memories improved. White (1993) reported that memory may be more involved with education than with age. He also reported on the positive effects of mental activity on the brain, whereby there is an increase of dendrites, which are connections between neurons in the brain. This may assist in slowing memory loss. John (1988) encouraged the providing of appropriate mental stimulation for older learners in order to decrease

perceptions of memory loss and enhance perceptions of learning.

Even though memory loss is a major issue with many aging adults, research suggests that actual changes are often minimal (Midwinter, 1982). Older people who forget something will often seize upon this event as proof of mental decline while a younger person may not. Adaptations to these memory changes can be made as new awarenesses are developed.

An issue that is perhaps more important than memory is whether or not the activity is enjoyable or life enhancing. Significant questions might be: Are there feelings of life satisfaction with this activity or course? Has some self-esteem been gained? Did the participants enjoy the experience? As these issues are enlarged upon and anxieties concerning memory are reduced, stress is diminished and learning is enhanced (John, 1988).

Various phases in the aging process may determine the focus and objectives for learning situations. Fisher (1991) suggested that several periods of older adulthood be considered. The first period deals with continuity of middle age. The second period involves more transition where there may be decreased health, relocation and possible

death of a spouse or partner. The third period may require more re-adaptations to new interruptions with revised goals and activities. The fourth period may consist of transitions in dealing with increased loss of health and mobility, a change from independence to more dependence, revised goals and possible loss of autonomy. The fifth or final period may involve limited mobility and the need for much care. This is a time for resignation and accepting of the aging process. Fisher further noted that these changes are not consistent with chronological changes and progressions. They may occur in various aging patterns. Havighurst (1957) observed that, because so much change occurs for the older person, it often becomes a necessity to learn "new ways of living".

Learning and creativity may be affected by a variety of changes in the daily lives of older people. Goldman (1991) stated that emotional needs, health, and leisure habits may have some affect on learning. Grognet (1989) found that factors affecting creativity and learning might include hearing and vision loss, changes in diet and climate, depression due to various aspects and attitudes, and a learner's doubts in their own ability to learn. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) commented that pain and fatigue might also affect learning.

Older adults often display tremendous amounts of creativity. To be creative is to "have the power to create; to be inventive; to be productive (McKechnie 1962, p. 428). Creativity may be viewed in such non-traditional forms as adapting to life's changes, adjusting to life's surprises, and fighting disease. Kaslenbaum (1991) noted that elders may call upon their creativity in later life, even up to the last few days or hours. Perlmutter and List (1982) wrote that self-esteem and lowered anxiety levels may occur with more self-understanding through reorganizing the past in creative life review. Butler and Bentley (1993) observed that lifewriting is a creative form whereby the writer tries to capture on paper the "raw experiences" of a lifetime. Bergman (1991) wrote that writing a journal might be a creative form of management of solitude.

Older adults have many experiences to reflect upon in their learning process. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) commented that for enhanced learning, special attention and reflection must be given to experience. Palmer (1969) noted that experience teaches us how to "expect the unexpected". Reflection on "paradoxes and predicaments" that were dealt with in the past can lead to effective learning (Schon, 1987).

Group participation is often highly beneficial for older adults in the learning process. Withnall (1989) found that participants come to classes for social interaction and respond favorably to stimulation from other learners. White (1993) reported on research stating that educational settings may give people practice in "saying and hearing words", which is a special kind of mental activity that enriches the brain. Midwinter (1982) urged the proper recognition of older people as "providers" as well as "recipients" of educational resources. Davies (1987) challenged instructors to not only give out energy, but to be receptive to learner's energy. Learning then empowers and energizes all who are involved. Throughout this learning process, feelings of enhanced self-esteem often emerge (Chene, 1991). Goldman (1991) commented that through the sharing and relating of tales of struggles and accomplishments, new insights and re-enforced feelings of self-esteem and fulfillment may be experienced. Murphy and Florio (1978) suggested that older adults may be trained and may train other older adults to be resource people in group settings or in one to one settings.

Self direction, whereby the learner has direct control over what is to be learned and how it is to be learned, is considered a high priority in the learning processes of older adults. Herzog and House (1991) noted the need for

choices being given to aging individuals in types and levels of learning activities. They suggested much flexibility and individual tailoring by the participants themselves. Chene and Fleury (1992) stressed the importance of collaboration in defining the orientation and aims of the program.

Carlsen (1991) commented that in assessing the learning situations for older adults, the teacher and student might work together to assemble data that is significant for self direction and enhanced learning.

Research shows that physical activity often enhances the learning process. Stacey, Kozma, and Stones (1985) noted that the beneficial effects of exercise are not limited to physical fitness alone but may extend to cognitive and personality processes. Happiness levels showed a significant increase with participation in fitness programs. Due to the fact that depression can be a deterrent to learning, this seems important. John (1988) contended that elderly people remain physically and mentally active longer if they have regular physical activity. Mild physical activity, even at an advanced age may be advantageous.

The cost of courses or any learning situations for older adults is a consideration. Midwinter (1982) wrote that as fees go up, enrollment goes down in older age groups. Some creative attention is required for this predicament. In

order to provide enriched learning opportunities for older adults, special emphasis must be given to the complexity of details that are intricately and sometimes subtly involved.

Oldest Old Adults and Learning

Included within the group of people over the age of 85 are Centenarians. "Centenarian" is a term that was used in the early 1940's by Belle Boone Beard, born in 1898, as she wrote and spoke internationally concerning her extensive research involving people over 100 years of age.

Suzman and Riley (1985) stated that statistics often do not tabulate people past age 85 separately. Most research concerning learning does not include specifics related to this oldest cohort of individuals. Statistical data is also sometimes questionable since some individuals do not know their exact age or perhaps "inflate" it (Rosenwaike, 1985).

Pitman (1984) described the large generation of population born in the 1950's and 1960's as a "bulge". This is an oversized cohort of people who will eventually be facing old age. Pitman contended that "learning will be the key" to de-escalate the problems now being faced by our oldest citizens. As people with more education enter the ranks of

oldest old, they will place heavier demands on society for meaningful learning. Rosenwaike (1985) stated that "knowledge produces preparedness". The literature suggests that we are not very aware of learning experiences and perceptions of our oldest old citizens.

Centenarians are creating a new image in society. Instead of "old" bringing to mind a picture of pain, suffering and uselessness, many "old" people in their second century are being "happy, useful, contributing members of society" (Americans over 100, 1987, p. 28). This report went on to state that many Centenarians have the following personality traits: interest in others; a wish to serve; a desire for self-direction; the right to make their own decisions; optimism and confidence in the future; and a spirit of adventure. Centenarians have developed and participated in major changes in the country. They show that people are never too old to live alone, to dance, to drive a car or even to get married. This report encourages us to realize that our later years are "largely of our own making, and that we must reorder our habits and attitudes accordingly".

Beard (1991), wrote that Centenarians think "health". They continually exercise, they often feel an importance of religion, look on the brighter side of life, have a

tolerance toward others, can forgive their own errors, have an optimistic point of view, indulge in physical and mental activities, maintain as much integrity and independence as possible and lean towards interrelations rather than solitude. Segerberg (1982) noted that Centenarians were often curious, had freedom from much stress, and were flexible and adaptive. He also commented that many Centenarians were reading, watching television, doing housework, walking, sewing or knitting, listening to the radio, just sitting, gardening, cooking, visiting, doing dishes, doing puzzles and playing games, shopping, doing handicrafts, fishing, praying, and writing.

Poon, Martin, Clayton, Messner, Noble and Johnson (1992) found that cognitive performances of Centenarians were sometimes lower than other age cohorts. However, when cognitive activities were dependent on everyday experiences, no age related problem solving decline was found. Physical and mental health were found to influence cognitive performances. Centenarians seemed resourceful because of their practical problem solving performance. This report also stated that some Centenarians were writing, publishing, performing musically, guiding tours, earning a living, and investing stocks, all activities that give evidence of continued learning.

Research done by Martin, Poon, Clayton, Lee, Fulks and Johnson (1992) showed that Centenarians scored high on dominance, suspiciousness and imagination. These authors concluded that suspiciousness could be bad for health in earlier life but a good protective function in later life. This oldest cohort scored low on conformity and subjects were reported to be assertive and forceful at times. High emotionality was noted which may be due to diminishing resources available to meet the challenges of the day. This team of researchers stated that differential patterns of adjustment need to be assessed in the oldest old.

Research shows that participation in group activities declines in late life. Altergott (1988) noted that there were many indications that levels of participation decline dramatically after the age of 75, and particularly after age 80. There was then an increase in television watching, hobbies, newspaper reading and resting. Residential or home centered and media activities increased as community learning through social contacts and outdoor recreation decreased.

Life satisfactions of older people were less affected by the rate of leisure participation and more by the person's perceptions of their participation. Siegler, Longino and Johnson (1992) suggested that perhaps the oldest old people

withdraw in order to avoid problems of others and social expectations. McPherson (1990) discussed a variety of positive and negative aspects of the "activity theory" whereby people may remain in socially active roles or sometimes drop and replace roles. Barry (1988) contended that people over age 85 might deal with their struggle for integration and avoidance of despair by being involved in autobiographical writing in group settings. Segerberg (1982) noted that even "peppy Centenarians", when participating in meetings or group settings, dozed at times, and that these appeared to be natural coping skills of the aged.

As the change from group participation to more solitary living evolves, Barer (1989) wrote that the daily routines of the oldest old become very important and often satisfying. If time is re-allocated to accommodate personal care and household care, then tasks may become more focused and enjoyable. The finding of the "rhythm" of one's own self becomes important. The focus settles more on meals, health care, prayer, television and rest. Barer went on to say that socializing and solitary time were both valued in these very late years. McPherson (1990) discussed the potential of positive or negative feelings involved in the "disengagement" of elderly people from society. Decreased interaction with others in society may be satisfying if the

individual has clearly made the choice. However, disengagement due to lack of mobility, contacts, or other problems may lead to perceptions of reduced life satisfaction.

Successive losses in various aspects of life, and particularly losses of loved ones, can be extremely disturbing for the oldest old. Sarah Delany, age 103, wrote: "We've buried so many people we've loved; that is the hard part of living this long" (Delany, 1993, p. 5). Chene (1991, p. 350-351) wrote that the healthy aspect of "narcissism" is particularly threatened by the successive losses to which elderly persons are prone. She stated that "education may be considered as repairing, at a particular point, the narcissistic wound...education offers a privileged locus for self-reinvestment." She noted that education exerts a "regulatory function" insofar as it allows the self to pull itself together and excel at the point where there is a lack. She went on to say that acceptance of the elderly persons as they are, is of importance in the central role of maintaining self-esteem. In this attentive approach, the aged person who is suffering loss may experience more of the self love that engenders a "sense of union" with nature, things, and other people (Moore, 1992). This self acceptance will be of personal benefit as well as helping counteract the tendency towards a

relationship of dependence of an elderly person on the educator or the care giver. The dynamics of learning and adaptations that are involved within the struggle of successive losses warrant attention.

Brady, French and Peck (1989) wrote that several major needs are common to elderly people: to live as long as possible, to enjoy leisure activities, to find new perspective for life, to find relief from day to day routine, to be participants in groups, yet to withdraw from groups as honorably as possible when necessary, to maintain independence as long as possible and to seek and find self acceptance.

Bould, Sanborn and Reif (1989) encouraged programs whereby the oldest old are instructed or assisted in methods of coordinating and managing the services that are available to them. Harold (1992) stated that even though education is considered to positively affect the quality of life in old age and to be instrumental in helping older adults successfully negotiate transitions that may be occurring, educational programming has still not addressed many of the specific challenges that face our older populations, and particularly those of older women. "The effectiveness of public adult programs could be enhanced by more targeted programming and more highly trained staff" (Brady, French

and Peck, 1989). Theis (1992) wrote that "matching a person's needs with educational interventions" may enhance learning. She also encouraged exploring the preferred learning styles of the older individuals. Problem-solving and reasoning types of approaches may also be worthwhile. McLeish (1983) stressed the importance of the growth of the mind in aging. McPherson (1990) encouraged that specific policies and programs be designed to meet the unique needs of the oldest cohort of North Americans.

The search for meaning continues in late life. Kaufman (1986) wrote that elderly people tended to maintain an identity that continued despite the physical and social changes that came with old age. He noted the aging person's acknowledgment of the fact that the ways in which they interpreted events and experiences were what produced the most meaning for them. Meaning did not come from aging itself, but rather from perceived meaning in "being themselves in old age". Wallace Stegner (1992, p. 201) wrote in his 80th year, "I am the only instrument that I have access to by which I can enjoy the world and try to understand it". Vandenberg (1990) commented that there is often an urgency of meaning, an anxiety that results when we confront the realities of our own personal death. Bergman (1991) wrote that as many people come to terms with death, they want more perceived meaning of life.

Summary

Due to dramatic changes in our society concerning longevity and improved physical and mental wellness in very late life, we as educators must seek renewed understanding pertaining to learning experiences of our oldest citizens. This requires information from our aged members of society themselves. Spradley (1979) wrote that we need the "viewpoints" of other human beings who live in different situations or meaning systems. According to the literature, we are not clear as to the perceptions, helps and hindrances of learning experiences that are of vital importance to elders in today's society.

Just as elderly people are often courageous and creative in their encounters with new learning experiences in late-life's dance, we as educators must be courageous and creative in our attempts to improve learning situations for people of all ages. This of course is not an easy task. Brookfield (1991, p. 1) wrote, "the truth is that teaching is frequently a gloriously messy pursuit in which surprise, shock and risk are endemic". "To educators, the challenge is to create situations in which the self is able to discover its own possibilities (Wong & McKeen 1992, p. 140).

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design to produce an understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians in their second century of life.

"Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the evaluator does not attempt to manipulate the program or its participants for purposes of the evaluation. Evaluators engaged in naturalistic inquiry, study naturally occurring activities and processes. These activities are "natural" in the sense that they are not planned and manipulated by the evaluator as would be the case in an experiment."
(Patton, 1987, p. 13).

