NOT JUST SURVIVORS: Portraits of Three Vital Older Women

by
Bobby L. M. Kovar
B.A., University of Victoria, 1982

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of Psychological Foundations

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. R. Vance Peavy, Supervisor (Department of Psychological Foundations in Education)

[redacted]

Dr. Jennifer Hill, Departmental Member (Department of Psychological Foundations in Education)

[redacted]

Dr. Antoinette Oberg, Outside Member (Department of Communication and Social Foundations)

[redacted]

Dr. Timothy Diamond, External Examiner (California State University

Supervisor: Dr. R. Vance Peavy

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is an exploration of the lives of three very old women and how vitality and authenticity are expressed in their every day lives. These women assert an open and creative attitude towards the changes of old age, a trusting and confident connection to their inner selves, intimate and complex relationships with others and an on-going interest in the world at large. They affirm life on every level. The purpose of this study is to expand the limited body of knowledge of older women and to assist those working in the counselling field by presenting a view of aging that encompasses the possibilities of personal growth and the full potential of aging of older women clients.

Past gerontological research focused on the declines and problems of aging. As only a small segment of the aging population was studied, the full range of expectations and possibilities of aging were left out. Not only the diversity of an older person's experience of aging was overlooked but women's unique experience was largely absent from human science research. This lack of gender equity in research as well as the fact that most research was conducted by men resulted in distortions about the experience, potential and condition of women. One important consequence of these distortions was the adoption of limiting assumptions about the lives of older women by society.

The women who participated in this study lead lives that do not conform to the limiting assumptions of older women. These women are not "haunted" by their failing health nor are they "preparing

for death." The three participants in this study were chosen because they have a positive, life-affirming attitude towards life and are creative in their relationship to the dilemmas of old age.

A hermeneutic approach was chosen in this study to allow for the depth of expression and the freedom to explore the richness of the women's experience. Hermeneutical analysis is an interpretive process that is a continuous movement between the written transcript (the text) and a deeper understanding of what the text discloses. This approach is reflexive in that the researcher is part of the research. In this study there is a dynamic relationship between the women interviewed, the transcribed text and myself as researcher. Each woman was interviewed twice using an open, conversational tone. Throught this interview style I sought to understand the meaning of the central themes of each woman's life.

The interpretive analysis is presented in two parts. The first part is a portrait of each woman. These portraits illuminate the central themes in each woman's life as she presented them. They are a combination of the meaning she brought to her experience and my reflective interpretation of the way she described her life. The second part is a discussion of the underlying themes of vitality and authentic living that are fundamental expressions of these women's lives. The concepts of passion, creative renewal and meaning are discussed. The relevance to counselling practice is presented emphasizing the potential of a full and creative life for older women.

Examiners:

[redacted]

Dr. R. Vance Peavy, Supervisor (Department of Psychological Foundations in Education)

[redacted]

Dr. Jennifer Hill, Departmental Member (Department of Psychological Foundations in Education)

[redacted]

Dr. Antoinette Oberg, Outside Member (Department of Communication and Social Foundations)

[redacted]

Dr. Timothy Diamond, External Examiner (California State University)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although, to me, the writing of this thesis felt like an introspective, solitary and, sometimes, isolating task, in actual fact, my friends, family, sister-students, co-workers and thesis committee lived and breathed this study along with me. At every turn I was offered support, encouragement and a willing ear.

Thanks to my thesis committee: Supervisor, Dr. Vance Peavy, whose easy manner offered guidance when appropriate and silence when necessary; Dr. Jennifer Hill, whose critical eye for detail motivated me to prepare carefully and well before seeing her; and especially to Dr. Antoinette Oberg, whose provocative questions, so respectfully asked, taught me about resonance, clarity, the use of language and what it was I was trying to say.

Thanks to the women who participated in my study. To Aileen and Mary, whose long-time friendships inspired this study and whose lives they so lovingly shared with me, and to Peg, who opened her life to a stranger and whose life now encompasses a new friend.

The badge of patience belongs to my life-partner, Judy Lightwater, who retrieved sections of my study when I'd hopelessly lost them in the computer system; read and re-read each section even when I resisted suggestions; cooked, cleaned and organized our lives throughout, what seemed, a never-ending process.

DEDICATION

To all the women in my life, my life-partner, Judy; my daughters, Cassie and Sherry; to my sister, Gail; my nieces, Kate and Chris; and my friends:

> *May we also be Not Just Survivors but "flame with a wild life."*
>
> Florida Scott-Maxwell,1968

And, to my late mother, Margaret C. Moore, who taught me so much about unconditional love:

> *Here I go, flying high, disguised as a fairy godmother*
> *whirling and twirling my old-age wand;*
> *just watch me - I'm about to turn a million glittering cartwheels in milky outer skies.....*
>
> Virginia Satir, 1986

Chapter 1: Introduction

Women, when they are old enough to have done with the business of being women, and can let loose their strength, must be the most powerful creatures in the world.

Isak Dinesen

Choosing the topic

When choosing a topic or question of inquiry there is an experience of the world which directs our attention to the question in the first place (Carson, 1986). My interest in the aging process of very old women came about through my long friendship with two older women whose lives of vitality, aliveness, purpose and connection always fascinated me. Popping in and out of their lives over the years I was struck with the complexity and engagement of their lives on many levels. Their self-knowledge and self-understanding, their confidence and purpose in relationship to others and their essential and keen connection with the larger world were, for me, a source of inspiration and curiosity. This complexity and engagement not only incorporated the past and present but the future as well.

The value of my connection with these two women became even more obvious to me when I reflected on my own limiting, stereotypic assumptions about older women's lives. Weren't these women suppose to be "preparing for death"? Shouldn't they be focused on their present failing health and past memories? What happened to the disengagement and withdrawal of old age taught by human development theorists?

Why weren't these women "playing by the rules"? What was it about them that made them "different"? What was it about our present "knowledge" that portrayed such a negative view of older women and excluded the fullness of these women's lives?

A curious thing happened at the next level of inquiry. I began to talk to other people about my topic. No sooner had I begun to describe my interest and this fascinating aberration and the person to whom I was speaking would say, "I know an older woman you should meet" -- an aunt, a grandmother, a friend, or a neighbour. Everyone seemed to have an older woman in their life that fit my description. Like me, they too felt that "their older woman" was an exception. Curtin (1972) commented on this experience when she said, "almost everyone has someone they know, they love, who is also old. But they regard these old ones as rather special cases. They may be the rule rather than the exception" (p.50). This unexpected shared experience strengthened my conviction to expand the existing picture of older women by providing rich descriptions and stories about older women who lead vital lives.

Defining the Research Question

Initially, my focus centered on the experience of aging of the three participants in this study. How do these vital older women describe their own aging? However, what I discovered after interviewing each woman was that aging was not a big concern, nor was much attention paid to it. Aileen said, "I just keep going and never think about it." After a surprise party for her 90th birthday she said, "if they'd left me alone I would have still thought I was 40"! Mary, when comparing herself at 82 to other people who appear "older" at that age, said, "so I

don't know about aging, it's all a mystery to me." Peg's reaction, at 88, to a question about aging was to state simply that she "ignores it"! She acknowledged the physical changes she has experienced but emphatically stated, "I never feel like an old person."

As I proceeded, I discovered that the fundamental questions of vitality and connection were rooted in the lives of these women. The fact that they were in their 80s and 90s was only part of my interest. Their advanced age highlighted their vitality and gave meaning to the concept of vitality as being the ability to live or a capacity for lasting. They were maintaining their passionate connection to the world around them in spite of the physical changes of aging that were limiting their activities and involvement.