This is a study of learning experiences of Centenarians in their own life-worlds. Van Manen (1990, p. 182) describes "lifeworld" as the world that is already there. In this study, the natural occurrences of everyday life, or life as it is transpiring in the daily experiences of Centenarians, are considered of importance. Their perceptions of their own learning amidst these experiences are also of vital importance. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 189)) stated that subjects may "take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves." It seems significant, then, to be immersed in these contexts as I strive to attain a deeper understanding of Centenarians and their experiences of learning.

While attempting to gain insights into the ways that Centenarians perceive their own personal experiences of learning in late life, I am aware of the fact that merely through giving attention to certain items, occurrences, or comments, I have produced my own descriptive images and activated my own personal interpretations. This has been combined, however, with an intense focus on what Centenarians have told me themselves about the nature and essence of their learning experiences, as they have described and interpreted them to me. I have been as open and receptive as I could possibly be to what they have told me through their words, actions, emotions, eyes, and general

ways of being in their lifeworlds. Through my intense participation with each of them, I have allowed as many aspects of my "self" (social, psychological, emotional, spiritual, biological, professional, personal) as possible to be with them for a deeper "knowing" in their individual ways. I felt confident that later I could deal with a "knowing" in my own way as I worked with the materials through, sorting, organizing, analyzing, reflecting, interpreting, describing, and writing.

The conceptual framework was an important component that was involved in many of the steps of this inquiry process. This "multi-revised", preconceived framework assisted with direction and focus for the conversational interviews. To begin with I experienced mixed feelings of not wanting any preconceived parameters or directions, in order to be open to all that the Centenarians had to share with me. However, as I reflected on my past experiences with elderly people, it became clear to me that since Centenarians have over 100 years of experiences to share, there would probably be a need to put some form of limits or boundaries into our discussions. The framework and the questions were therefore, of extreme importance. Since I had engaged in the difficult struggle of creating the conceptual framework, I had unearthed many of my values and curiosities about learning that I wanted to explore with these elderly people.

It was therefore much easier to gently interject my questions, comments and topics into our conversations in order to gain more of the insights that I was seeking.

The conceptual framework also assisted in the handling, organizing and systematic reducing (painful at times!) of the massive amounts of raw data collected in the field. Transcribed interviews from audio tapes, observational notes, plus reflections and interpretations all added to the huge stack of material to be analyzed and processed. I color-coded each sheet of paper that carried vital information for this research project. Each Centenarian had a color and design that appeared on each piece of paper which included their words or observations about them. As I cut these papers up in order to sort materials into categories and seek themes, I always knew just who was speaking or being spoken about on the paper due to the color-design code. With the framework, I had several main categories for the beginnings of this organizational process.

From there I moved on to "theme analysis" in order to discover the emerging foci and patterns that were contained within the data.

"Theme analysis" refers to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78).

Themes helped with giving order to the data and, therefore, to my learning, understanding, and writing. A theme is a subject or an element or an experience which is repeated and which carries a resonant chord of common meaning. Through themes, I have tried to capture a phenomenon that I want to understand, by viewing that phenomenon as it was revealed to me in a variety of accounts of Centenarian's lifeworlds or lived experiences. "Theme is a process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 88).

Analysis is a process of "bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units" (Patton, 1987, p. 144). Through the analysis of various themes, I have attempted to understand and reveal the essence of meaning and significance that is evolving through the patterns of learning experiences of Centenarians. I have worked intensely with the materials through reading, cutting, sorting, arranging, re-arranging, reflecting, dreaming, mind-mapping, writing, re-writing, and re-writing, until the patterns and themes have been developed in a satisfactory

manner. Within each theme, I chose the person who seemed to represent the essence of that concept, idea or theme to its fullest, and I let that person speak through her own words. I then added my descriptions, interpretations, and reflections, as I discovered deeper connections and meanings through the analyzing of these materials. I have the intense hope that the readers may also find new understanding and meaning in these writings.

I have also become aware that not only are Centenarians and their learning experiences being revealed through this process, I too am being personally revealed through my descriptions, interpretations, reflections and writings.

A major challenge in this process was to capture as much of the feelings of these Centenarians as possible along with some of the tones of their lives. This was especially difficult after having literally "chopped up" the texts from our naturalistic encounters in order to create analytical groupings patterns and themes. Therefore, I went back to my copies of the un-cut texts in order to recapture the essence of the Centenarian's learning experiences within the aura of their feelings, emotions, and tones as I had recorded them within the contexts of their own lifeworlds. From this place, I wrote. This was a dance that sometimes included the clenching of my teeth and torturous writhing around,

plus literally pulling of my hair. At other times, when just the right images, words, feelings and expressions had been captured, it was a dance of wide-flung arms and chest-beating triumph.

Contacts

Making initial contacts with Centenarians presented a special challenge. Long hours were spent contacting organizations, committees and individuals in order to arrange interviews. Many Centenarians appeared to be living quite private lives which made it more difficult to locate them. Appendix B contains a list of the 44 Agencies which were contacted. Through these channels, 18 people were suggested to me as being interested in participating in this research inquiry, and I, therefore, proceeded to meet with each of them. Several other Centenarians were mentioned who have dementia. Due to their inability to converse, they were not included in this study. Dementia was defined by one Centenarian as "the going away of the mind". It has also been defined as "the impairment or loss of mental powers" (McKechnie, 1962, p. 482).

Permission for conducting this research with human subjects was obtained from the University of Victoria Research Administration Office. Participants received a consent form

(Appendix C) that briefly outlined the research objectives. Subjects indicated their willingness to participate in the project by signing this form. Pseudonyms have been used in all written materials pertaining to this research, and upon final approval of this document, all tapes pertaining to this project will be destroyed.

Data Collection \ Conversational Interviews

I met once with each of the 18 Centenarians, and returned a second and third time to talk with a few who seemed the most eager to share in this discovery processes. In some situations I used an audio tape to record our conversations. In other situations, when a person spoke very slowly or had very poor hearing so that I had to shout, I did not use the tape recorder, but rather took notes. Notes were written during and immediately after our conversations concerning observations, reflections and interpretations I had made. Later notes were also written as I recalled more details and had further reflections on what had happened and what I was learning.

Conversational interview questions (Appendix A) were developed using the conceptual framework as a guide. I piloted the interview questions with 4 people who are just under the age of 100. They made suggestions for minor

changes to enhance clarity. The questions also went through an evolutionary process as I began using them with my subjects. In the beginning I had too many questions which caused frustration, mostly on my part. I quickly adapted by dropping many repetitive types of questions and by asking only a few that got right to the main topic or the heart of what I wanted to know. Sometimes I did not ask a question, but rather introduced a topic in the midst of some relevant story that was being told. From there the Centenarians took the lead and spoke of their values around the topic that I presented. It was a form of gentle persuasion that could be accepted or rejected at will by the participant. Each of us involved in this study seemed quite comfortable with this approach.

The schedule for gathering data was established around the times of day that participants experienced their highest energy levels. Most of them requested morning interviews but a few enjoyed an afternoon visit. I found that 45 minutes to an hour was an appropriate time to visit. Near the end of that time, fatigue was displayed in a variety of mannerisms such as, napping, looking away, stating that they were tired, and in one case, becoming angry and telling me not to ask any more questions. I responded in each case by finding a graceful conclusion to our visit and departing.

Thoughtful reflections often came during these conversational interviews. Perceptions of personal learning experiences in their second century of life were not conscious issues that these people had been pondering, therefore, many of these Centenarians needed time to think about the questions. That is, they had often not been explicitly aware of their learning experiences in their present lifeworlds.

I was content to settle into their rhythms of thoughtfulness and wait for responses. It was as though we created a dance movement, where sometimes I led and sometimes the Centenarian led. We each adjusted our direction and rhythm to the leadership of the other.

At times I asked for words to describe deeper meaning in what they shared. Often I saw eyes that were searching back through past experiences, eyes that did not focus on external images, but rather on internal scenes that unfolded. At other times there were irritations because they did not know what I wanted to know. "What is it that you want from me!" exclaimed Sadie in a high pitched, impatient voice. I then had the challenge of trying to discover what it was that I really did want to know and how I could say it so that she could understand. These were challenging learning experiences for me!

There was often a cheerful atmosphere as Centenarians shared their perceptions of learning. I believe this was partly due to the renewed learning that transpired from re-visiting past experiences through new frameworks. I believe it was also due to the validation of their present learning experiences in very late life. I also believe that much of their happiness came with our friendly participation in this learning process and with their speaking and being heard.

"It was the process of speaking and being listened to that was empowering. As we recounted things we had done in our lives, we began to appreciate that even though we had followed ordinary patterns, we had accomplished more than we had given ourselves credit for." (Co-op, 1993, p. 13).

This concept was reinforced as Centenarians told me that they had not had the opportunity to see their lives in this particular way before. Several reported that they had a feeling of deeper meaning in their lives as we talked.

Through thoughtful reflecting and throughout the conversational interviews with Centenarians, new insights concerning "lived-meaning" of learning experiences unfolded. Van Manen (1990, p. 183) described lived-meaning as:

"the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful. Lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it. For example, a teacher wants to understand how a child meaningfully experiences or lives a certain situation even though the child is not explicitly aware of these lived meanings."

Lived-meaning is a portrayal of real things in a real person's life, as interpreted by that person. These meaningful experiences are then transformed through each listener or observer's assignments of meaning. Through our conversations, these Centenarians and myself could highlight some of the meaningful learning experiences that were occurring right there and then as we shared. The integration of their lived-meaning and my lived-meaning was thrilling.

Living Situations of Centenarians

The Centenarians involved in this study were living in a variety of situations in the greater Victoria area. Some lived alone in houses or condominiums. Some of the people in these home settings had assistance with cooking, cleaning

and bathing, while some were completely independent. Ruby, age 102, stated with great pride as she greeted me at the door, "I not only take care of myself and our home, I also take care of my "baby sister" who is 96!" Several people were living in facilities with intermediate care.

Intermediate care consisted of having meals in a dining room with other residents but having their own or shared living space where they often required very little extra care.

Others were in extended care facilities where they had most of their meals in their own rooms and required much care and attention. This was more of a hospital setting.

Summary

This qualitative research design was established to facilitate a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians in their own naturalistic settings. The conceptual framework and theme analysis were used for discovering patterns that lie within the materials gathered. Through conversational interviews, the 18 subjects were encouraged to reflect on the learning experiences in their lives at present and sometimes in the past. These visits transpired in the various living situations of each participant. This allowed more comfort for the participant, plus it allowed me to experience each

person in their own particular lifeworld, which often added deeper meaning to what they shared.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

THEMES FROM CONVERSATIONAL INTERVIEWS WITH CENTENARIANS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to come to a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians in their second century of living. The purpose is also to discover the helps and hindrances involved in the learning experiences of these long-lived individuals.

The fact that Centenarians chose to share particular learning experiences indicated to me that there was value in those experiences. What another person might perceive as commonplace or insignificant, an elderly person might choose to hold in a revered position of learning in their late, transforming lives.

Dance Metaphor

The metaphor of the dance has contributed to unique insights in this study. I readily observed themes that presented themselves as dance movements of Centenarians. Movement themes such as: graceful hands reaching out for warm gentle handshakes or holding; delicate hands reaching up for cheerful waves of greetings or partings; proud upright bodies slumping into sad dejection and rising again into renewed strength; slow moving legs that produced meaningful patterns of efficient but careful mobility; and wheelchairs that were maneuvered gracefully among hospital beds and vulnerable feet of roommates. As these and other themes matured in the eyes of my mind, there was created a framework around which the themes concerning learning evolved.

I have attempted to preserve the position of Center-Stage for these Centenarians in this research project. I as the inquirer\learner am melding, mixing, separating and reflecting as I find my place and relate to the space that is created as I gently experiment with my mid-life-dance amidst their late life-dances. Through the engagement, entanglement, and interceptions of insights, with an intense focus on each of these individuals, their themes have

evolved, and through these have come my transformations of deeper understanding of late-life learning.

Inner Elder

As I spent time with these people on the outer boundaries of aging, I began to develop a sensitivity to some of their issues and emotions through the themes in their life-dance. With time I became aware of a gentle transformational process that I was experiencing in my life-dance. I no longer related to Centenarians simply as myself, a 50 year old person who was experiencing their lives through their words, stories and reflections. I began to realize that through the inter-weaving of their movements, of their words and of their lively voices, I had begun to develop what I call my own personal "Inner Elder" who resonates comfortably and more knowingly with these people.

This inner elderly not only responds compassionately to partners in old age, (s)he seems to take note of all that is happening in order to more wisely and lovingly guide me through my present life in ways that are compatible with my ever expanding personal long-term vision of old age. This inner being is neither female nor male, yet is both and more. This internal being is different from my God images which carry much baggage with them. This is a fresh,

inspiring, empowering, fanciful, more personally connected inner dance partner. At present, these Centenarians are the main teachers for this, my Inner Elder.

Setting the Stage: General Group Themes

The purpose of "setting the stage" is to give deeper, more meaningful context to the lives of the Centenarians involved in this study. Through these themes there lie the possibilities of more meaningful understanding of late life and of the people who dance there. Through this understanding, we might then have greater insights into what they are telling us about their perceptions of their personal learning in their second century of living.

The individuals in this study have the unique characteristics of: having been born before 1894; of still being healthy enough of mind and body to enjoy talking about various aspects of their lives; and of still being keen about learning. Interestingly enough, they have crossed one century line and are nearing another.

"Age Awareness"

When we talked about living for over 100 years several of these people commented that they hardly noticed that they were over 100. Ruby said smilingly as she looked out of her

11th floor apartment window onto the shimmering harbor below, "I just forget about my age! I just take care of myself and my baby sister (age 96) and I go around about my business. And I'm always learning you know. I figure I'm never too old to learn! And I'm surprised when people introduce me as being 102!" Ruby had mirthful surprise in her own face as she spoke this. I was astonished, not only at her amusement of her own age, but at her high energy in verbal expression. It was lovely to hear the strength of a 102 year old voice. It was also encouraging to witness the richness of Ruby's life that may be available for me and for others in these late years.