The research question evolved into three parts:

1. How do older women constitute their lives and what are the key features of a life so constituted?

2. How is the spirit of vitality expressed in the lives of each of the participants?

3. How can this vitality be explained and understood in terms of the course of their long lives?

Coming to the Question

My purpose in doing this research was influenced by personal as well as ideological reasons. The first reason was triggered by the death of my Mother shortly before I began graduate school. To my naive surprise I discovered that I was now the matriarch of my family. I became acutely aware of time passing. Both my daughters were living on their own and by the conclusion of this study I was told by my older daughter

that I was going to be a grandmother.

The loss of my Mother began a chain of realizations that lead me to yearn for old age mentors. Chances were that I would live into my 80s or even 90s as my Mother had not. How did I want that time to be? What were my choices? And, most immediately, was there anything I should know or do now that would influence my coming years? I came upon the words of Ruth Raymond Thone: "In describing old women we admire, we are describing our possible selves" (1992, p.101). The more I could understand these women's lives, the more options I would have. If the role of older woman awaited me, I wanted to understand all I could about it.

An important aspect of my inquiry was to balance my need to understand these women's lives and have mentors for my own aging, as well as to know that I could not emulate these women. There would be no magical step-by-step process, just a deeper understanding of these women's lives and a source of inspiration as I created my own journey into old age. My inquiry was a place for me to learn something essentially human by understanding actual lives as lived (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

In their book, <u>One Hundred over 100</u> (1990), Jim Heynen and Paul Boyer reflected on the effect their interviews with people over 100 years of age had on their own view of aging. Soon after they started their interviewing, Paul asked Jim, "Do these people make you want to live to be a hundred?" Jim answered, "Not nearly so much as they make me want to live my life right now the way they live theirs" (p.xvii).

I did not approach this inquiry as an outsider unable to imagine the experience of the women I studied. Rather, this topic has evoked my interest because it touches my personal

life.

My study invites the readers to question their beliefs about aging. Through this process it will be possible to develop insights that contribute both to the body of knowledge of older women and to the practice of counselling with older women by challenging the myths and assumptions that limits their potential for personal growth.

The second reason involved my belief that, until recently, women's experience had been largely absent from human science research. According to Betty Friedan (1986) women's experience was denied while at the same time studies were done claiming to produce insights about women's lives without taking into account women's actual experience. As most research had been conducted by men, studies of women had naturally been influenced by a male view of women in society and by male definitions of problems. Betty Nickerson (1991), explaining why she had written her book Old and Smart, said, "I couldn't relate to reference books filled with statistics measuring negative conditions. Besides most of these were about old men. I didn't find myself in those pages" (p. 12).

Women have been evaluated from the perspective of "other" in relation to men. Distortions about the condition of women have resulted. Only through studies of women's own experience and in their own language will these distortions be corrected (Gottlieb, 1987).

In the same way that women have been judged from the powerless position of "other" in relation to men, so have older people been defined as "other" in relation to youth. Age has been seen only and simply as a decline from youth. There is enormous denial of the personhood of older people. Age has no substance of its own, no value of its own, consequently, age is

defined only as a problem. In this way older women are subjected to an age and gender "double jeopardy" of powerlessness in our society. Nett (1982) speculated that low status of the old in general resulted from the fact that so many old people are women. In this way, agism is a by-product of sexism.

One important consequence of research conclusions that create a distorted and deficit portrait of older women is the adoption of this view by society. The stereotype of an older woman becomes a mask which conceals the essential identity of the woman beneath. With the loss of power and social status, older women become invisible, unimportant and even shunned. Thone (1992) wrote that, "Our society fears old women because they represent death and disdains them because they are no longer useful, sexually or as caretakers" (p.ix). Thone however, also reminded us that in past ages, old women were looked on as wise, powerful, guardians of life's entrances and exits, healers, seers, and truth-speakers (p.x).

My ideological purpose for embarking on this research is the emancipation of older women from the limitations, expectations and invisibility of lay stereotypes. In the words of Adrienne Rich (1985), "The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities" (p.65). I do this by providing the opportunity for three older women to speak their own truths, use their own voices and share their experiences.

Significance of the Problem

Canadian society is aging. At the turn of the century it was considered a novelty to live into the ninth decade. Only one

person in 500 lived to the age of 85 in 1900, but by 1975 one in 100 survived to become that old. It is estimated that by the year 2000 people over the age of 65 will constitute 13% of the general population. When people in the baby boom generation celebrate their 65th birthday this statistic will increase dramatically, to 22%. Butler (1985) has coined the phrase "age of aging" to describe this demographic trend (p.1). With this large increase in the aging population the study of old age becomes a pressing professional, social and cultural task.

The anticipation of this dramatic demographic trend has sparked a flurry of interest in the aging population. Several commonly held stereotypes and myths about aging and older women in particular are finally being held up to scrutiny. One such myth is that aging is a relatively homogeneous event. Even though gerontologists contend that the aged are highly diverse, perhaps the most heterogeneous of any age strata, diversity among the aged has rarely been analyzed, interpreted or discussed until quite recently (Nelson & Dannefer, 1992). Most literature on aging portrays older adults as having similar needs and problems, as if late life were "a kind of cloning process" (Anderson, 1979, p.215). For example, the most commonly used delineation of old age has been 65-plus years. People identified in this age group could vary in chronological age by as much as 30 years or more (e.g., 65 to 100+). By definition, a parent and a child, with all their cultural and historical diversity, could easily occupy this age group simultaneously!

Another distortion of an accurate picture of aging stems from research on old age that tended to focus on the problems of aging: sickness, limitations, decline and poverty. These problems were seen as a social problem that had to be

addressed and remedied. Only a small segment of the population was studied, thus distorting the full range of expectations and possibilities of aging. This coincided with assumptions of many early developmental theorists that maturity was complete in early adulthood and then after a long period of stability was followed by the degeneration of old age. More recently gerontologists have moved away from this view and have begun to examine old age as periods of continuing personal growth, change and development.

Not only has the diversity of an older person's experience of aging been overlooked, but rarely is the uniquely female experience taken into account. This omission occurs in spite of the fact that women outnumber men almost 3 to 1 in the 85-plus age range. According to statistics in the Department of the Secretary of State report (Chappell,1990), by the year 2000 older women will constitute the fastest growing segment of the population of Canada.

Significance of the Study to Counselling

The results of this research investigation will add breadth and depth to the limited body of knowledge of older women who lead vital lives. It will be done by using the words and experiences of three women.

The vast majority of gerontological research has emphasized the mental and physical decline associated with increased years. As a consequence of this emphasis, a void exists in the view of the healthy functioning of older women (Lewittes, 1982). This study will broaden both the counsellor's picture of older women and offer a keener insight into the most effective ways to assist them.

According to Novak (1983), "only those people who are living a good old age can teach us what we need to know about good aging" (p.232). This study has been limited to include only older women who had positive, life-affirming attitudes and maintained a vital and on-going connection to the world around them. As counsellors, it is imperative that we encompass all possibilities of personal growth and potential with our older women clients and to see this potential as a realistic goal. To achieve this we must possess a picture of this time of life that includes the full range of diversity that realistically represents this age group. Not only do we need to see our clients with open eyes and hear them with open ears, we need to free ourselves from the distortions and myths that permeate our society.

As a counsellor with the elderly, this study was central to my professional work. I have not only expanded what is known about vital older women, I have been changed by it.

Style and Organization

I have chosen to write this research report in a narrative style of writing. This style is consistent with the portraits of each woman and the presentation of the interpretive analysis. In order to maintain the integrity of this style in the body of the report I have placed the section entitled Literature Review in the Appendix section.

Chapter 2: Method

Immersion: Informing My Perspective

The first task after choosing the topic was to become more aware and knowledgeable about the world of older women and to begin to identify the vast amount of "taken-for-granted" assumptions that are associated with this world. I set out to immerse myself in the lives of older women, both fictional and real.