On the other hand, some Centenarians were acutely aware of their age. Lee, who was seated in the living room of his red-brick home, made some interesting observations about being over 100. "I'm getting old and, (pause) I am old," he stated with emphasis. Lee leaned forward as though to more fully focus on a thought and then he said with meaningful accentuation as he looked directly into my face, "My brain is still working though!". I nodded and smiled and told him that I could easily see that. I became aware in a deeper way that "learning" can be a way of proving that our brains are still working, both to ourselves and others. Within this concept lie issues of self-esteem, life satisfaction and feelings of improved quality of life.

Lee went on after a restful pause. "I can't stop getting older, but you know, it's probably better being over 100 than under 100! When I was under 100 I had more things to look after!" Lee pointed to a desk in the corner of the room and said, "Now, if at the end of the month I have enough money to square the accounts and have the simple food I enjoy, then that's enough. It's very very important," he said with a nodding of his head. Lee chuckled a little then and went on to say, "I have quit complaining, I found it didn't do a damn bit of good! It's a waste of time and a waste of energy!" He and I both laughed with these comments, and the housekeeper who sat on the far side of the bright, tidy livingroom joined in with the laughter.

Ada laughed when I asked her how it was to be over 100. "Most people think I look very good for being 101," she said proudly as she patted her silver hair that she had just pulled back and fastened into a soft bun at the back of her head. "They expect something all wrinkled up or something." We smiled at each other with this comment and her pink rouged cheeks pressed gently up against her wire-rimmed glasses. "Oh I've got my wrinkles, but so has everybody else. I don't let it bother me!" Ada stated this with firmness in her voice and with a dramatic lift of the chin. I appreciated the pride and vanity that are alive and well

in this stately woman. I am realizing that even though our society often dictates that pride and vanity can be negatives, many of us derive great pleasure and creativity from indulging in them. Perhaps when I am 102 I will still laugh at myself and tell a friend that I am having a "bad hair day" and that that affects my mood.

Marie wanted to tell a story about what had just happened to her two weeks ago, as she chatted about having just turned 104. She encouraged me to move the short stool that I was sitting on just a little closer to her rocking chair and her knees, so that she could more easily speak into my ear. I had a sense of what it might have been like to have had a Grandmother to sit with for story time and I felt happy through every part of my body. I had a vision of my "inner child" leaping up, skipping and twirling around the room two times and then contentedly settling onto the stool again.

Marie's voice was soft. It was a dramatic contrast to mine which had to be loud and harsh even when I spoke into her best ear that was equipped with a hearing aid. She moved around in her chair for a moment to find the most comfortable position for her delicate body and then she began. "I had a very, very bad cold, with coughing and sneezing," she said as she placed her warm smooth hand on my shoulder that was just slightly higher than her lap. "The

nurse said I must go to bed and stay in bed. So I stayed in bed for 2 days, then I got up and sat in this chair." Marie patted the arm-rest of her chair. "So the nurse came in and said, 'What are you doing up? You shouldn't be up!' I said to her, 'I'm not going to get any better laying in that bed. I'm going to get up and move around a bit.' She said, 'you are too weak, you are not able.' I said, 'I am not able either to lay in that bed!' You can't argue with them!" Marie said with a scowl as she leaned forward to let me see her facial expressions more clearly. She leaned back again and continued. "But anyhow, I stayed up. In 2 or 3 days I was walking around and feeling good again. That nurse, she came in one day and said, 'I don't understand you!' I said to her, 'you won't until you are my age!'" Marie finished this sentence with such pronounced nods of her curly grey head that even her earlobes did a jolly jig. I sensed her robust perception of her own strength and knowledge of self and I had a strong urge to nurture this in myself.

"The Good Old Days"

Most of these Centenarians had stories to tell and thoughts, ideas and feelings about days gone by. "The good old days have slightly passed, I'm afraid," Lee said with a touch of melancholy in his voice. "My health has not been so good lately with this cancer. I feel like a man who is slipping away." Along with the sadness, Lee's bright blue eyes

conveyed a warm, strong involvement with life. I sensed no regrets with his comments, merely observations of what was happening with him and an acceptance of his feelings. The sores on his face and neck from the cancer were not pleasant to look at, but they still left room for visions of a handsome man who had been happy for many years as the son of a loving Mother, as a professor of engineering and as an avid golfer.

Jim had lively comments on this topic. "Oh, those were some mighty good old days for me, yes they were!" Jim stated with deep conviction as he spoke about his past. He sat on a slightly worn brown couch with home knitted decorations draped on the sides and back-rest. I sat beside him so that I could speak into his better ear, just as he had instructed me to. His white shirt that was opened at the neck gave a lovely contrast to his brown tanned, weathered face. A vivid brightness shown from his eyes as he allowed his vision to travel back through the years. I had a sense of being drawn back through someone else's life through the power of those eyes. "Ah," he said, as his vision came back to the present and his focus was on my expectant face, "now there is a factor I must remind you of. "I used to be quite an entertainer in the old days! Oh yes, I was a good singer! I was very popular for being a good singer you see!" Jim spoke this with deep confidence and pride.

As I listened to Jim, I had a strong sense of how ego-affirming this part of our conversation was for him, so I encouraged him to continue. "Well," he said, "I was invited to take care of weddings, to sing a song pertaining to a wedding you know, and I have such a song!" This sentence was completed with great enthusiasm and with a note of anticipation punctuating the end.

"Would you mind singing me a song?" I asked with hopeful expectation.

"Do you want me to sing you a love song?" he asked with a warm smile and a little more deepness in his voice. I assured him that I would very much like that.

Jim straightened himself on the couch and leaned forward slightly onto his cane. Then he sang:

"Only you can make this world seem right,
only you can make the darkness bright,
only you and you alone can thrill me like you do..."

This was sung with deep feelings and only a few notes being missed. It was a lovely experience for both of us. I do not recall sitting on a couch and being sung to by a man and so it was a treasured experience. If Jim had had more mobility I might have asked if we could dance together as he

sang because the song was so compelling for me. I shared that thought with him and we had a marvelous laugh together. The good old days mixed merrily with the good "new" days for those few moments. I have often wondered how we are to nurture the union of the "the good old days" and the "good new days" and I see this as a fine example. The remembered learning of poems, songs and stories fits beautifully into the present when the situation and setting are just right.

"War" played major parts in the lives of these people. Some saw war times as "the good old days" and some did not. Meg sat in her soft grey chair facing the large picture windows that displayed lush green shrubs that partly hid a sidewalk where many passers-by wandered. Meg's vehement comment after a brief description of her war involvement was, "And I've had enough of war." I appreciated her brevity and yet her depth of feelings. She seemed to have heavy feelings and yet she did not want to discuss them further. I often found with these Centenarians that if they did not care to go deeper into a subject, they had effective ways of finishing the conversation on that topic and indicating that we move on to something else. I appreciated their directness.

Jim spoke of his mixed feelings on war. "Well, I think the first war took a lot out of me. I can remember almost every

detail of every battle." Suddenly all the muscles in Jim's face seemed to retire at once. Even his tan seemed to fade. "I can see them yet, those battles," he said with slow plodding words as tears crowded in his eyes. We sat for a moment as he allowed himself to connect with the pain and then, with a quick deep breath he said brightly, "but I also remember going to the States for the first time, and I remember the songs that we sung in the Boar War! I have a good memory for things like that in the good old days."

"Memory"

Jim, then continued with a thought that evolved as a major theme. "It's what happened yesterday that I have trouble remembering! It's normal isn't it?" he asked with slight anxiety in his voice. I assured him that I thought it was quite normal and that our short-term memories seem to take little breaks now and then, but that our long term memories often stayed strong. I also discussed with him the idea of us having rehearsed various things or experiences in our past, by going over them in our minds or conversations and, therefore, those experiences are easily remembered. On the other hand, perhaps we have not done that with yesterday's events and, therefore, they seem to leave our memory more quickly. Jim's comment was, "now that is one of those very interesting ideas. I'll be thinking about that for several days now. Maybe it's some of that rehearsing that I'll be

doing!" he exclaimed through his chuckles and with a joyous lifting of his elbows out from the sides of his body as though he were expanding in size. I became acutely aware of the learning that was happening for both of us in this conversation about memory and I felt deep elation.

Cherie wanted to discuss memory also. She rested in her bed in her cozy room at the intermediate care centre. I sat in a chair beside her bed as we talked. "I hope you don't mind my not sitting up," she said with a small bit of anxiety in her voice. I assured her that I didn't. "You see, I have something wrong with the bottom of my spine and it hurts when I sit, so I mostly lie down. I sit when I'm having my meals and visiting in the dining room, but then I have to rest here again. I don't mind," she said with a light-heartedness that was very believable and even a little enticing since I was tired that day. "Well, I'm glad I've got my memory anyway. I'm not a dud you know!" Cherie looked at me with an intense sideways stare as she spoke this last sentence with strong intonations. I smiled and assured her that I could well see that. I felt a sadness with this reminder that many of us will probably have to do battle with our insecurities about our minds and memory right to the very end. I also wondered if there were more creative ways to deal with these feelings of "dud-ness" in

earlier life and in late life. My sense is that they are closely connected with learning.

Cherie went on. "I'm so happy to have my memory. But then you don't know if you do lose your memory," she said conspiratorially as she lifted her head and brought it closer to the edge of her puffy pink pillow. "There is one woman here who sits and talks to people who aren't even there!" Cherie said in a near whisper and her eyes darted to her door that stood partly open. "But she's alright, that woman, because she isn't suffering. She has all those (invisible) people to talk to!" she said with a lift of the corners of her mouth and her eyebrows. We shared a knowing smile and nod. I had a hopeful wish that I, too, might have "all those people to talk to" in later life, if my mind wandered to a new and mysterious place without my body.

"Opportunities for Schooling"

With a few exceptions, people in this group had little formal education due to the need for employment at an early age in order to contribute to the family income and survival. However, at least one had a University degree and a couple of them had attended Teacher Colleges.

In most cases Centenarians used the word "schooling" instead of "education". I immediately warmed to this because I had

been raised in a family where my parents used the word schooling. My father, who attended only part of grade 8 due to the need to work on the farm, still says with longing in his eyes, "Your mother was very lucky. Her schooling included part of grade 9!"

Marie had a longing look in her eye as I mentioned the subject of school. She rocked a little in her chair and the colorful afghan that she had crocheted and that hung over the back of her rocking chair swayed gently with the motion. It seemed to lull her into the space she was looking for. "I was in grade four and that was the limit," she said with quiet sullenness. "I liked school, but I had to be home when I was big enough to do something, to do some work." She rocked a while longer as she seemed to survey her 104 years of experiences, and then she said with grimness that was such a contrast to her earlier sunny demeanor, "It was all work." I wondered in the silence that followed how it must have been to grow up so quickly in the realities of survival. I also wondered if I had spent enough time appreciating my opportunities, not only for my education but for my "childness", that was sheltered from the need to provide the necessities of food and housing.

Hal had frustration mixed with joys as he shared memories about his family and his schooling. "At age 14 I quit

school and worked. Only upper class went on to school." I sensed some resentment as Hal spoke this last sentence. He raised his crumpled handkerchief to his mouth and dabbed gently at his moist lower lip. As he lowered his frail, brown-spotted hand, he leaned his head gently back into his soft, overstuffed chair that stood beside his bed in his comfortable room in the intermediate care facility.

"I worked as a page boy in my youth, to help with the money," Hal said slowly. "Father worked on the railway for 5 dollars a week. Mom had 9 children. I was the eldest. And I had all the chores to do," he said with great frustration. He sighed then and painstakingly lifted his legs gently with his hands to straighten their position in front of him. As his hands came to rest on his knees he tilted his head gently to one side and said with resolution, "Well, we all worked hard then. Mother washed 20 or 30 napkins a day by hand for the babies. There wasn't much time for school."

"Tiredness and Pacing"

I met Ella in the beauty parlor of the extended care unit of the hospital where she lives. With her leaning heavily on my arm, we walked ever so slowly from there to her room, while she shared greetings with staff members and with other residents along the way. We settled in blanketed chairs beside her sunny, warm window and began to chat.

Ella spoke immediately about the tiredness as I approached the subject. "I didn't wish to be 101 years old. Many things start to wear out! It's easy to get sick. It's very tiring! You feel sleepy all the time. That's how I feel." Ella said with clarity of thought that was apparent with many other Centenarians. Her vision was not so clear however. She moved her head up and down slightly in order to attain a less obscured focus on my face through her thick eye glasses. When she had accomplished this to the best of her ability, she smiled warmly at me, reached out and took my hand with her left one and then slowly with her other hand she reached for the hand of her roommate who sat just to her right. Then she said, "this is my roommate, Mrs. Cook." As Ella spoke, she turned her head towards Mrs Cook and smiled affectionately at that warm, responsive face. "I love Mrs Cook," she said with depth of emotions that I had seldom heard expressed by any one roommate or partner about the other. "I like having her with me. She is very quiet." Ella said this as she turned back to face me. It was easy to feel the pleasure and restfulness of having a quiet warm companion in a tired time of life. Mrs. Cook did not speak any words but her smiling face and relaxed body portrayed warm acceptance of Ella and myself.

Jim made a quick self-observation. "Oh, well, when it comes to pacing, I'll have to say I'm much slower now!" His snappy sentences and quick humor made it difficult to imagine a slow pace, but his body movements added credence to his words. "Before, I was always in a hurry. I wanted to do this and to do that, but I know I can't do it, so I have to be patient with myself and with other people. Because sometimes my slowness and sometimes other people get on my nerves. You know?" he suddenly asked and I could honestly reply that yes, sometimes slowness and other people did get on my nerves too. "But I have to grin and bare it!" Jim said zestfully as he laughed and slapped his knee. There seemed to be a level of not only acceptance, but entertainment all blended in with this slower pacing and I liked that a lot. How do we come from pain to acceptance to entertainment with things that we cannot change, I am wondering.