I began by exploring the taken-for-granted assumptions that I believed were commonly held in North American society. Using a free-flowing method of listing all the visual and social images that I had to define older womanhood, I produced a list of approximately 80 descriptions over the course of a few days. On reflection, the exercise proved very valuable as I was able to observe the strength and pervasiveness of each entry as I weighed it against my own personal experience and knowledge of older women. Although some of my assumptions may fit a particular woman to some degree, none of the women I knew personally, came close to resembling this stereotyped "generic" woman. This experiential exercise provided me with a greater understanding of the heterogeneity of this group of people labeled older women.

The next step was a delightful journey through fictional literature by and about older women which portrayed women as positive, effectual characters. Non-fiction works by older women about older women carried a strong message to the reader to let go of distorted assumptions and see and listen to

the diversity and depth of older women's experience (c.f., Jacobs, 1991; Macdonald, 1983; Nickerson, 1991; Thone, 1992).

Viewing films about older women offered an important visual vehicle into their inner worlds. Films such as, A Company of Strangers (Scott & Wilson, 1991), A Woman's Tale (Cox, 1993), and The Whales of August (Anderson, 1987) gave me the opportunity to observe older women reflecting on their experience of aging and the way this experience impacted on their lives.

Finally as a geriatric counsellor, I regularly had the opportunity to meet with aging people to discuss the way in which they maintained a sense of themselves and struggled to find meaning in and make sense of their long lives. These contacts, often informal, gave me the chance to observe older people as they moved through their daily lives.

Each of these methods of immersion enabled me to surround myself with my research interest. Each helped keep this study alive and vibrant by creating a balance with the academic information I was reviewing in the literature.

Developing a Research Strategy

My interest in adding breadth and depth to the limited body of knowledge of very old women required research methods that were compatible with this inquiry. The qualitative research approach was chosen because it was ideally suited to focus on the "inner world" of the older woman, to reveal experiences as she actually understood them rather than as externally observed. In general, qualitative research methods are best suited to the search for meaning through the

interpretation and understanding of rich descriptions of experience (Morse, 1991). Various researchers (Kastenbaum, 1973; Neugarten, 1972,1985; Poon, 1980) have argued for adopting a wider variety of methods, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics, that allow for the possibility that older people themselves could more fully inform us about the experience of aging. For example, Neugarten (1985), while stressing the need for investigations in which small samples of adults are studied in detail, said, "if ever there was an area of inquiry that should be approached from the perspective of interpretive social sciences, research on aging is one" (p.294). Kastenbaum (1973) argued that "no matter how formidable the methodological challenge, old people do have their inner lives, and that we do not have a comprehensive gerontology unless we know something about this realm" (p. 702). Poon (1980) pointed out that one area that has received limited attention is the study of exceptionally gifted elderly and how to profit from their accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and experience.

Rowles and Reinharz (1988) maintained that qualitative descriptions are essential when studying individuals, situations that are unique, relatively unknown, or have become stereotyped. As older people's experiences become "alive" and an understanding of what it was like for them to be old emerges, these very old people can be emancipated from damaging, stereotypical agist images.

The expectation of the old to adhere to a prescribed social role was apparent when Florida Scott-Maxwell (1968) wrote: "My kitchen linoleum is so black and shiny that I waltz while I wait for the kettle to boil. This pleasure is for the old who

live alone. The others must vanish into their expected role" (p.28).

I did not approach the participants in this study as "objects of study" but, in the words of Carlsen (1991), as "human participants in the human journey" (p.ix). Their lives were not lived in bits and pieces but as a dynamic whole interconnected with others and with the world around them. This belief was the starting point from which many other methodological decisions were made. The methodology evolved as I and my study progressed and the tension was maintained between my research interests and the participants' shared experience.

A qualitative research approach in gerontology provides the opportunity to examine the experienced reality, the personal truth of age; to not only ask "How old are you?" but "What is it like?" and "What does it mean to you?"

Hermeneutics

An approach within the qualitative research paradigm which invites answers that describe personal experience and the freedom to explore the richness of this experience is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is based on the philosophical assumptions and writings of Heidegger (1962). Heidegger proposed a framework whose concern was to disclose and understand the meanings embedded in the everyday world of lived experience (Allen & Jensen, 1990). Everyday experience as it is lived is thus the focus of attention.

As a holistic strategy, hermeneutics seeks to study the person in the situation. According to Benner (1985) "meaning resides not solely within the individual nor solely within the

situation but is a transaction between the two so that the individual both constitutes and is constituted by the situation" (p.7). To understand meaning both the individual and the situation must be included in the collection of data. This kind of involvement allows no detachment. I too, could not place myself outside of the question that I sought to answer. The relationship between myself and each woman was dynamic, each of us reciprocally influencing the other.

Ricoeur (1981) has been credited with defining hermeneutics as a "system of interpretation" which makes clear or makes sense of an object of study. Allen and Jensen (1990) stated the following:

> The task, then, of modern hermeneutics is to describe and explain human phenomena. The purpose of hermeneutical description and explanation is to achieve understanding through interpretation of the phenomena under study. It is the written description of the phenomena (text) that is the object of interpretation. (p. 242)

The interview conversation, therefore, must be transformed from a dialogue to a written text. The character of the dialogue changes and is different from the text in important ways. Ricoeur (1981) referred to these differences as "distancing" (p.13). When the dialogue is transcribed into a written text it is the meaning of the speech event, not the event itself, that is preserved. In this way the text is

distanced from the speaker. Consequently, the text stands on its own. As it is free from the limits of the original audience, it is opened up to unlimited readings and no longer bound to the particular time and place in which the dialogue occurred. The text is now addressed to all readers and is freed from its context. It has moved beyond the descriptive nature of the interview to the possibilities of what the text may disclose through interpretation.

The meaning of the text is now construed as a whole. Allen and Jensen (1990) describe the text as having a "circular character" (p.243). The whole is implied in the recognition of the parts, alternatively, by looking at details, the whole is construed. The reader may now see the parts simultaneously as opposed to those engaged in the dialogue who only see the whole in retrospect. The text is more than "a linear succession of sentences; it is a cumulative holistic process" (Ricoeur, 1981, p.212).

Hermeneutical interpretation attempts to explain the internal relations of the text. It does this by first structuring the data into clusters of information based on their relationship to one another. The interpretation moves to an in-depth meaning of the text by establishing hierarchical relationships for various levels of integration of the parts in the whole. An understanding of the phenomena under study does not come from what the text describes but what the text discloses. According to Allen and Jensen (1990) the "task of hermeneutic interpretation is to critically examine the phenomenon in question, with the intention of gaining a deeper comprehension of that phenomenon" (p.244).

A hermeneutic interpretive approach has been chosen for my study to address the questions: How do these older women view their lives? How is their vitality expressed? What do they say about their experiences of being old? How is their passion and energy for life maintained in the face of the losses which accompany old age?

Participants

When designing the methodology of this study I was concerned with exploring an in-depth understanding of the meaning of what is said. Consequently, the number of participants was limited to three to allow for the depth of insight necessary to understand more fully the meaning of the participants' experiences. Each of the women chosen for participation lived in their own homes and were 82, 88 and 92 years of age at the time of the interviews.

The decision to interview a small number of participants made the selection of adequate and appropriate participants critical. To fit the needs of the study each woman had to be in her ninth decade or older, articulate and reflective, maintaining a vital and on-going connection to life, creative in her relationship to the dilemmas of age, and willing and able to share her experience with me. This portrait coincides with the general criteria established by Colaizzi (1978) of selecting participants who have the lived experience of the specified phenomenon and are able to articulate their experience as they live it in their daily lives.

As mentioned earlier in the section entitled Introduction, two of the participants were personal friends of mine and contributers to the inspiration for this study. The third participant was suggested to me by a friend. Each prospective participant was interviewed briefly before she was asked to participate.

Ethical Considerations

Reich (1978) described four essential ethical issues to be considered when conducting research with human participants. The first issue addressed the usefulness and necessity of the research. Older women's lives and experiences are invisible in our society. The usefulness and necessity of this study was to make visible three women's lives and experiences through their own words.

The second issue was the risk to the participant. Reich described this consideration as a "risk-benefit analysis" (p.327). It measured the proportionate risk to the participant against the expected benefit to society. The present study did not involve any apparent risk to the participants. They were free to guide the interview as they wished or, if necessary, discontinue it.

The third issue was concerned with the equity or discrimination of choosing participants for research. As noted earlier in the section entitled Significance of the Problem, until recently gerontological research tended to focus on the problems of aging selecting participants who were considered in need of help. Consequently, the full range of expectations and possibilities of aging was distorted. This study expands

gerontological knowledge by focusing on vital older women.

The fourth issue was the lack of informed consent of research participants. In this study care was taken to explain the intent of the research, describe the interview process and how the interview would be used in the study to each woman before her consent was solicited.

The in-depth interview format of this study enabled me to gain rich descriptions of the participants' experience. The interviews offered the opportunity to be known, to gain self-understanding, to give something to the other, as well as a chance to delight in the intersubjective nature of human understanding (Weber,1986). It also involved the risk of exposure.

Participants ran the risk of revealing more than they wanted to reveal. Although the interviews were private and confidential, they were also social and public. From the outset the women were informed that the purpose of the interview was to gain information about their lives that would become part of a written thesis. What began as an intimate conversation between two people is now finding its way into the public arena.

In the early stages of the written presentation of this study I referred to each participant by the title "Mrs." and then the initial of her surname. I decided that this title portrayed a formality and coldness that did not fit the personalities of these women. Each woman, then, was given the option of choosing a pseudonym for the purposes of the presentation of this study. Interestingly, each chose to be known by her true first name.

In conducting the interviews I found three areas of special consideration regarding the physical and mental health of these participants. The first was a concern for Aileen's stamina and fatigue as she had multiple health problems and was frail. Her interviews were initially scheduled in short segments while she was in bed. The number of interviews was not determined at the start. I asked her on several occasions during the interviews if she was too tired to continue. In fact, her interviews were the longest and were completed in two sessions.

The second consideration was Peg's blindness. It was necessary to read the interpretive analysis of her interview to her to elicit her comments and corrections. The third consideration was Mary's self-reporting and apparent concern that her memory was "not what it used to be" making me question that she would be, in fact, a credible participant. On one occasion Mary repeated a story in the second interview that she had told me in the first interview. There were no other apparent signs of memory difficulty that interfered with the purposes of this study and therefore, it no longer became a consideration.

Equally important as preserving the confidentiality of the participants in the study, is the commitment to present their lives as they revealed them to me. The interpretive nature of hermenuetical research and the reciprocity of the interview present a particular challenge to the researcher. Through the interpretive part of this study I endeavored to remain true to each participant's expression and meaning of her experience. I returned to two of the three participants with her interpretive portrait to allow each woman to make any changes, comments

or deletions she chose. Unfortunately I was unable to review Aileen's portrait with her as she died soon after the completion of the final interview.

Throughout the study I maintained an ethical commitment to the participants. It guided my actions and decisions and still continues as I bring this study to a close.

Data Collection

Consistent with the philosophical framework of this study, data were collected using open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, with a conversational tone. Two interviews were conducted with each participant. The first interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. The second interview, which lasted 45-90 minutes, was designed to clarify and deepen the responses of the first interview.

The nature and the quality of the interview was important. It was a dialogue, a joint reflection on a phenomenon, a deepening of experience for both interviewer and participant. The conversational interview style chosen for this research is not unlike the counselling interview. According to Kvale (1983), the main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what is said. It is not only necessary to listen to the directly expressed descriptions and meanings as well as what is "said between the lines" (p.175). Both the interview style used in this study and in the counselling milieu sought to understand the meaning of the central themes of another's life.

The participants were encouraged to express their views freely and expand on their comments whenever they wished. The in-depth interview invites statements of all sorts, not

just responses to specific questions. The aim was to have each woman speak with as much specificity as possible about her own experience in order to clarify what she meant.

Participants were asked initially to respond to the statement: "I am interested in finding out as much as possible about your experience of being an older woman. I am interested in what is important to you, how you spend your time, the relationship you have to others and what 'being an older woman' means to you."

Following Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) advice to be "truthful but vague" (p.25), I omitted the information that I had specifically chosen them because they exhibited a strong sense of self and positive, life-affirming connections with others and to the world around; qualities that I have termed authenticity and vitality. I anticipated that each woman would deny or reject the description that may have set them apart from others and made them special. I did not want this to influence the interview.

I endeavored to develop a sense of trust and comfort with each woman. This was greatly enhanced by the pre-existing friendship I had with two of the participants. The interviews were a blend of my inner commitment to my research topic and each woman's experience. According to Bergum (1991) the interview is not solely a search for research data but a mutual search for knowledge which holds the breadth and depth of wisdom.

Hermeneutic Interpretive Analysis

Even though the above sections on participant selection, data collection and this section on interpretive analysis are reported separately, the research method used did not entirely separate these three functions. The interpretive analysis began as soon as I began reflecting on the two women that I knew prior to this research and when a friend began describing the suggested third participant to me. When I entered each woman's home to conduct the interviews I began to learn about her in the context of her environment. What did she choose to have around her? What pictures were on her walls? Where did she sit and what did she wear? Tesch (1987) described this overlap of methodological stages when she stated, "The first data collection session already contains the seeds of what is usually termed the 'analysis' and new ideas continue right up to the writing of the results" (p.232).

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989) data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. This process does not proceed in a linear, organized fashion but tends to be "messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating" (p.112). The above adjectives aptly describe the movement that I choreographed through the approximately one hundred and fifty pages of typed transcripts culminating in the portraits of each of the three participants.

The transformation of the audio-taped interviews to written transcripts by use of a transcribing machine provided me with the opportunity to hear again each participant's story in her own voice. During this slow-paced review I took special

note of each participant's apparent ease or discomfort with the interview process, tone of voice, use of emphasis to highlight a point, hesitations in responses and laughter. After the transcription was complete, accuracy was checked while re-listening to the audio-tape. The above qualities were noted on the transcript.

The contact with the participant, data collection, transcription and the first phase of the interpretive analysis, in the form of a "portrait", were completed for each participant before going on to the next participant. In this way undivided attention was given to each participant's story and the temptation was lessened to compare and contrast the stories of other participants. Each woman's story was regarded as unique, personal experience.

The next stages of the interpretive analysis were created as the process unfolded. The guiding principle by which I proceeded through this mysterious process was the understanding of the meaning of these older women's lives through the interpretation of their voiced experience. Stahl (1989) maintained that the specific procedure of interpretation cannot be operationalized; it is too closely tied to the interpreter and his or her own interpretive context (p.29). This context is influenced by the purpose and insight of the researcher. My personal and ideological purpose was discussed in the section entitled Coming to the Question in Chapter One. My insight was informed by the literature review I conducted, anecdotal information and human intuition.

According to Bowles (1984) there is no such thing as a "detached, neutral, or objective place to stand when we know

something" (p.185). Throughout the many hours spent with the transcripts and interview audio-cassette tapes, I was keenly aware of maintaining a balance between the participant's words and stories and my role as interpreter. This balance became a narrow corridor where information taken from one side had to resonate with information from the other side. This visual image of a narrow corridor served as a reminder to stay in close contact with each side and not stray off in one direction too long.