"Grieving"

Grief beat a heavy, dark cadence in the lives of these Centenarians. Ada spoke of these matters very early in our conversation. She leaned back onto the thick couch cushions that supported her back, re-adjusted her swollen, arthritic legs that were propped up on soft pillows and said, "I'm a lone wolf." She laughed as she observed the bewildered look on my face. "I've had to learn to live alone and be alone,"

she said with somber pride. After a brief interlude, I observed a shift in Ada's self presentation. Her eyebrows knitted and her face and body seemed to wilt. "I don't go out anymore at all. I don't have anyone! The girl who used to take me out, she died. I had known that girl since I was in my twenties. I don't want to go out with anyone else because I don't know them," Ada said with some defiance in her voice. "When you are young, you can do this and do that. But when you get older, you get habits!" I wondered in the silence what habits I have now, or what ones I might get in late life, that could be a hindrance to my learning and feelings of fulfillment.

A heavier sadness glided into the room as Ada's mind traveled farther back into her past. "I had three husbands. They were all nice men and I lost them all. Everyone's gone but me. I had just one son and I lost him. That was the worst thing I ever faced!" A wave of anger and sorrow swept in and blocked her speech. In my mind's eye I saw a dark dancing figure slowly working its way through Ada's life and many of the lives of these Centenarians who had to endure the tragedy of outliving their beloved children, spouses and friends. I seemed to feel the grieving more deeply because I was mourning the loss of my beloved friend who had only a few weeks before been killed in a terrible accident, leaving her children and husband and all of us who love her so

deeply to make our own sorrowful ways through the darkness. I wondered just how these Centenarians maintain and endure throughout successive deaths of loved ones. These deaths seem to increase in frequency while their own lives continue.

Lee spoke many times throughout our visits about his grieving. I came to realize how extremely important this issue was for him. I remembered that McPherson (1990) wrote about life satisfaction for elderly people and how it was often involved with the maintaining of primary relationships and significant others. When our precious ones die, we can still maintain relationship in some form, but it is dramatically changed and lacks the physical nearness that often brings joy. Lee's focus of grieving centered on his mother, even though he spoke of the weight of many losses of loved ones throughout his 100 years. "I miss being around my mother and my wife and my sister," Lee said one afternoon, just after his resting time and my arrival. "They all left me; that is they all passed away. I wish I had left them instead!" he said with a brooding look about his mouth.

Lee cast his eyes downward and for some time he stared blindly at the bottom of his walker that was standing beside his soft grey easy-chair. After a time of contemplation he

raised his saddened, blue eyes, pointed to a picture of his mother on the television, and said, "I guess I learned the most about life from my mother." When I gently asked him if he could tell me just a little more about that, he sat back, breathed deeply and said with heavy emotion clutching at every word, "I guess the best thing my mother did for me was love me and let me love her." Lee released himself to his tears then. Anna, the housekeeper, quickly put down the tea pot that she had just brought and took kleenexes out of her apron pocket for each of the three of us who had been caught up together in this sharing of emotion.

"Personal Death"

Several Centenarians referred to prospects of their own death in an open and relaxed manner. Cherie lamented about her struggle with her health. "This has been a very bad year for me," she said with gloomy intonations, as she straightened the light blue blanket over her legs and torso. "I got the flu first, at the beginning of the year. April. I haven't been good since. So it's a bad year, but, I hope I die soon anyway." Cherie's spirit seemed to rise slightly, along with the pitch in her voice as she finished this last sentence. "Since I've been sick, and because my back is bothering me, I don't walk like I used to. Soon I won't really walk at all I guess. By then I hope to be dead, so it won't matter!" I could actually see more rosy

colorations appear in Cherie's face and neck as she allowed herself to delve into these images of her death. Her eyes became brighter and she focused them intently on me, as though to keep me right with her in this futuristic dance. I leaned forward and held her gaze with intensity. I found it thrilling to explore death with someone who was greeting it as a friend. Cherie then pressed on emitting extra breath with each word that was chosen carefully to match the calm, angelic smile that was unfolding over her face and shoulders, "It would be nice to die in your sleep! Oh yes, I think that's perfect!" We remained in that aura of death, together, for some time, even though life continued to pulsate through us and through the hallways that were filled with the talking and laughing of other residents and nurses.

As I reflect on our conversations about death, I sense something powerful and profound about coming to a place in life where a certain phase feels complete. It is as though we have less fear of facing the next phase, no matter how unknown it might be, when we are fully confident that we are ready to move on. Cherie is ready. And I feel just a little closer to "ready", after having done this transformational death-dance with Cherie.

"Humour"

Centenarian's humorous images of themselves in past and present situations added much laughter and buoyancy to our conversations. I was continually amazed at their ability to sink into the depths of their sadness and then to rise almost instantly to mirth. During our conversations, I saw in them a confidence that they could descend into the abyss and yet have sufficient strength to ascend into joy and humour. However, through our conversations I learned that as age does its work on their bodies, they begin to fear the lowering of their physical selves onto the floor, for fear of not being able to rise alone. I see a juxtaposition here. For myself, I am confident that through a simple dance expression of sadness, I can descend with my body into a crumpled heap and then easily, alone and at choice, I can rise to a full standing, strong position. However, I have fears of descending into the depths of my sorrow and pain for any length of time, for fear that I will not find my way back to joy. Centenarians seem relaxed with their strengths in the returning journey from pain, to humour.

I believe that as we allow ourselves more depth in our pain, we allow ourselves more depth in our joy. Jim demonstrated the dynamic shift in these emotions one morning as we sat on his couch and visited. He returned his handkerchief to his pocket after crying deeply about the loneliness that he felt

from losing two "good" wives to cancer. As his hand left his pocket it immediately went to the couch beside him and he slapped it jovially and said with a mischievous sparkle in his eyes, "but, since they've gone, I use this couch more than I ever have in my life, just to keep out of the way! You should come in when one of my girls does the baking! I have two girls a day. One comes in the morning and gets my lunch and cleans the house. What she doesn't do in the morning, the other does in the afternoon and gets my supper. Then a nurse comes every Tuesday and she really appreciates the baking that the other girls have done, so we all mix around in here. Oh yeah, it keeps me really busy getting out of their way!" Jim laughed heartily through much of this monologue and he finished with strong slaps on his knee and rocking motions of his body. I was completely caught in the merriment of it all and envisioned a busy platform with all of these dancers whirling madly about while Jim rested centre stage on his couch and related to each of them when they took the time to slow down and speak with him.

Ruby loved to humorously and affectionately speak about her scooter. "I couldn't get along without that scooter now," Ruby said with strong conviction as she leaned her head slightly toward her shoulder. "My son bought him for me. I hadn't even seen them before. I was taken out for a

demonstration. They had me try one, so I crept along very slowly and carefully but finally, I enjoyed it. I named it "Pegasus" after that famous flying horse. Maybe I don't fly, but sometimes I feel like I do," she said with laughter flittering around her words.

"I don't go to plays any more," Ruby said with some longing and disdain. Then lightheartedly she continued, "I'm a little afraid to take Pegasus down town in case he dies down there!" Ruby had a warm throaty laugh that she accompanied with a nodding of the head and shaking of her shoulders. "I took him there once; but we are both more comfortable with just running around our own part of town. I take him up in the elevator and right here into my room," she announced proudly. I ask her if he likes the elevator ride. She widened her eyes, raised her eyebrows and gave a startled, tickled laugh as she said, "Well, he doesn't say, but maybe I'll ask him!" The response that was generated from this exchange gave me a clear, quick glimpse of Ruby's rapture that seemed to come from the injection of a frivolous new perspective. My delight came not only from this playful exchange, but also from beholding the meaningful and jovial relationship that Ruby had developed with Pegasus.

"Taking Life As It Comes"

This was a theme that wound its way gently throughout the conversations with Centenarians. When I visited with Ada in her cozy living-room with the drapes partly drawn and a soft lamp lighted above her head for reading, I asked her what she enjoys most, now that she has been living for over 100 years. "Oh, I don't think about it. I just take life as it comes," she stated immediately with a gentle shake of the head. When I asked her if she could possibly explain a little more about that, she exclaimed with a slight tinge of annoyance in her voice, "that is to say, I 'use' life as it comes!" Ada would not explain how she "uses" life as it comes. However, I caught a glimpse of it as our visit continued.

"I miss driving my car," Ada said with sadness as she straightened her body and legs on the couch for added comfort. "I used to drive around Victoria and Canada and even to California," she stated proudly. "I love to drive! I feel power!" Ada proclaimed this in present tense and in deep confident tones, as she held her arms and hands out in front of her as though she were holding a steering wheel. "People in Canada have power too!" Ada quickly added as she shook her tightly clenched driving hands and broadened her verbal scope to include other Canadians. "They don't know it, but they are strong," she said with content and lowered

her relaxing hands to rest in lap. I joined in with her laughter and appreciation of the impromptu movements and expressions.

I was struck by what tremendous power and exhilaration Ada was feeling as she re-lived and 'used' her past driving experiences and her present reflections for enjoyment. I wondered how each of us could learn to nurture this art of taking life and using life as it comes in order to maintain a richness in our lives, even in the face of dramatic sadness or change.

I also wonder what else Centenarians would "take" and "use" if they had more situations offered to them that had meaning in their lives. I can see that they have limited energy for seeking out new and interesting stimulus. What then could we offer them, and how and where? I believe that the themes that are unfolding in this inquiry are of vital importance as we consider these questions.

Learning Experiences of Centenarians

Colourful patterns of learning emerged as Centenarians spoke of their perceptions of their personal learning experiences of late life.

"Learning Through Social Interactions"

A tremendous amount of learning, as described by these Centenarians, involved learning through social interactions. These interactions often involved family. Sometimes they included friends and peers. Many times they involved people, any people, who might bring some newness with them through personal interactions.

Meg sat in a soft grey chair that stood in the lobby near the main entrance of the intermediate care facility. When I arrived I had not noticed her because I was so deep in thought about the doors that were locked so that I could not enter. A staff member had seen me trying to get in and pressed a button to unlock the doors. She explained that people with dementia also lived there and that they cheerfully left without notice if the doors were unlocked. I happily acknowledged her explanation and then told her I had come for my visit with Meg. "Oh, she's right behind you!" she said cheerfully. Meg sat with her eyes intensely focused upon us as her fingers worked rapidly with knitting needles and pink yarn. I had an instant flash of realization that Meg had placed herself strategically by the front doors and reception desk so that she could observe the majority of events that transpired there. She also had easy access to a variety of people if she chose to relate to them. I warmed instantly to this idea and made a mental

note to do more of that myself in my later years, if I was in need of social interaction and did not have easy access to it.

Meg and I were introduced and ushered into a soft-blue decorated sitting lounge with pillowed chairs and a small coffee table. Dining room tables were being set for lunch in the area behind us and amidst the bustle, tea was brought for both of us, with warm encouragement to enjoy our visit. Meg had been studying me carefully as all of this activity transpired. I explained to her again as to why I was there and she seemed to settle into a more relaxed position in her chair.

After a time of sharing a little about ourselves, I asked Meg what her thoughts were about learning these days. She continued her rapid knitting, thought for only a brief moment and then said decidedly in a slow semi-drawl, "I learn a lot from being with other people. They keep me up to date." Meg paused a few moments in thought then, and her body slumped as she exhaled heavily. "But there are not many visitors now. They have all passed away. I had one daughter and she passed away too." Meg directed these anguished words down toward her hands, yarn and knitting needles, which now sat silent and poised as though they were ready to absorb the pain. With time, the delicate blue-

veined hands and the grey knitting needles began their magic with the pink soft yarn and Meg sighed deeply and said with self-comforting sounds, "but, I still have my niece." Meg paused, then met my expectant gaze and said, "she tells me all about what's going on out there." Meg rested a moment and then with more strength backing up her words she said, "it's important what's going on out there!" It seemed as though Meg had sat with her personal sorrow just as long as she needed, and then she was ready to move on with her thoughts about the world "out there".

"I learn most things from other people and I like mixed company," Meg exclaimed with an emphatic nod of the head as she said "mixed". "Sometimes children come and visit me here and I really like that. Old people like young people you know!" I smiled at Meg and nodded, and remembered the importance of the "inter-generational" contacts that I had been hearing and reading about. I then told Meg about how much I also like young people and about how much I am enjoying my new granddaughter.

"My niece takes me out for a drive every Thursday," Meg said with pleasure vibrations in her voice that almost resembled a purr. "My favorite place to go for eating when I go out with her is to McDonalds. I love looking at all the people and at the children who are eating and playing there!" Meg

spoke more quickly as she explained these things and there was a brightness in her eyes that had not been there before.

Meg seemed to enjoy this conversation about learning and she continued on after a sip of tea and an adjustment of her gold brooch that decorated her red paisley dress. "I like to learn new things too, you know?" she said with a slight pout of her red painted lips and with accentuation at the end of the sentence that seemed to request my response. I was immediately curious as to what new things she would like to learn about, so I asked her. "I don't know," she said slowly and pensively. Then, with a sharp tone in her voice and a brushing motion with her hand and wrist that resembled clearing crumbs off a table, she said, "just new things." I interpreted this as an indication that she was finished with this line of conversation. We sat in silent communication and enjoyed our tea and waited for the appropriate time to begin talking again. As I reflected on what Meg had been telling me I realized that she encounters new things each time she goes out with her niece and interacts with other people, even if it's just being there among them, without talking. Perhaps we are not aware enough of the tremendous value that these encounters have in the lives of the very elderly.