The format of each transcript was a series of questions or clarifying statements by the interviewer and responses by the participant. As I read through the transcript of each interview I treated the participant's responses as a story or narrative of her personal experience. The first re-organization of the data was a brief, chronological life story constructed from the information given. This was helpful as an overview of time, place and events. These overviews are not included in the presentation of this study.

Using a highlighter pen, the next stage consisted of going over the transcript sentence by sentence and highlighting the statements that were particularly revealing about the experience being investigated. I paid attention to recurrent words, images and metaphors used by the participants. Tesch (1987) called this approach "panning" and described the "looking for precious elements, which take the form of descriptive expressions in the material that are at the center of the experience, those that address it's nature, or directly pertain to the phenomenon" (p.232). These highlighted statements or stories were re-read several times and initial clusters of compatible information were identified. A phrase

used by the participant that represented each cluster was used as the identifying heading. For example, when identifying the separate elements in the interview with Mary, I was struck by the passion with which she talked about her time spent living in Montana. The phrase "back to basics" appeared many times in her attempt to explain to me just what it was about her life in Montana that meant so much to her then and now. I titled a blank sheet of paper, "Moving to Montana: Back to Basics". On this page I recorded every reference in her interview that referred to this time and how her life continued to be influenced by her experience of living a rural lifestyle.

The transcript was read again and again until I was satisfied that each cluster of information or core theme was identified and transferred to separate sheets of paper. The remaining, unused portions of the transcript were not included in the analysis.

At this point I returned to the participant for the second interview with questions of clarification and elaboration formulated from the first interview. The process of transcribing, highlighting and clustering were repeated. The second interview was more focused and added richness and depth to the already identified descriptions or clusters.

The hermeneutic analysis of the text relied on a dialogical approach. By returning to the object of inquiry (the text) again and again, understanding grew and a more complete interpretive account unfolded. It was a shifting back and forth between the parts and the whole. The parts received meaning from the whole and the whole received sense from the parts. This shifting revealed new themes and new understandings. It

was not a search but a discovery. The initial understanding became refined and corrected by returning to the events studied and revising the interpretation. Each slow and careful reading of the written texts revealed more depth. In this way the themes that were important in each woman's life unfolded.

Throughout the writing and rewriting there was a constant search for deeper meaning. New questions emerged that I would ponder for days. For example, Mary's expression, "time is shrinking" initiated a deeper search. What did her description of time shrinking really mean? Listening to her say this on the audiotape over and over, asking friends what they thought of this expression and talking it over with one of the members of my thesis committee brought me to my present understanding described in Mary's portrait.

Understanding moved the interpretive analysis into the next level where the emphasis was not on what the text described but on what the text disclosed. According to Allen and Jensen (1990) interpretation and understanding are in a dynamic, dialectical and interactional relationship with one another; as the part unravels the whole, the whole takes on a new meaning. In this way understanding is an "unfolding process which rotates on itself" (p.245).

After all the portraits were completed I returned to two of the three participants for confirmation that the tone and emphasis that I had placed on their interviews fit with their experience. Neither Mary or Peg requested any critical changes be made to their portraits. Both commented that it felt "weird or strange" to read (hear) about their lives. Mary said she felt "important and bigger than life" and found her portrait "flattering" and somewhat "embarrassing". Peg said it sounded

a bit "goody-goody" but "it is kind of as I am".

It was difficult to not include the new information given during the feedback session. An inherent dilemma in a hermeneutic inquiry is establishing a stopping point where no additional information is added.

Trustworthiness

In the hermeneutic inquiry the construction of meaning may result in different interpretations by different readers. According to Rowan and Reason (1981) this does not present a problem as long as there is adherence to "a canon of interpretation" (p.133). This canon states that an interpretive account must seek to make the phenomenon "maximally reasonable in human terms" (p.134). By exploring and articulating the complexity of the phenomenon, the phenomenon may be understood "more clearly than by those actually engaged in it on a day to day basis" (p.134). Palmer (1969) characterized this view of an interpretive account as a search to understand not so much correctly, but more "deeply" and "truly" (p.215).

Establishing criteria by which qualitative research is evaluated is an essential element of the research design. These criteria must reflect the nature and purpose of the study. The findings in this study are descriptive in nature, representing one life perspective. The data are "of descriptive worth in and of themselves" (Krefting, 1991, p.214).

The trustworthiness criteria used in this study followed the outline of Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Four

crucial aspects were identified. These were "credibility", "transferability", "dependability", and "confirmability" (p.294-301).

The concept of credibility in qualitative research is based on the assumption that multiple realities exist in research and the researcher's job is to "represent those multiple realities revealed by participants as adequately as possible" (Krefting, 1991, p.215). I have presented evidence in the form of the participants' own words to describe and interpret the participants' experience and to support the conclusions. Packer (1989) stated that interpretive accounts are not undisciplined guesses and do not shoot beyond available evidence in speculative way. However, these conclusions remain open-ended as new information may change them.

Transferability, as presented by Guba (1981), refers to the "fittingness" of the research findings into contexts outside the study situation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that fittingness is more the responsibility of the person wanting to transfer the findings to another situation than that of the researcher of the original study. The researcher of the original study can make no statements about fittingness based solely on data from the studied context alone but can "supply that information about the studied site" that may make possible a judgment of fittingness to some other site (p.217). I have collected and developed "thick descriptive data" (Guba, 1981) that permits a comparison of the context of this study to other possible contexts.

Dependability in qualitative research implies "trackable variability" (Guba, 1981). Since qualitative research emphasizes the uniqueness of the human situation and

encourages unstructured and often spontaneous strategies, variation in experience is sought. Variability stems from the fact that qualitative research looks at the range of experience rather than the average experience. In this way the data are not necessarily consistent but are in fact credible if described and interpreted correctly. A detailed description of the method of interpretive analysis used in this study was put forward in the section entitled Hermeneutic Interpretive Analysis.

Confirmability of the study focuses on the relationship of the researcher to the study. The qualitative approach is reflexive in that the researcher is part of the research, not separate from it (Krefting, 1991). The distance between the researcher and the participant is decreased in order to increase the worth of the findings. Therefore, subjective involvement with the participants is valued (Sandelowski, 1986). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that it is important to discuss the underlying assumptions of the researcher and to document the shifts and changes in orientation to the study. Whenever appropriate, I have included my assumptions and changing orientation to this study.

Chapter 3: Portraits

Introduction

These portraits came out of of my reflection and interpretation of interviews with Aileen, Mary and Peg. The words belong to each woman. Each woman's story is unique, with its own tempo, style, individuality and wisdom. The portraits introduce each woman and tell her story in a way that reveals the landscape of her life, her situation and the context from which her words come (Bergum, 1991).

Aileen

Aileen was born at the turn of the century (1900) making her 92 and a half years old at the time of the last interview. She married late in life, never had children of her own, and had been widowed for approximately 20 years. She lived alone in the same house she had shared with her husband.

I do the best I can with what I've got.

After a brief description of my interest and before I had even asked a question, Aileen offered this declaration, "I don't want to look a pattern of an old person. So, I try not to." She refused to get a "perm", nor, it was obvious, did she colour her light brown, greying hair. Neither would she "talk about her aches and pains or her insides because there are too many other things to talk

about." Instead she believed in "doing the best with what you've got." What she had was a very quick and lively mind and a steady stream of friends through whom she extended her reach into the larger outside world.

Living a "really happy older life or a miserable one" presented itself as a choice to Aileen. This ability to choose a really happy older life went beyond a simple acceptance of aging and its limitations. It was not resignation or tolerance but intentional living. She had achieved a balance between her mind and her body and each day offered new challenges, another opportunity to choose between, in Aileen's words, "[to] say poor little me what am I going to do or I am going to enjoy myself."

Very old age brings varying degrees of physical changes. Aileen did not escape those changes. Her many health problems, limited mobility and dwindling energy prompted her to assess her life in new terms. In practical terms it meant creating places in her house where she could get to, were relatively comfortable and in which she could carry on most of the activities that were important to her.

Aileen had three places in her home that were her favourites. More and more of her time was spent in her bed. Her bright and cheery bedroom was converted by friends and neighbours from a dining room about 10 years ago. She had fallen and broken her hip and could no longer make it up the long, steep staircase to her old bedroom. From bed she could replenish her precious energy and with a telephone and radio close at hand insured she would have easy access to the outside world. Several times a day she moved into her tiny kitchen to make a cup of tea, to talk with her home support workers who had become a daily necessity, and to visit with her many friends who came by. Occasionally, in the evening,

she would move to her living room to watch television. There was only one chair that was comfortable enough for her to sit in and get out of easily. Each move from room to room was made slowly and carefully as she maneuvered on her two canes.

Even though she felt that she rarely thought about the age she had achieved, there were occasional reminders from her body that gave her a "swift kick." She recalled "looking in the mirror and nearly fainting" when referring to her aging appearance and the physical reality that she "can't even walk to the bottom of the drive." But the physical limitations and discomfort were not of consequence when weighed against the potential loss of mental ability. She suggested that her life would be very different if she "didn't have her marbles." She summed up the value she placed on her cognitive capabilities when she said, "from my neck down hurts all the time but from my neck up that's where I get all my enjoyment, so you can always take Tylenol for your body but you can't revive your brains with Tylenol!"

When I'm with people of 35, I think I'm 35!

A sense of agelessness accompanied much of Aileen's description of her life. When asked about her inner self, she replied, "I feel extremely ageless in my brain." While acknowledging her long life history and experiences, she enjoyed a chameleon attitude to her age. She described "thinking I'm 35 when I'm with people of 35." Age differences for her diminished when she was engaged with people. It wasn't an important aspect of the relationship. Her world was a multi-generational one and

she participated fully. When describing a delightful visit she'd had with an 8 year old boy the day before she said, "he entered my world or I did his; either way we had a wonderful time". Aileen didn't deny her aging by trying to act or appear younger but rather transcended her age. She became ageless in the part of her life that holds the most value for her; her relationships with people.

Often reminders of her age came from those around her. To illuminate this idea she told the story of a surprise 90th birthday party put on by the members of her church. After being lured to a friend's garden on a "roasting hot day" she was surprised by the congregation of her church. Men, women, children and babies, all wearing hats of some sort, awaited her arrival with a huge birthday cake. Through laughter she said, "well, if they had left me alone I would have still thought I was 40!" On reflection she said that if she could go back she wouldn't want to be 30 or 40 but 65. Sixty-five was a time in her life when she had learned "a certain amount but not nearly as much as you learn when you're my age." It was important to have gained some insight but still have more to learn. At 65 her body was healthier and stronger and she was very independent.

There was a very real sense of connection with young people in Aileen's life. She saw herself as a defender and mentor of the young. She expressed irritation when people talked disparagingly about the young today. She saw the young as, "wearing the most terrible clothes, dreadful clothes. They wash their hair 16 times a day 'til they got their hair washed away and wear these funny things but inside are these lovely kids. I love them"! Her world was a young world with people of all ages coming through her door. She said, "I find them stimulating and a whole pile of fun.

So I enjoy them. But then, when you're my age everything is young to you including the 60 year olds."

She tried to let the young people in her life know that she felt strongly about a lot of things. She hoped that "some how or other along the line when they're older" they would realize that she'd helped them. She was able to see past the outward appearances of the young and appreciate their inner loveliness. She expressed great empathy towards young people's difficult place in society and considered her role in her young friends' lives as a vital one. There was a strong sense of faith in the future through her connection with the young people in her life. Yes, the young may dress funny and appear different on the outside but on the inside, for those we take the time to know it, they are "lovely kids." Even though, Aileen never had children of her own she said, "you feel as if you have hundreds of grandchildren."

Her love of the young was even more pronounced by a dissatisfaction and frustration with some people closer to her own age. She recalled a recent conversation with an old friend who described her life as miserable enough to wish God would just "take her." This attitude was so alien to Aileen that she found conversations with this old friend depressing and exhausting. She expressed an on-going connection to her life and the world by saying, "I want to ask for an extension!"

This chameleon, whose perceived age shifts with the demands of different situations, also maintained an underlying sense of personal time having past and age in relation to others. Even though Aileen treasured her ability to feel as young as her friends, she acknowledged and enjoyed the benefit of what she saw as the privilege of old age. No longer was she restrained by

convention and narrow social roles. There is a powerful sense of Aileen's authenticity. Because of her 92 years of living she felt she could "get away with anything." To illustrate her point she said, " I love my [chimney] sweep, and I give him a hug and nobody says you mustn't do that. I can do anything and it doesn't make a hoot of difference." The idea of no longer being judged or constrained in accordance with society's conventions freed Aileen to be herself.

Along with this freedom to get away with anything was the desire to be honest with people especially when they were "being stupid." Describing an incident when a young friend used "shocking behaviour", Aileen felt responsible to "pull him up on it" because "he could do it to lots of people who'd never say anything to him and he would go on doing it." There was a deep sense of security in the relationship and trust that her friend would not be angry at her and would continue to love her. She was allowed on the strength of the relationship and her privilege of age to get angry with him, to tell him what he was doing wrong. She had an obligation and responsibility to straighten him out. It was for his own good to let him know when his manners were shocking. It was with great confidence that she said, "he loves me and we parted hugging each other."

Spiritual and self-knowing.

A "terrific faith" and a strong sense of a spiritual life were extremely important to Aileen. She believed a spiritual life is important for young and old alike and expressed sadness that some of the young "don't know the value of the spiritual life and how much it can do for them." She had recently had an

"extraordinary experience" and offered to share it with me:

> I have a lot of young friends who I have known all their lives. This one happens to be really quite a close young friend of mine. He's an outdoors person a bit of a loner. He likes canoeing in Mexico and California. Anyway, he's been to see me quite a bit since I've been ill this last time. He turned up on Sunday in a funny old T-shirt and funny old sneakers. He came and he calls me Auntie. I said "hello, dear, how lovely to see you." He bent down, he said, "Auntie, I have such a desire to say a special prayer for you because I love you so." Down he goes on his knees beside me, holds both my hands, with his arms sort of almost around me, and he said the most *exquisite* prayer. He's only 28 and sort of an extemporaneous prayer of love and sweetness. Then put his arms down and hugged, the tears in his eyes. Really this is true. And off he went. That's experience when somebody young does that. It wasn't the ordinary stereotype thing. It was something very special and he had tears in his eyes and so did I. So it's those kinds of things that are so wonderful.

To share a precious moment with another, one that spans age, life experience, and life style, is a "wonderful thing." All differences pale in light of the moment of sameness, of giving and of receiving. This moment, this spontaneous prayer, was truly a gift of love and acceptance for both the giver and receiver.

The ability to be vulnerable with someone requires great trust and understanding. This young man's confidence that his gesture would be understood in the spirit in which it was offered was testimony to their relationship and knowledge of each other. Aileen's spiritual strength came from deep within her. She could not think of a time when she didn't have it. She grew up with it, lived her life in a way that demonstrated it and passed it on to the younger people in her life. She described living a spiritual life as a way of "looking at everything through spiritual eyes. It gives you another dimension somehow." For her the great mysteries of life, the "migration of birds or how a little thing like a hummingbird can stuff itself" were proof of the existence of this other dimension.