Marie seemed to produce intense beams of light from her eyes as she leaned forward to look into mine as I sat on the stool at her knees. "I'm not worrying at all about my learning because I have enough chores to keep me going, and ah,h," she gave more thought to her comment, "and if I want to go out for more learning, all I gotta do is tell the nurse and she phones my girls and then they take me out." Marie smiled with satisfaction, smacked her lips together twice and went on, "We go to my daughter's place mostly and there we eat and talk. That's nice because here the meals are exactly the same and you get tired of it. Why it has to be like that, I don't know. I don't like it myself. They come around with a big pot of sandwiches. This woman comes around with her bare hands and she puts the sandwiches on the bare table." Marie motions with her hands as though she is patting a table or sandwiches on the table and her vibrant, animated face shows disgust. "Then the cat'll come in and she'll pet the cat and then do more sandwiches. No that's not sanitary at all. That's one thing I don't like at all!" There were large slow shakes of her curly grey head as this last sentence was stated with force. I had a sorrowful feeling as I heard this story because I pictured Marie as having lost some of her power. Had she? Did she give it away? Was it taken away? Had she tried to do anything about this, I wondered.

This story also painted another unpleasant picture in my mind. It conjured up my fear-image of old age where I am being served mushy green slop and I am powerless to do anything about it. I asked Marie if she had spoken to anyone about this. "No," she said more quietly. "I told the nurse I was going to tell about it, but no, that's the rules now. I don't know how long it will last. Not long I hope," she said with patient expectation and resignation. Marie seemed to be patiently out-waiting this woman in her life. Perhaps after 104 years this is yet another learning experience, meeting the challenge of out-waiting an aggravating situation. One side of me felt an urge to get involved in this situation, and another, stronger side of me held Marie as able to take care of herself in these matters.

"Now let me see," Marie sighed, as she seemed to do a quick review of what she had just said. "Oh yes, we eat and talk. My daughter knits and crochets and reads a lot. She has a bad leg. I get all the news from her. She reads a lot and knows all about the family. Sometimes she reads me their letters because my eyes are failing. My family teaches me about life." With this sentence, Marie seemed to come to a closure on this topic. I had a vision of Marie's family connections weaving a pattern as colorful as the afghan she had draped on her chair. I asked her if she could tell me more about what her family teaches her about life, and she

tilted her head slightly to one side, smiled at me and said, "No." I shared a knowing smile with her then as I realized that the learning for me within my family is so profound and yet so subtle, that it is difficult for me to begin to consider words that might describe this phenomenon.

Learning or mental stimulation through social interactions does not necessarily require an abundance of words. Eva sat in a high-backed green chair right beside the elevator in the intermediate care facility where she lived. Her cane was propped against her right knee and her eyes were fixed on Marge, the staff member who walked beside me. Marge was explaining that Eva wanted to talk with me but was hesitant because she was having problems with her throat. "However, this problem did not interfere with Eva's celebration of her 103 birthday last week," Marge assured me laughingly.

As we drew near, Eva's eyes focused on Marge and then her right hand suddenly popped up for a wave while her left hand moved easily over to steady the cane that leaned against her knee. Her raised hand then came down to her lips and she dramatically threw Marge a kiss. It appeared to me as a graceful dance move that had been choreographed and practiced a thousand times, with dramatic effect. Immediately Marge shouted, "Oh hi Eva!" and rushed over, leaned down and kissed Eva on the cheek. Eva's eyes beamed

up at me as she enjoyed the affections. She carefully assessed me at the same time. They held hands together for a moment and Marg introduced us by shouting into Eva's ear.

"Oh, but I can't talk today," Eva said in a painfully croaking voice as she pointed to her throat. "That's fine," I said loudly into her ear as I held her warm, thin, lumpy-knuckled hand that she offered me. We all three shared warm, accepting smiles and hand squeezes for a few moments and then the elevator door opened and new bodies moved on stage. Eva gently released our hands as her eyes released our faces. Her vision then moved quickly to the passing crowd. Suddenly her hand popped into the air and her fingers motioned gently yet persistently for attention. Results came quickly. "Oh, hello Eva!" said a friendly deep voice and a man stepped out from the moving mob. He reached out as he approached and devotedly sandwiched Eva's outstretched hand into his burly brown ones.

Marg and I moved off to the side and observed for a while. When the lobby was clear, Eva sat and gazed in such a way that her eyes did not seem to focus on anything in particular. It seemed a time for resting, reflecting, and perhaps learning from these experiences that were obviously very meaningful to her. It was also a time of preparation for the future events that were certain to occur there in

her carefully chosen position in life. I admired her choices and strategies.

Hearing people talk was a high priority for several Centenarians when they considered learning. "My hearing is fine and I'm thankful for that," Pat said happily as her pale face looked up at me from her bed where she was resting. "That's why it's so important that I get news from outside," she explained with some urgency. "My sight is nearly gone and that's sad." Her facial expressions reinforcing her words. "No more TV or reading now, which I did a lot of in the past. That was my learning! I really miss it!" The anxiety had built by this time and Pat's hands were clenched around the folds of blanket at her chest. "That's why I really need people to come and talk to me. Most of my learning comes from hearing people talk about what things are happening." Pat rested a while after stating this and I had a moment to be aware of the pictures on the walls of her extended care room and the friendly chatter that was going on in the hallway between staff members and residents. I could readily understand that if my vision were leaving, I would be in desperate need of learning through the spoken word.

"When I'm feeling well, that is," Pat added after a deep breath and a re-consideration of her comments. "You see,

it's such a fine line, because when I'm not feeling very well I don't want to see anyone and I don't feel like I'm learning either," she explained with a sigh. "My stomach is often upset because I can't masticate properly. I swallow big lumps or something and it makes me sick!" Pat began to appear upset as she spoke of this and I asked her if perhaps she was not feeling well right now and that maybe I should leave. She gave an unstiffled sigh of relief and said, "Yes, maybe you should go now, but please do come back and talk to me on another day when I feel better. I want you to do that." I thanked her and told her I would be happy to return when she was feeling better. I called several times and Pat's condition had not improved so I did not return.

Ruby also explained that she likes to learn by listening and talking with others. "I go to dinners at "seniors" two times a week." she explained with enthusiastic intonations and hand motions that indicated the direction of the senior centre from her home. "It's good food and always too much," she said with a chuckle. "But we can sit and talk and learn from each other. I get tired of my own company and my own thinking!" Ruby smiled at her own thoughts as she shook and then nodded her head while seeming to reviewed her thoughts. "Sometimes someone at the centre has readings or quotes or even a short film. Then we discuss them. It's always educational. It's the informal kind, you know. And nothing

to do with figures. I get numbers all balled up! Oh! And I don't want to be graded! I just want to listen and talk and learn!" Ruby drummed the thick magnifying glass on the table in front of her as she spoke, as though to emphasize her point. I smiled at Ruby and told her how much I enjoy learning and how I also greatly enjoy learning without being graded! I was delighted at the variety of educational opportunities she was open to and hopeful that I would be the same.

Lee had a different philosophical approach about social interactions. "Visitors bring back the past life, especially older visitors," he explained with an elated smile as he unconsciously rubbed his knees and pondered my questions about learning. "And you need to have a few good pictures around the house to recall things to you, especially about good people." His cancer marked face became more serious and he said, "I'm bright enough to enjoy sharing memories with other older people who know what I know! We are always learning something new with the old memories." I appreciated Lee's confidence about his learning through sharing with his friends. I began to value more the sharing and learning of people of the same generation, just as I was learning to value the multi-generational aspect. With the same generation there are so

many similarities or connections that might enhance deeper communication and insights.

Lee continued without prompting. "The fact that people come around to see you shows that you have some status in their life. The fact that a person comes back to see you or wants to, is a wonderful thing! If you liked and respected people in the past, they probably liked and respected you!" I was amazed by Lee's comments on status and respect. I had not considered these vital elements of a visit in this way before. Just the fact that people "show up" seems to have tremendous value, even before conversation begins.

Lee appeared to be fully into his power now and he went on. "I have some friends who drop around and I'm so damn glad to see them come around, I behave very nicely!!" Lee put so much emphasis into these last words that small saliva particles spewed from his mouth with the exuberance of his articulation. It was hard to imagine him behaving any way but nicely, since he was such a warm and welcoming gentleman. I loved seeing the passion that was so alive and aptly expressed. I see Lee as having a lot of "soul". That is, he has a deeply emotional nature and he is able to "get the feeling out" when he chooses. He is able to encounter those deep meaningful values and give them lively words! I wonder what other types of situations might offer Lee more

opportunities for learning and for lively expressions of his "soul".

"Going Out"

Several Centenarians expressed the importance of "going out" of their dwellings in order to experience learning through different settings and different people. Gina's description of her situation shed light on how it went for a number of Centenarians.

"I'm 102 on my birthday," Gina said as she smiled up at me from her warm place under her yellow fuzzy blanket at the intermediate care centre. "I've never had a, touch wood, a serious illness. I feel about the same as any other time, except if I was at home. But you see, here, everybody does about the same things, so we just adjust. It's a nice place. I didn't want to come, but no one could care for me. You can't expect young people to sit home and wait for me!" Gina's voice was very soft, but there was strength in her expressions of sadness along with acceptance of her situation.

I asked Gina what has the most meaning for her these days and she giggled a little shyly and said with excitement at just the thought, "Oh! to be taken out, because they don't bother with me because I can't hear so well. So they say,

'Oh, it's no use taking Gina out, she doesn't hear,' that's what they say!" Gina giggled again and I became aware that her giggles were not always when she was feeling happy. She had much sadness now, yet the giggles came automatically as though trying to cover over the pain. She continued, "I enjoy going out, but now they don't bother. But then, you see I'm over 100 and they think I'm an old lady!" Gina laughed more heartily with her choice of "old lady" and I laughed with her and told her I found her to be very young at heart. "Oh yes," she cried delightedly, "and you see I even wear my long string of pearls to bed when I'm resting, even though Mommy always told me to not!" She said this with an impish gleam in her eyes that shown out past her thick glasses. I greatly appreciated Gina's mischievousness about her pearls. She held them up so she and I could both easily see them. My inner elder made a special note about using the impish, mischievous approach with the "mommy and daddy" voices that obviously will be with us well into our 100's!

I also am wondering about these in-between phases of very old age, where our minds and spirits are ready for an outing but our bodies are not strong enough to allow us to go out with a group or completely alone. Yet perhaps we are strong enough to go out with one person who can give us some special attention. This is what Gina and other Centenarians

seem to require. However, there do not seem to be enough people available for this service. I wonder if there are more people available, but, perhaps, this resource has not been tapped.

"Group Size"

When Centenarians go for an outing, some of them enjoy being in groups for stimulating learning experiences. Jim cheerfully explained his preference for group size. "Oh, when I get together in a group, I like a group of about 14 or 15 or maybe up to 20, in that area. Anything smaller than that, well they are interesting, but they are more interesting when there are more of you. And that's about as many as you can get in an ordinary room."

On the other hand, some Centenarians preferred very small groups of perhaps 3 to 5 people so that they can hear better and speak more easily. Some Centenarians want strictly a one to one encounter for their learning experiences, especially as physical disabilities encroach on their vision, hearing and mobility.

"Learning through the Media"

Many Centenarians spend a lot of time at home, and therefore, rely on the media for bringing the outside world to them. Jim commented about reading materials that he

enjoyed the most. "Well, the things that keep my mind occupied is the local news from the paper and stuff like that." He thought for a while as he looked around his living-room as though he were searching for more ideas to share about this. "And oh, I don't know, I like to read but my eye sight is failing and I can't read like I used to. But however, that's life," Jim said with a touch of resignation that seldom showed in his merry comments. "I try to read many times in the day, especially when letters come or when advertising comes. I try to read them all but they fail, (pause) I fail, rather! So it's very disconcerting to me. But however, that's life anyway." he said with a laugh as he corrected himself and swept his hand in a semi-circle to demonstrate the reading materials that were stacked on top of tables and desks and underneath many pieces of furniture too. I immediately related deeply to Jim's comment because I have wonderful books stacked in many places in my house, waiting to be read. It's exciting and also disconcerting!

"Oh yes, and large print is okay for me and sometimes helpful," Jim offered, as he pointed to some books on the table at the end of the couch where we sat. "I go to church naturally, same as a lot of people, and I have enlarged books and things and song books there too. I've got some enlarged things here too, mainly the Reader's Digest." Jim

showed me this proudly. "I like regular magazines or anything with short stories and things like that," he said lightly as he thumbed through the Reader's Digest. I noticed that many of these Centenarians were very pleased with their enlarged print editions of reading materials, with Reader's Digest being by far the most popular.

"Larger print would be helpful in the phone book too sometimes," Jim said. "But then the telephone book is pretty heavy already, and some other books are too. They are hard to hold. I can put the heavy books on the service tray of my walker and move them around that way if I want to. I just made that tray myself, you see?" Jim said as he reached past his cane and drew his walker over closer so that he could have me carefully examine how he had welded a special basket-type tray on it for transporting things. I was very impressed with his creativity and adaptability. I also realized more fully how even one book can upset the balance of an elderly person and, therefore, they must make plans for transporting a heavy book. I felt a tremendous surge of insight as I more fully realized the fantastic amount of learning that transpires merely through adaptations to changes in the aging physical body. It seemed important to Jim to share his creative expertise with me in order to more fully enjoy his own work and to be recognized also by another. I was impressed! I envisioned

a slow, comfortable dance that centered on a theme of reading, but that had lovely intricate movements which included going to the basement, finding special parts, fitting and welding, returning upstairs, experimenting with various books and articles on the shelf, and having restful, satisfying reading breaks in between.

Edna depicted the popular trend of reading health materials. We sat in a living-room area on the third floor of the intermediate care facility where she lives. Edna sat straight and yet relaxed in her overstuffed chair. Her arms were crossed easily over a fairly large book that was balanced on her lap. Her daughter-in-law, who had met me at the front door, remained with us throughout the visit but she said very little, allowing Edna and me to enjoy our talk. When I approached the subject of learning, Edna said, "Mostly I just take one day at a time. I like reading. Mostly I read from Prevention Magazine with large print." Edna unfolded her arms and with some effort lifted the book-type magazine and handed it over to me. I wondered if she brought it just to show to me or if she had been reading it before I came. Either way, I was pleased to see it. "I like to read about healthy things," she said smilingly and motioned again at the book that I held. "I read a very few novels. The shut-in service brings me books every few weeks, but I don't really read them. My eyes are still very

good," she said after quite a long pause, "and I read the newspaper too." Just as Edna finished this sentence, "tea" was announced over the P.A. system. Her eyes which had become slightly heavy suddenly popped open wide and she said, "Oh now we must all three go down for tea! That will be very nice!" Edna instructed me to leave the book there on the table and assured me it would be safe. She rose slowly and a bit painfully, it seemed to me, smoothing the back of her blue flowered dress as she stood up. She then indicated which direction we would go and we all went down for tea.

Television proved to be another popular way of learning through the media for these Centenarians. Dale sat in his favorite recliner chair that faced the television in his living-room. His step son who lives with him and assists with household duties brought a chair for me so that I could sit near Dale while we talked. After a short time of getting to know each other he said as he adjusted his brown sweater and green print shirt, "I like watching TV. My favorite program is Lawrence Welk, because I was always a dancer, you see." As Dale spoke his feet popped up in front of him and he began doing a little dance with them in mid air. We had a wonderful laugh together. "I was a Vaudeville dancer and I made my money by traveling all around the US and Canada and dancing and acting. But, when

the "talkies" got popular in the '30s, well then we went bust," he said with a dropping of the tone of his voice. This was the first sign of dejection in Dale's voice since I had arrived. "But the TV, I learn from that. I watch a lot of old stuff. A lot of the old American stuff is my style of entertainment. Oh yeah! I really like the old memories. I get a kick out of them with the old memories." Dale's balding head was bouncing from side to side as he smiled widely and spoke of the old memories.

"I love to learn," Dale said after a short break. "I get Channel 4 and I follow that quite often. Some of those Nature programs are really good. And I like Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy, and the news, since I want to know what's going on in the world." Dale sat and looked at the dark television as though he were trying to remember what else he watched. At times his eyes wandered up onto the wall beside the TV and my gaze followed his.

"These are pictures of my family and friends and from my acting and dancing days," he said proudly. "They help me remember my dancing and acting and other things from my past. Sometimes, when I'm in cooking my eggs for breakfast in the morning, I just have to stop and do a little tap dance for a minute!" Dale's eyes were as bright as his smile. "I guess my favorite thing on TV is watching that

old time dancing." Dale said this last sentences with nods of the head and intonations that sounded like a final "ta da" at the end of a dance, and then he folded his hands in his lap and leaned back for a rest.

I loved hearing how dance has been and still is threading its way through Dale's life. I see that he has learned a new style of dancing, the "Dancing on air" style, where he can sit in his comfortable chair and raise his feet up to a lovely height for his own pleasurable viewing, and dance. Perhaps his dancing on air changes as he views new dance forms on TV. Dale reminds me of my personal philosophy of dance which is: if my body deteriorates to where I can only move one finger, then if I'm moving it, I'm dancing. This image is separate from my "dancing spirit" image, where movement, unhampered by my body, is limitless, timeless, and eternally transforming.

After a time I noticed that Dale appeared drowsy and I suggested that I leave. Dale shook my hand, then kissed it and invited me back for another visit. I happily accepted.

"Learning Through Activities"

Meg persisted with her rapid knitting as we worked our way along with the conversational interview. At one point she released a knitting needle and took the strand of pink yarn

into her left hand and gracefully raised it far above her head three times, pulling the yarn out of the ball that was in her knitting bag which was attached to her walker. Upon my request she cheerfully showed me her creative array of slippers that were in her bag. There was a profusion of colours, sizes, shapes and patterns. She lovingly patted each pair as she arranged them on her lap for my admiration. "The most important things in my life now are knitting and tea time," Meg said pensively. "It's about all I do. At age 12 I taught myself to knit. Much of my learning today still comes from my knitting. I have to knit different sizes for different people. Oh, and then everyone's ideas change about what colours they want!" she exclaimed with a touch of surprise in her voice and eyes. I immediately understood what a challenging learning experience it must be for Meg, just trying to keep up with the trends in the knitting world. Even preferences for kinds of yarn that items are made of change. I have a passion for creative sewing that resembles Meg's creative knitting. I'm excited about the learning and inventive adaptations that I might be making in my late, late years.

When I mentioned activities and learning, Marie said, "I don't read much because things close to my eyes hurts my eyes, but to fill in the time, I do crochet work. But I only do it about an hour and a half a day, once in the

morning, and once in the afternoon." She rocked gently for a short while and gazed out at the tree tops through her spotlessly clean picture window. Then she continued. "I have a one tracked mind you know. When I'm doing this crochet, my mind is right on this. Some people watch TV but not me, I concentrate on this. But, I think I'm doing something better making this for to cover up the little ones, rather than reading a book. Even if I make one or two squares a day, it puts in the time. Then I look outside and rest my eyes." As she said this, she again gazed out of the window.

"I want to show you a little quilt. Would you like to see it?" Marie asked as she stirred in her chair and began to rise. I assured her that I'd love to see it. She proudly showed me a small, child-sized blanket that had been folded on a chair nearby. It was an exciting creation that had a black background with brightly coloured raised flowers of reds, yellows, pinks and oranges, all accented with deep greens leaves. As I held and admired it, Marie went to her closet and dug enthusiastically into the bags and bundles that were stored there.

Marie returned and sat down. Ceremoniously she unwrapped the old stained kitchen towel that she had placed on her lap. In an unrushed manner she lovingly picked up the light

blue bordered, multi-designed crocheted squares that were nestled there, and she spread them on her lap. Each square had its own vibrant design, different from all the others and I was amazed at her originality. "Now these will go to the orphans in the hospital," she said as she encircled these creations with her arms as though a child were snuggled under them already. Her smiling eyes gave beams of light that reminded me of sun-rays through a partly clouded sky, once described as "god-light". I was deeply touched by her tender, giving and happy heart.

Jim had other activities that he was involved with, besides putting a shelf on his walker. "I started last spring to make a composter, but I haven't gotten very far," he said with patient merriment. "I'm waiting for someone to come along and punch some holes in the steel for me. I have a lot of things in my mind to make. One of these days I'll get on with my composter, you just see if I don't!" he said with enthusiastic confidence. "I'm learning something new every day, and that's the truth. I have many things started and they are on the ringer and they are waiting for their turn to come around! I just figured out how to hang my ladders on my basement wall last week!" Jim said and laughed and slapped his knee heartily. I am amazed at the challenging tasks that he is taking on at this point in

life. Trying and learning new things seems a very high priority for Jim.

"Physical Activity and Learning"

Most of the Centenarians in this study valued physical activity and were eager to report on their choices of movement. Walking was by far the favorite form of exercise. Cora mentioned her walks shortly after we began visiting. She was irritated when I first arrived to her charming room in the intermediate care center. She was fussing with the broken switch on the large brass lamp that was on the table beside her grey and blue flowered chair. Cora relaxed when the staff member who introduced us promised to send a repair person that same afternoon to see about the lamp. As I approached Cora, I noticed that with her blue and grey blouse and shining grey curly hair, she looked as pretty as one of the large flowers in the upholstery of her chair. The deep folds and grooves in her 106 year old face were intriguing and attractive to me. Cora removed her feet from the soft footstool and moved it slightly to one side, motioning me to sit. "What do you want?" she asked as she leaned closer to me and looked me over carefully, then pointed to her left ear with a hearing aid. I spoke into that ear and explained why I was there. She smiled, nodded, leaned back and thought for a while. I waited patiently and

took the opportunity to settle gently into her space and her pace.

Cora asked me a few more things about myself and then I asked her a few things. She told me that she is not involved in many things now because her hearing is very poor and her eyesight is failing now too. "But I can still get around for my walks. They keep my mind bright!" she exclaimed and she patted her cane that was leaning against her knees. "I take my walks every day and I like to go alone, but these days someone usually goes with me." I felt a little sadness about Cora's having to give up the independence of walking alone, yet I was thrilled to hear that she still could walk! "I like walking around! Yes, I really do!" she said with relish. "I walk just to save myself and to see for myself!" I was fascinated by this comment. I immediately saw walking in a new light as Cora spoke these words. I treasure my own daily walks down by the sea, yet I have not been able to explain this deeply felt value. My mind also stays brighter as I "see" for myself and as I "save" myself, my emotional, physical and spiritual self from despair and dis-repair, as I stroll beside the whispering waves, leave my footprints in the soft, wet sand, and commune with the spirits and creatures that exist there. Cora could not give a deeper explanation

of her statement to me, and so I can only imagine some of her thoughts and feelings through my own precious knowing.

Cherie still enjoys her independence during her walks. "I get all dolled up like a scarecrow to go out the door for my walking," she said with a warm chuckle. "I feel better and think better when I get out for a walk each day. It keeps my mind alert and my memory going. I used to walk fast everywhere in the past - oh, very fast!" she said with pride as she pressed her shoulders back and allowed her chest to expand slightly. "Now I walk more slowly." Cherie's walking pace may have slowed, but her mental pace did not appear to be very slow.

"They (staff members) know I go out every day, so they mostly leave a door for me to go through. I have to go and see if it's unlocked, then I get all dolled up, pants and jacket and scarf and such. They are not old fashioned," she assured me with strong conviction. "I bought them 3 years ago and then I just started wearing them every day." I smiled at Cherie's fashion consciousness and realized that we are learning continually as we change and adjust to the new fashions. We often do not credit ourselves for this learning process.

"Mobility and Learning"

Walkers, carts, scooters, canes and wheelchairs were all devices that were reported as presenting new challenges and new learning experiences to these Centenarians, as they lost increments of mobility with aging.

Sadie sat in her wheelchair in the hallway of the long term care hospital where she lives. She was sitting with another resident and both of them appeared to me to be disgusted or perhaps angry. When I introduced myself to her, she sighed with some disgust in her exhalation and leaned her chin momentarily onto one hand. "Okay, let's go to my room. You push my wheelchair." I was pleased to do that. We settled by her large bright windows where we could easily see the birch trees that were just outside. "I'm 103, but I think I'm more," Sadie offered as I organized my tape recorder and notebook. As I relaxed into a comfortable position, I gave her my full visual attention and saw she was leaning forward onto the armrests of her chair and there was a tautness of her body. She went on, "But I don't care how old they say I am. It doesn't matter, even if I'm 110! You've got to die and live!" I heard and saw irritation now. Sadie pulled her pink-flowered dress half way up her right thigh and gently rubbed the end of her leg that disappeared into the prosthesis that was fitted loosely there. With slightly groaning sounds she said, "My leg had to come off. It was a

bad leg. I have a false leg. I don't walk much on it. It's a show thing. It looks good. I had to learn to run this chair. It goes funny places sometimes," she said with a smile on one side of her mouth that faded quickly again. "It's hard to figure it out. (long pause) But, I'm not doing anything else. It's boring!" she said testily and flipped her dress down to cover her leg.

We talked for a while longer and suddenly Sadie said with much ire, "I don't know what you want! Don't ask me questions! There is nothing romantic about my life!" She moved her hands sharply to the wheels of her chair and began backing it up, coming very near the toes of her roommate who sat holding a magazine and gazing out of the window. "I'll show you my picture in the lounge before you go," Sadie said firmly to indicate to me that the visit was over. I instantly felt rejected and as though I was a failure with this conversational interview. I quickly side-stepped into a memory of Sadie's mood at the beginning of our talk. I then felt an appreciation of Sadie's allowing her true feelings to surface. With this thought I relaxed into the scene and quite enjoyed the sparks of her snappish temper.

"Follow me," Sadie said in command form, and I followed. She painfully guided her chair down the hall, around the corner, and into the lounge. One of her arms did most of

the work while the other assisted and guided the weaving chair as best it could from the other side. Sadie made painful sounds the entire length of this agonizing journey to the lounge. I felt deep empathy with her as I slowly walked behind and tried to imagine what feelings I might have if I were in her position. It would be difficult to celebrate my pride of learning to get around in a wheelchair, in the face of pain such as she was experiencing. I felt great admiration for her.

"There's three pictures there," she said as she stopped in front of the fireplace and pointed upward. "I'm in the middle -- living!" she said with emphasis on the last word and a full smile on her pink, unpainted lips. We shared a laugh then, plus thank you's and good-bys. "I get cranky sometimes," Sadie said as she lowered her hand from our parting hand-shake. I told her I liked that about her. She smiled again and turned her wheelchair back towards her room.

"Window Learning"

Several Centenarians positioned their chairs for maximum viewing out of their windows. As we talked, their focus often left my face and centered somewhere outside. When Meg was thinking about what she wanted to say, she often rested

her eyes on the sidewalk outside of the large picture windows we faced. As people and their dogs passed by, her eyes followed them until they disappeared behind the large ornamental shrubs. As a large Golden Retriever came pulling its owner past our window, Meg leaned forward quickly, pointed at the animal and said with excitement in her voice, "We always had cats and dogs in my younger days. My daughter always wanted them. I sure have good memories of these!" I could experience Meg's pleasure of those connections with family pets just in being with her in her animation and expression.

Within a short time, a family of four people walked by and Meg placed her focus keenly on them. "I learn by watching people," Meg announced suddenly. When I gently questioned her more about this learning, she got stiff and a little abrupt with her speech and said, "I don't know, I just learn." I reflected on this part of our conversation for many days and suddenly one day I realized how much I am like Meg in this respect. Some months ago I had even designed a small shelf that attaches to our front-room window ledge. There I can place my cup and small plate, so that when I'm having my lunch or tea break, I can sit and watch out the window. I greatly enjoy the people and animals, birds, bikes and cars that pass by. Through looking at the trees, grass, flowers and sky, I seem to discover new ways of

feeling "natured" and therefore, "nurtured". That is, I feel more grounded, included, and unified with nature and the universe. I seem to let go of some of my boundaries and through visual images I seem to become almost transparent, allowing my spirit and even my physical molecules to intertwine more with those of the air, sunlight and people passing by.