She expressed bewilderment at people who professed to be atheists or agnostics. What puzzled her was how they could account for these mysteries of life and the wonderment she felt when people shared heart-warming stories with her. These stories were important to her and she shared them with others. They enhanced her belief and she passed them on to others as a gift.

Her earliest sense of a spiritual identity was imbedded in special memories remembered from her childhood. She recalled walking along a lane in England as a very young child, clinging to her father's hand, she said, "Daddy, could you tell me something about the stars? He said, 'Don't you know about the stars? Well, it's easy. God's made holes in the floor of heaven so you can see the bright light. That's why stars are there, they're little holes in the floor of heaven that God's put there for you to see.' " Aileen continued, "and I used to look up and think, isn't that wonderful, here is this bright light in heaven and there are holes for me to

see! Isn't that sweet?" This was a memory of 85 years or more recalling the beginnings of her spiritual beliefs.

She lived by the philosophy that "love is the essence of the spiritual life." As a way of distinction she said, "To love someone in a spiritual way is quite different than loving them in a sexual way. They are two different loves." She credited her parents with her ability to love people saying, "I grew up with lots of love and I'm grateful for it and perhaps it's not difficult for me to love people, it's easy because I've had a lot of it myself." Her philosophy extended out from love to forgiveness to helping others. She said, "that's what it's all about. Quite simple, not difficult, is it?" Her unconditional love of others showed itself in an intense interest in their lives; who they were and what they believed. The fact that her love was returned by a great many was attested to by the constant flow of people who called, wrote or walked through her door. Arranging an interview time when no one else would be at her cottage was a feat in itself!

Although loving and helping others were the outward manifestations of Aileen's being, there was another strength that emerged from her core. This was a sense of her personal identity. While discussing the confidentiality of her participation in this study she exclaimed, "I honestly couldn't care less [about her confidentiality]. What I say, that's me!" She had a deep inner respect for herself. This was apparent in the confidence she had when she spoke about the role she played in people's lives, her acceptance of not only being important but what she had to say being important, her pride in her lively mind and the tenacious hold she had on life. She had something to offer the world and she had no doubt she made a difference. She had opinions, showed

tolerance of other opinions but never lost sight of her own. She could hold her ground when differences emerged trusting that there was room for both. She was a valid person who counted. She deserved to have people care about her and want to be with her. She was very proud of her political knowledge, her sense of being in touch with the world and had an avid interest in the future. She was fascinated by a report of a "space ship that's going to the end of the universe" and frustrated that she couldn't get someone to explain "when it gets to the end, what happens"? To her, advanced technology was "*absolutely incredible*" and "sort of half scares me." Since it was projected to take 15 years for this space ship to reach the end of the universe, she concluded that, "when it comes to the end it boggles me because I won't be here." She laughingly added, "maybe I'll be at the end. I'll say, 'here it comes, I've been here long enough waiting for you guys. What's the matter with you!'" When reflecting on her long life she said, "It annoys me that I'm the age that I am because I know perfectly well that I'm not going to live to 200 like Methusla or however long he lived. It annoys me because there's a lot of things I want to see." She went on to explain it wasn't places or things but, "to know where we go from here."

Throughout our conversation Aileen consistently expressed her desire to "keep going." At one point she said:

> You know, you look back on your life and think of all the people you've met, interesting people, bad people, good people, the countries you've lived in and you think how lucky you are. And this is what bothers me about having to pop off. I'm not particularly keen to go I don't want to leave where I am. I'm really happy.

This wish did not stem from a fear of death but an enduring and strong connection with life. One important reason she wanted to continue living was her many friends that she had "no desire to leave." She joked about the possibility of taking them with her but felt that they wouldn't want to come so she had "no choice but to keep going to the best of [her] ability."

Making a life in my little cottage in the bush.

During the last several years as Aileen's health and mobility changed, she responded to her lack of independence with flexibility and creativity. She remarked that her "life now is so different, it's really different. Well, considering now I can't walk to the bottom of the drive, and I can't get on a bus and if I got on I wouldn't be able to get off and it would be hopeless so that's out." Her involvement with society slowly transferred from a physical one to an intellectual and emotional one. Her world now revolved around her home, the friends who brought vitality and life into it and her radio programmes that connected her to the outside world. She said, "I'm entirely [dependent] on my friends to get from A to B. So I have to make a life in my little cottage in the bush."

Not having children of her own meant that she had to create her own family. Her daughters were "all you adopted ones all round here. They're the ones who look after me." If she had a problem, she was confident that "somebody will come to my rescue. I shall make dead sure of it. I mean it seriously." Aileen expected that her friends would be there when she needed them and trusted that

they would do their best for her. Three weeks prior to our conversation Aileen had been very ill and close to death. In reflecting on that time she said, "I found out how marvelous people can be. Really, I did. Now, I'm grateful."

A consequence of Aileen's long life was her sense of ever-dwindling energy. It was necessary to conduct both interviews while she sat up in bed in her housecoat. Physical energy was precious and she reluctantly picked and chose how she would use it. (The evening before the second interview she had gone out with friends to Butchart Gardens to see the Christmas lights and she had to spend the next day recuperating.)

But her energy never seemed to falter when it came to her interest in people. Throughout both interviews Aileen remarked that she was fascinated by people and found them incredibly interesting. There was a noticeable increase of animation in her gestures and strength in her voice when she spoke about the many people in her life and the anticipation of new people coming in to her life. Her increased frailty and consequent reduction in activity created the conditions for an intense involvement with people in her life. The two days that I spent conducting the interviews and the countless other times I was in her home, I observed that each time someone came to the door or called on the telephone that person received her full attention. During the second interview I remember thinking that I was engaged in a "battle of the interview." She was attempting to ask me as many questions as I was asking her! The value Aileen placed on her personal relationships with people was reflected in the choice to channel her severely limited physical energy into these relationships.

Although she had "terribly sad things to go through, and a lot of suffering" she cherished the lessons she had learned. One important teaching was the belief that everyone has talents, has gifts to offer the world. People are "like a jigsaw puzzle. You're fitted into a place and you go into different places and then you get into theright one. I know I have a gift because I can talk to anybody. A lamp-post or a chair or anything. I can talk and I must use it."

This ability to "talk to anyone" was part of her personal identity, the way she described herself. It had generated a large and very diverse group of friends and a richness of life surrounding her. From rambunctious children to misunderstood teen-agers to people in their 40s and 50s that she had "known all their lives" and "oldies" closer to her age, each brought with them a small piece of the outside world to share with her. Each took away a sense of being heard and known by Aileen. Her questions probed deeply into one's soul. "How do you feel about the execution by hanging in Washington," she asked me before I'd even gotten my coat off. "What do you think of people using first names with people they just meet," referring to something she'd just been listening to on the radio. "How would you resolve the conflict between the Serbs and the Bosnians"? In return she shared her thoughts and beliefs coupled with the experience of almost a century of living. These exchanges touched a depth that rarely happens between people, even friends.

Aileen was a collector of stories. She used them often in the interviews to illustrate a point. The stories she chose to share in the interview had a similar theme. Each portrayed humanity at its best. They were important to her because they touched an inner

goodness in people, a sense of innocence or faith. These stories enhanced her own personal philosophy of life and spirituality. By passing them on to the young she carried on an age-old tradition of an older and wiser generation helping the young cope with life's challenges. As well, she maintained her hope for the future. She was a channel of hope, a source for those whose faith was tested, and a creator of hope by seeing the goodness in others.

The collection and telling of these stories was a reciprocal relationship. Most of the stories were related to her by friends. Why did they also choose to share stories with happy endings, with heart-warming innocence, with a glimpse into the most precious, vulnerable parts of humanity? Was it because they felt certain that their stories would be understood in the same spirit in which they were being told? Her little kitchen became a safe refuge to grapple with the harshness of the outside world. She didn't insulate herself but listened intently to the constant stream of world events brought to her on the radio. She then tried to make sense of the world with the help of her friends, surrounding and cushioning the harshness with stories of goodness.