Through my window I also learn about the progress that is being made with some individuals who pass by on a regular basis. One woman had a broken arm and went from a cast to a splint to full recovery. A physically challenged young boy got a new motorized wheelchair. He began his journeys past our place by creeping along so slowly that as his mother walked beside him, she could gaze at all the flowers in people's yards. They then progressed to where she was practically jogging to keep up with him. Now they are at a phase where he goes far out ahead, turns around and comes back, circles around her and chats for a moment then shoots out ahead again. As I consider the progressions that I view from my window and my process of relating to all of this, I more fully appreciate what Meg might be experiencing as she speaks of learning from watching people out of her window.

Minnie sat in her room with the large, heavy drapes pulled back and softly gathered beside her reclining chair. She

sat looking out of the window, and as I approached her I heard her making a sound, deep in her throat. I gave it little thought as we were introduced and I was instructed on how to communicate with her. Minnie had a small microphone which I spoke into, and this was attached to a cord which ran to her special hearing aid with an amplifier. I sat on a low, handsomely carved antique chair between her and the window. As we took the time to get accustomed to each other, her vision shuffled back and forth from me to the yard outside. During our quiet times, I heard this mysterious sound in her throat again. Eventually, as I concentrated on it, I began to detect a bit of a rhythm to it, and finally I discovered that she was humming! It was delightful to tune into this when we were not sharing words. Several Centenarians had told me that they loved singing before, but that they do not do it now and miss it. Minnie was continuing on with her musical expressions and somehow I greatly appreciated that. I like to hum. Perhaps I'll nurture the habit.

Now and then I followed Minnie's gaze out of the window and there I saw a gardener, flowers, cars going by and birds flittering about in the trees. "I don't visit a lot with people any more," Minnie said sadly. "With my hearing so bad, it's too hard. But I love my window." There were vibrations of contentment that resembled her humming as she

spoke these final words. Minnie continued. "The view out my window is lovely, especially in spring and summer. This gardener that we have is very good. He's quick and tidy. I like to see him working in the yard. They do it different now than we did then. I learn new things from watching him. I do miss doing my own gardening though!" Minnie's moods moved unhampered from happiness to sadness as she spoke.

Minnie tilted her head and eyes upward slightly as she said, "And always new birds! They come at different times. I can't keep track, but I love them!" she said with the corners of her eyes and mouth all turning up at exactly the same time. I had a feeling that she liked the changing of the bird species in her yard, even though she did not fully sort out who arrived when. I am like that with the birds in our yard, and perhaps with other happenings in my life also.

It was a pleasure to experience Minnie's "window world" with her. In one moment I felt as though she and I were the dancers on stage and the world beyond the window was our audience. In the next moment, we were the audience and the gardener, birds, and all else were the performers. In yet another moment I saw all of us from a more distant perspective, merrily intertwined and spontaneously making our choices for our next "life-moves".

"Wanting More Learning"

A few topics for future learning that were mentioned briefly by some of these Centenarians were: trees, flowers, gardening, birds and books. However, most of their ideas centered around themselves, other people and memories. Lee seemed to capture the essence of these ideas.

"I'm not interested in learning too many new things, just mostly about growing older." I asked him about the growing older and what aspects he would like to learn more about. "More focus on what's happening to me. And more about family," he said emphatically. "We need to communicate more and keep together. And with other good people too," he quickly added. Lee became more impassioned as these thoughts sorted themselves out into sentences. He began using hand and arm gestures to accentuate his ideas. "When I look back at the past, I think of my family and my mother and the nice people I've associated with. That's what has most meaning now. The fact that you can look back at things and "re-collect" them is a great pleasure! I think that's where we need more learning!" I was fascinated with Lee's use of the word "re-collect". As he rested from his energetic expressions, I began formulating new perspectives on learning experiences.

If we have new ways of "re-collecting" our experiences, then we have new learning. I often speak of my own experiences of the past, because I want to share and because I hope to learn something new from those experiences or events. If I have no new perspective as I begin to tell the story, if I gain no new perspective with the telling of the story, and if I glean no new perspective through the responses of the listener to my experience, then I am often left with feelings of hollowness due to no new learning. However, enlivened feelings of success can come with my perceptions of new learning, without changing anything but my perspective.

Perhaps in very old age also, new perspectives on the recollections of experiences may be a form of stretching and reaching that stimulates perceptions of renewed learning. These perceptions of learning may come with deeper understanding through new connections or re-connections among and between things, events, feelings, and people. Merely the acknowledging of these perceptions of learning gives the learning more value. The transformation involved within the shifting perspectives and perceptions of learning may enhance more intense feelings of life satisfaction.

Continuity of Learning

As these Centenarians spoke of their learning experiences throughout life, patterns from early childhood learning seemed to re-present themselves in similar forms, right into the second centuries of their lives.

Reading, gardening, crocheting, knitting, the constructing of useful things, and learning through experiences were continual themes that appeared from youth to old age. However, social interactions, such as listening, talking and being with others, held the highest position for learning throughout the lifetimes of most of these people.

The light of mid-night stars seemed to twinkle in Gina's eyes as she told her story of early learnings, a story that had similar emergings in many Centenarian's narratives. "If we wanted to know anything, we always went to Grandma, 'cause Grandma knew," Gina said with deep emotion, conviction, and affection. "My mother couldn't be bothered with that. Mother would say, "what do you want to know that for? But Grandma! Grandma wouldn't say that! Grandma would say 'yes' and would talk to you about anything. That's how we did our learning."

And so the dance of learning was begun. The partners were chosen carefully and probably still are. There must be a 'yes' to the encounter and there must be relevant meaning. There must be people who know and who want to know more. There must be people who will follow and lead, according to the needs of the elderly choreographer, just as "Grandma" followed and led with her learning, designing, and enlightening grandchildren.

Barriers to Learning

In this category, four major themes emerged strongly and clearly from the conversational interviews with these Centenarians. These were: poor vision, poor hearing, poor mobility and illness.

"Poor Vision"

A number of people reported extreme distress over pronounced loss of vision. As their eyes fail they are forced to disengage from reading, watching television, and many other activities that provide learning and that are often very satisfying. Associating with other people, especially new people, is also difficult for Centenarians when they cannot clearly see with whom they are visiting. Dealing with poor vision is also energy draining and energy is a commodity to be guarded carefully in extreme old age.

"Poor Hearing"

Marie aptly described the struggles of partial deafness that several Centenarians reported. "When people come in, I can't hear what they say. They have to come so close. This is difficult. Television is no good. And oh, I can't go to any meetings now because it's no use; I just sit there in a haze because I don't hear. I get tired of trying to talk to them, and they get tired of trying to talk to me." Marie showed signs of extreme frustration as she spoke. There were harsh intonations with her words and her left hand made sharp up-and-down motions that could be read as feelings of being chopped off from others or signifying definite, impenetrable barriers.

"Mobility"

"My weak legs and my method of traveling gets in the way of my learning," Jim said angrily as he pointed down at his feet. "I dropped out of some good organizations because I can't walk good and then I've got to travel to these places. I can't do that, so it's like isolation," he said heavyheartedly. After a time of sitting quietly to think he continued. "If someone just picks me up and takes me home, then that's fine. I can use my cane or walker or whatever, once I get there." Jim spoke more cheerfully with this comment. After another pause, he gave his final statement

on this topic, "The difficulty of getting around, that's a big thing! Mobility!"

"Illness"

Ruby gave a crisp explanation concerning her health and learning. "My health is basically good," she said proudly. "I'm very healthy. Never much sickness. I'm a tough old bird. My mind is brighter when I feel well, and not so bright when I fell ill. When I'm not well, well, then I'm not so interested." Ruby thought for just a moment and then added, "But, I need things to keep my mind off myself." I began to more fully realize that this is a tricky situation because learning is not terrible welcomed when one is ill, yet there is the need for something to occupy the mind in order to keep it from entirely focusing on the ill self. Very challenging.

Journal Writing

I asked each of these Centenarians if they kept a journal or diary. Each of them responded with, "No." I asked several of them if they were interested in writing down a few things about their learning experiences, from either the past or the present. Each of them responded with, "No." However, Ruby did comment further. "No, but I do it in my letters to my children. I write duplicate letters with carbon paper to

my two sons and the widow from my son who died. And if the black paper is working well, I do one for my nephew in Calgary." When I gingerly asked Ruby if she would give me a carbon copy, she laughed and said, "No I don't think so, 'cause I put in family things." I smiled and realized that privacy is important to Ruby. I also realized that my letters to family members are a form of a journal as I recapture and reflect on many of my experiences and feelings.

Partings

There were at least a few precious moments in each of the conversational interviews that I had with these Centenarians. Because of this, I experienced waves of joy during our talks and waves of melancholy during our partings. In each situation, we, the partners in the dance, found our own ways of coming to a close and separating. Sometimes I led, sometimes they led. Ella was definitely leader in this part of the dance. "Give me your hands now, dear," she said warmly as she held both of hers out to mine. I stood, bending down towards her, after I had placed my tape recorder and notebook papers in my purse. Her steady gaze held mine firmly and both of us gave no resistance to the smiles that moved upon our faces. I told Emma how very

much I had enjoyed our talks and what a lovely person I had found her to be. "I'm very glad to hear that, dear," she said quite easily and receptively, and then went on with slower words that allowed selection in between them, "It means a lot to me to know someone thinks that of me." Then she squeezed my hands, pressed them away from herself and more towards me and said, "Go to the door now, dear, and wave from there." I went willingly; then turned to face her and waved. She responded with a slow raising of her hand and arm and a smooth but very enthusiastic broad wave in return. I read tremendous pleasure on her face and in her movements, as she saw that this part of the dance was unfolding just as she had orchestrated it.

Summary

In this study, themes play a vital part in the development of the deeper understanding of learning experiences of Centenarians in their second century of life. General group themes centered on age awareness, the good old days, memory, opportunities for schooling, tiredness and pacing, grieving, personal death, humour and taking life as it comes.

There were a variety of themes that emerged around learning experiences of Centenarians in their present situations.

These themes included: learning through social

interactions, going out, group size, learning through the media, learning from activities, physical activity and learning, mobility and learning, window learning, and wanting more learning.

The types of things that these Centenarians suggested for more learning were: additional social interactions, further knowledge about growing older and what's happening to them, added focus on family, and furthering meaningful work with memories through more creative re-collecting of past experiences. Other topics that were briefly mentioned were birds, gardening, trees, flowers, and books.

Barriers to their personal learning were readily identified by these Centenarians. The four major themes were: poor vision, poor hearing, poor mobility and illness. Some Centenarians are struggling with only one of these barriers, while others are dealing with all four.

Centenarians are faced with many challenges as they encounter the 1990's. Their early training dealt with facing the challenges of the 1890's! They have had some dramatic learning experiences between then and now. There are still significant learning experiences in their present lives and the potential for more learning. Therefore, they and we, as educators, have the opportunity to work together

creatively, to further enhance rich learning experiences for very elderly, yet vital, long-lived individuals.

Chapter 5

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research project is to come to a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Centenarians in their second century of living. The purpose is also to discover the helps and hindrances involved in their learning experiences, as portrayed by these 18 Centenarians themselves. Recommendations for education are then discussed, followed by a few new questions that have been raised by this study. And finally, some further reflections of the researcher are included.

Metaphor of the Dance

The metaphor of the dance has provided me with creative mental images of graceful meanderings between Centenarians, myself, and the research. It has also allowed space for new perspectives, connections and reflections as I have grappled with my pre-conceived theories, my own personal life

experiences, and the voices and settings of these Centenarians. Subtle body movements which often accompanied the words and intonations of these very elderly individuals and of myself, provided me with more insights, resonance and depth of understanding of the dance of learning in middle and in late, late life.

Inner Elder

As time has passed I have become more familiar with each of these Centenarians through intense participation with them in the sharing of their perceptions, perspectives and emotions. Somewhere within this personally transformative process, I have become aware of an unfolding of (what I have named) my own personal "Inner Elder" who resonates more comfortably, compassionately, and knowingly with these elderly people. This personal inner being takes careful notice of many aspects of very late life and beckons me towards deeper levels of understanding and compassion. This inner being also gently nudges me towards healthy choices now in mid-life that may lead to more positive and fulfilling experiences, not only at present, but also in my future. I have written a poem, found in Appendix D, which depicts a few aspects of my new perceptions of aging, as seen through glimpses of the eye of my "inner elder". Perhaps this image of an inner elder may be used as a

research tool through which others may also explore their transformations of the knowing of the aging self.

Observations

A number of significant and relevant observations were made during our conversational interviews. Personal comforts seemed important and were attended to by Centenarians themselves and by caregivers. Soft chairs were always chosen by these people for sitting. Forty-five minutes to one hour seemed to be the appropriate amount of time for visiting. Napping was reported as revitalizing for many of these people and one had a short nap near the end of our visit. Quiet times for sitting, reflecting, and sifting through many past experiences before speaking were of high value. Maintaining a sense of independence, and of orchestrating some of one's daily routines held much value. Rooms were kept fairly warm, yet many of these people enjoyed a blanket or afghan draped over their legs for extra warmth. Most of their body moves were slow and methodical, often conveying a sense of gentleness toward self and others. Sadness, anger and complacency were also readily expressed through verbal and physical language. Emotions often shifted from happy to sad and back to happy, within moments. Eyes expressed much emotion. Many expressions of

warmth, caring and affections were shared between elders themselves and between them and their caregivers.

Still other observations were made during our visits. If participants were experiencing physical or emotional distress upon my arrival, often the thrill of our conversations over-rode much of their discomfort. People reported feeling stronger or empowered from having someone listen to them so intently and with such deep interest. Participants in the full variety of living situations (condominiums, houses, intermediate care and extended care facilities) all reported similar types of learning experiences. Most of them also commented on suffering from feelings of isolation from the outside world. Several people placed themselves strategically by main entrances, elevators, or windows in order to enhance their opportunities for new stimuli. Even though some of these people did not always feel well, they still enjoyed discussions with me as it helped prevent total focus on their unwell bodies. Participants did not necessarily report experiencing direct effects of earlier education or schooling upon their present-day learning experiences. They did, however, comment on some continuity of learning experiences from young life to late life. Gender was not reported as a factor affecting their learning experiences of the past or present. In fact it was not mentioned by these

individuals. People enjoyed having the opportunity to validate their learning, both to themselves and to me. In my eyes, these people are prime examples of lifelong learners.

I made many personal observations about myself during this research process, but one day I made a shocking observation about myself and my own personal form of ageism. Shortly after we had settled into our chairs, Ella, one of the participants, asked me for a nail-file because she had a rough spot on her fingernail. I was preoccupied with organizing my tape recorder, note pad and pen, and I had this niggling feeling of not wanting to be bothered with looking around in my purse for a nail-file. So I ignored the request for a few moments. Ella waited patiently. I suddenly had a flash of realization that I had a small but strongly whispering voice that was saying, "Why bother? This woman is very old and will die pretty soon anyway, so why fuss with such trivia?" I was horrified at my own prejudice and I felt instantly ashamed. I sat frozen for a moment in order to just be with myself in this place that I had not consciously viewed before. As an unknown amount of time floated past, I became aware of the need to consciously grapple with this attitude, and yet to nurture acceptance of myself in this seemingly unacceptable place. I slowly reached for my purse and found the nail-file, suggesting to

Ella that she might keep it. She happily accepted the offer and commented on how much she appreciated these little things in life now.

As I reflect on my observations of this "nail-file incident", I am not only shocked at my prejudice, I am also very glad to be seeing this part of myself that has energy and that has been unconsciously involved in my decision making. I feel good to have brought it to the light so that I can deal with it directly. I wonder where and when I developed this perspective. How many other people feel this way and, therefore, do not want to bother with the little things that can add small satisfactions to the lives of the elderly? Are we as educators also unconsciously thinking, "why bother with programs for the very elderly, since they will die soon anyway?" These are important issues that require more attention.

I also observed that there were times when I wished these Centenarians would speak to me more about a particular topic or learning experience, so that I could more fully understand it from their perspective. However, no matter how creatively I approached a topic, if they did not want to discuss it further, they dropped it, diverted, ignored, or flatly told me "no", that they could not or would not discuss it further. I admired their strength of conviction

but felt frustration at times. Perhaps they have taboos around discussing certain topics in depth. Perhaps they were not clear on just how they did feel or think about certain issues, and so they preferred to not speak. Perhaps with more time together, deeper levels of trust would be established which could lead to deeper understanding. I did observe, however, that if they did have internal permission to speak about a topic, they seemed to get right to the heart of what they wanted to say and were not preoccupied with social graces.

Another very interesting observation I have made during this inquiry is that many people in our society are intrigued by this research project involving Centenarians. Therefore, I have had numerous opportunities for sharing my discoveries and perceptions of my own learning. Almost without exception people will comment on the fact that they feel "hope" around these reports of vitality and learning in very late life. Within this hope are the possibilities of enjoyment in old age as opposed to merely enduring or tolerating late life living. I believe this to be an essential element in our transformational process, as individuals and as a society, for gaining new and healthy perspectives on aging.

Recommendations

After much reflecting on all that I have been learning throughout this study, I have developed several recommendations for enhancing learning experiences for Centenarians and other elderly lifelong learners. These recommendations might be considered by Centenarians themselves or by other elderly people. They might also be considered by administrators, educators, caregivers researchers and other members of the general public.

Several philosophical recommendations may be considered.

- Consider the development of an orientation towards an "environment for learning" whereby learning and teaching are main focal points for Centenarians themselves as well as for institutions, educators, caregivers, families, friends and volunteers.

- Focus on and respect the choices each individual has in the engagement or disengagement processes of aging.

- Continually reassess what Centenarians want for more learning experiences by asking them and through attentive observation.

- Acknowledge the learning experiences of Centenarians to the Centenarians themselves when these are observed by others involved in their lifeworlds. Through the eyes of others we often have new insights about ourselves.

- Continually seek ways of using skills, knowledge and experiences of Centenarians in teaching\learning settings.

- Strive to provide more individual, community and residential learning experiences that are specifically adapted to very elderly learners.

Several recommendations that deal a little more with technique are now discussed.

- Think about the development of teaching/learning programs that are centered around major events or interests in the lives of the very elderly.

- Focus programs around issues such as changes in the self in the late life aging process, maintaining perceptions and feelings of control and independence in one's own life, grieving, and negotiating transitions in life.

- Develop more creative enhancement of learning through social interactions. This may include more involvement and perhaps training of family, friends, organizations and volunteers.

- Offer strategic places for people to sit if they require more personal interactions with staff or visitors in institutions. This may be near elevators, main entrances or other busy places.

- If Centenarians are interested in looking out of the windows, place them strategically for this and perhaps have

discussions about their learning experiences from this vantage point.

- Offer learning experiences through reminiscence and the sharing of personal life stories, songs, poems and experiences.

- Offer a variety of learning experiences such as individual teaching and learning, small group discussions, large group involvement and age integration.

- Provide more choices of enlarged print materials and make them easily available to elders. Considerations of size and weight of these materials are also of importance.

- Offer more educational programs on television that are of interest to elderly people.

- Offer more variety of mild physical activities for the very elderly, being cognizant of and adaptive to each increment of mobility that is lost.

A few more technical recommendations are included.

- If learning experiences or educational opportunities are offered, they should be in an andragogical form whereby they meet the individual's unique personal needs and interests.

- Individual barriers to learning must be carefully considered for each learning experience.

- Programs should be perceived as functional and purposeful to the elderly learner.

- Respect must be shown for the dramatic differences of outcomes and ways of participating in the learning processes that may be displayed by the participants.

- Choices of participation must be clearly made by the learner, rather than the facilitator or institution.

- Self-direction should be encouraged throughout the process of involvement in the learning experience.

I acknowledge that these recommendations may be difficult to achieve and may take much time. However, they are significant goals that have been inspired by Centenarians themselves, as they discussed their learning experiences in very late life.

A Few New Questions That Have Been Raised

This study has prompted me to ponder a few new questions concerning the learning experiences of very elderly people.

- What would other Centenarians and other elderly people choose for enhanced learning experiences in late life?

- What are some cultural differences that require attention in order to offer appropriate learning experiences for the very elderly?

- How can we facilitate Centenarians asking for more of what they want for renewed learning?

- How can we assist Centenarians in keeping more up to date with what they are wanting to know?

- How can there be more quality learning/sharing time spent between Centenarians and those relating to them?

- How can we match people of various ages but with similar interests, for enhanced learning and sharing?

- What resources might be tapped to recruit people who might offer the service of enhanced learning experiences for elderly people, including taking them for outings?

- How might we enhance personal perceptions of present-day learning by Centenarians themselves for improved self-esteem?

These are a few questions that might give us further insights into more fulfilling learning experiences for Centenarians.

Personal Reflections

It has been a wonderful privilege to relate to each of these Centenarians involved in this study. These individuals displayed large amounts of vitality, creativity, humour, and present-day learning experiences. They seemed to be enjoying many aspects of their lives, but of course not all aspects! Even as they commented on their struggles, sorrows and boredom, they often shared their joys, laughter and

entertaining perceptions of themselves and others. Through relating to these Centenarians with their ups and downs, turmoils and contentments, I have come to love many aspects of old age, and the people who live in that age of "old". I revel in the memories of our sharing.

Through communications with these Centenarians I have come to believe and more fully understand that these individuals are having rich learning experiences in their daily lives. I have become more fully aware of some of the helps to learning and hindrances to learning that these people are dealing with. I also understand that we as a society and as educators have many possibilities of choices that we might offer and that we might look forward to ourselves some day, for enhanced learning experiences in very late life.

This has been a long, involved and rewarding process. However, at times I feared that I would be over 100 years old myself before I finished this project. Now I am convinced that, if I am granted the privilege of living that long, I truly will be in the process of gaining new insights about this inquiry when I am a Centenarian. I have a happy image of myself sitting by a sunny window in a fluffy blue chair, having an exhilarating flash of new learning and saying to myself or to anyone who might listen (be they of

the physical or spiritual world), "now this is something that needs to be included in my thesis!"

We the dancers of life and learning may teeter between the profound moments of balance and the terrifying moments of confusion, unknowing and falling. Herein lies the potential for compassion, imagination, improvisation and action. It is here that we are allowed the dance of deeper understanding which may lead to more creative offerings of enriched learning experiences for many individuals, including those who are flourishing in their second century of living.

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Appendix A

Questions or Topics for Conversational Interviews

Setting the Stage: General Group Themes

How is it being over 100 years old?
What are some of your joys and frustrations?
What are some of the challenges involved now in your life?

Learning experiences

What kinds of learning or learning experiences are you having these days?
What things are of most interest to you?
Are you finding out enough about these interesting things?
If someone could help you with more learning, how could they help you best?
Do you have suggestions for improved programs, education, or any other kinds of learning experiences for people your age?
What kinds of things do you think you or they might want to learn more about?
What kinds of settings are the most comfortable for you?
If you are focusing on learning something, what is the most comfortable setting for that?
What are your favorite ways of learning things?
Do you like to learn through visiting, T.V., reading, radio, or just how?
Do you prefer learning alone or with a group? What size of group do you prefer?

Continuity

What do you remember about your learning experiences of your past? Do you see similarities between your learning experiences of the past and of the present?

Barriers to Learning

What types of things get in the way of your learning experiences these days? Physical problems? Comfort? Transportation? Types of programs?

Journaling

Are you interested in writing a little about your learning experiences?
Would you be willing to let me read some of what you write?

Appendix B

Agencies Contacted

In order to make connections with Centenarians, I contacted these agencies: Victoria Gerontology Association; Centre on Aging; Faculty at U. of Victoria; B.C.Stats.; Silver Threads Centres; Seniors Adult Day Care Centres; Home Maker's services; Hospice; Senior Citizens Centres; Office for Seniors; Seniors Sendial Coordinators; Seniors Serving Seniors; Times-Colonist; Ministry of Health and Seniors, including a talk with Minister Paul Ramsey; Churches; B.C. Government Services to Seniors; CRD Health; Long Term Care Coordinators; Home Nursing Care Coordinators; Community Rehabilitation Coordinators; Seniors Personal Care Facilities; Senior Intermediate Care Facilities; Seniors Extended Care Facilities; Meals on Wheels; Helping Hands; Juan de Fuca Hospital Systems; Oak Bay Lodge; Seniors Peer Counseling; Seniors Advisory Council; Fitness Centres; Seniors Health Promotion Network; Summerset House; Ministry for Social Services; Peninsula Home Support Services of Sidney; Family Care Giver's Network; Beckley Farm Lodge; Resthaven Lodge; VISTA; Oak Bay Volunteer Services; Peninsula Chat Line/Visiting Service; League of Mercy; Senior Outreach; Seniors Visiting Program; Telephone Reassurance; Individuals in the community.

Appendix C

Consent form for participant in the study entitled,
**LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF CENTENARIANS IN THEIR SECOND CENTURY
OF LIVING: HELPS, HINDRANCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

I understand that this research project is studying learning experiences of Centenarians in late life. It is also studying helps and hindrances to learning at this phase in life. I understand that I may be asked my opinions about these matters in a friendly manner, and that I do not have to answer anything I do not want to.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

I understand that any data collected in the study will remain confidential; interview results will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Furthermore, I understand that my name will not be attached to any published results, and that my anonymity is guaranteed by using code numbers or imaginary names to identify the results obtained from individual subjects.

I understand that my conversational interviews may be audiotaped, and that the tape will be erased immediately after the thoughts/feelings/experiences that I talked about are coded in written form. I also understand that if I do not wish to have my interview taped, I can refuse to do so.

I understand that whether I participate or chose not to participate, it will have no bearing on my status here.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Experimenter: _____
(Mary Ann Fenimore)

Appendix D

"The Aging Goddess"

A movement, from brash and flagrant snarling morality
 To the contemplative stepping forward with one possibility
 Amidst the colorful array of many.

A repositioning, from the juiciness of self-righteousness
 and judging
 To the deeper vibrations of understanding and compassion.

A side-ways step from addictive spontaneous abandon
 To considerations of consequences and the wealthy feelings
 of knowing.

A switch, and never permanent, from brazen sexiness
 To enchanting magnetic sensuality
 Masked in the cloak of playful indifference.

A whirling leap from unconscious and compulsive primping,
 preening and negative picking verdicts
 To admiration of beauty, uniqueness and personal light.

A stretching, from violent passions spewing unleashed into
 outer darkness, finding no satisfactions
 To well boundried channels, open and direct from pain to
 illumination.

An alteration, from leaping, separating, quickly
 disseminating flames
 To red-smoldering, unified, enduring, heat exuding coals.

A dancing, from demanding, impatient instantaneous
 requirements,
 To more timely, graceful suggestions with increased
 occurrences of fulfillment.

VITA

Surname: Fenimore Given Names: Mary Ann

Place of Birth: Kennewick, Washington

Date of Birth: November 16, 1942.

Educational Institutions Attended:

Pacific Lutheran University	1960 to 1964
Washington State University	1966 to 1967
University of British Columbia	Summer 1974
East Kootenay Community College	
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Degree Awarded:

B.A.	Pacific Lutheran University	1964
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Title of Thesis/Dissertation: Learning Experiences of Centenarians in Their Second Century of Living: Helps, Hindrances and Implications for Education

Author



(Signature)

Mary Ann Fenimore

(Name in Block Letters)

June 13, 1994

(Date)