As I think about this vital, extraordinary older woman, I wonder what it was about her life that most reflected who she was. What story would I tell to others so that they might have a glimpse of her. Her words came back to me when she had described a woman she'd known for almost 70 years. She said, "she has a tremendous amount of money. I mean really rich and lives in an immaculate house which has white furniture. The whole thing is immaculate and *lonely*." She went on, "and I thought, I live in this tiny cottage, that's in a continual state of confusion and it gets worse!

The kitchen they call the piggery! It's getting more and more piled up with stuff but it doesn't matter. When it gets too bad somebody tidies it all up and I can't find anything!" Laughing she says, "oh, golly!"

I would tell the story of her "piggery", the heart of her house, the heart of her life. You reach it by driving up her long and curvy driveway to her little cottage in the bush. You enter through the back door (no one uses the front one). This door brings you directly into her tiny kitchen. She still has the original oil cookstove which also heats the kitchen. She spends most of her days sitting at her chrome and arborite table. Her chair is covered with worn pillows to offer a little more comfort to her old, achy bones. The other chair is placed for visitors. I swear I can almost feel the warmth of the previous body probably departing just minutes before my arrival. In front of her on the table and growing up the back wall is a huge, disorganized pile of "important things." She has a little shelf at the back of the table to help organize these things -- correspondence in different piles, to be answered, already answered but too precious to throw out, pictures sent and to be shared with others, bills to be paid. This little shelf has long ago outlived it's ability to cope. Little boxes have been brought in to supplement the system. Shoe boxes bulge with old letters, cards. Unused birthday cards waiting for the next occasion, tape, wrapping paper and ribbons and paints, coloured pens and crayons to decorate the envelope or distract a cranky child. At the corner of the table is the telephone. You hope it doesn't ring before you've had your visit. Bordering the shelf are little boxes of chocolates, dried fruit, gifts from visitors left to share with others. A cup of tea by her elbow and the latest

out-going correspondence in progress is usually how I find my friend.

For as long as I've known her she has referred to this part of her kitchen as the "piggery." She talks seriously about cleaning it up, once and for all organizing it, and how far it is encroaching on to the eating space of the table. Then she laughs because you know and she knows that will never happen. Her piggery is who she is! All the love that comes to her and goes out from her passes through this spot. The heartfelt, caring letters to her from people who love her are testimony to her ability to touch your soul. Her thoughtful, colourful replies are treasures to all who are lucky enough to receive one. Her piggery is her "heart station", open to all who stop to share with this old lady of 92.

Mary

Mary was 82 and a half and had been widowed for less than 2 years at the time of the interviews. She lived in the home she and her husband bought soon before his death. Her treasured companions were her two dogs. She was in excellent health and lead a very physically active life. She had four grown children.

Getting the message out.

What do the activities someone engages in tell us about who they are? For Mary, the way she chose to spend her time and the activities that were important to her reflected a value system that remained relatively constant throughout her life. Each activity was carefully chosen and measured as to its usefulness

towards one consistent goal -- the preservation of the planet.

Mary's commitment to "getting the message out" about the changes necessary for planetary survival were tangible in her every day existence. On her coffee table sat neatly arranged piles of the latest peace and environmental publications. She subscribed to 64 of them. Her book shelf was full of books on the same subject. If a book was particularly informative she frequently bought several copies and distributed them to people she thought would read them, be influenced by their message and pass them on to others. Her calendar, which she jokingly said looks like it has a "bad case of acne," was full of meetings to attend, promises to fulfill, places to be and people to see. For many years she was the one that the many organizations, of which she was a member, counted on to organize events, set up literature tables, bring the latest information to share, write letters and provide the "tremendous tonnage of literature" that had been the vehicle by which she shared information. She had spent countless hours reproducing this information, once by cajoling and encouraging her aging, antique Gestetner which, for sentimental reasons, still occupied space in her basement, and now in front of a photocopying machine.

Mary felt strongly that we have "worked ourselves into an endangered state," and that it was imperative that we "change the environmental system, the justice system and convert our deadly thinking to another kind" or she "doubts that we will be here much longer." After so many years of social activist work and her growing conviction that we are "on the wrong track," she expressed her frustration and feelings of disbelief when she said:

> I don't understand this inability to grasp the sentence that we are all living under about being near the end if we don't do something. We owe it to the animals, we owe it to the planet to try to redeem what we were given by way of brains and flesh and gorgeous resources without despoiling them like we are doing so desperately.

In an effort to explain how we have moved on to the wrong track, Mary proposed that as we have become "more and more technological and farther away from self-sufficiency, [we have] developed the kind of impersonality, the lack of relationships that used to be so common place." She pointed to the violence in our social system that had become so acceptable as an example of "something missing from our ability to have the kind of relationship with one another that makes animals survive and other living forms. We've gone beyond all that into an unreal condition."

When speculating on what drove her to keep going, to be so dedicated, she was astonished that other people were not as concerned. Her response to the planetary situation was the rational and appropriate one in light of the present condition. Although she clearly saw the steps necessary to alter this destructive path, she was not unrealistic about the depth of the change that would be expected of each person. She expressed this by saying, "I feel as though there is very little chance that I'm getting through to anybody about what seems important to me" because she realizes the "tremendous ordeal" the change she was suggesting would mean for people. She saw aspects, even in her own life, where the change would be difficult for her now but

says, "I would willingly do it if there were other people with me in it and it seemed to make a significant change to the planet itself." The depth of Mary's dedication resounded in her words when she said, "The belief that this is the only way to go, haunts me night and day. I know that I have to keep trying with every bit of energy I have to get something happening."

Getting the message out had taken many different creative avenues. During the 1960s, every Saturday, she and her husband stood on the busiest intersection in the city where they lived and held up a very large, home-made, anti-war placard. Mary laughingly told the story of two women, who, every Saturday, "dressed up with earrings, high heels and modish clothes would arrive, stop right in front of [her husband], look at him and say, 'stuff it! '" Rather than being affected by these two women's disapproval, Mary found the regular interchange quite amusing. The decisions that she had made all along in her life had been based on her beliefs and values and rarely influenced by the expectations of society. For her, making her views public on a controversial issue, "seemed like the most normal thing in the world to be doing. Expressing yourself so that more than your next door neighbour or your best friend knew what was in your mind and seemed important to you."

Through all the dedication, the hard work and the humour there was a discomforting sense of futility that permeated Mary's spirit. Her sense of urgency coupled with her realistic appraisal of the profound attitudinal change necessary to accomplish this change made her "pessimistic about what's ahead." Her reluctance to express her pessimism was apparent when she said, "I don't want anyone to give up and I don't want to give up myself and I won't, as long as I can do anything [but] it's getting to be quite

perplexic how to maintain one's equilibrium in the face of all the negative things."

A sense of balance and hope helped maintain Mary's equilibrium. A delicate balance existed between her belief of impending doom if we continued on the same path of materialism and planetary destruction and the living of her own life simply and purposefully along with her joy in the lives and accomplishments of her children and grandchildren. The greater her appreciation and enjoyment of the gifts of nature, the greater her urgency to alter the path of destruction. Mary spoke of this balance when she said:

> The whole thing piles up in my mind as one hideous tragedy even though I am enjoying it. I'm enjoying being here and I don't consider leaving just because it is unpleasant and not promising at all. I just keep hoping that maybe there is a little glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel and that people will wake up in time to save the birds and the snakes and the fish. I don't feel very hopeful at the moment but that doesn't mean that there isn't hope. I don't see it all necessarily. I'm not omnipotent!

Moving to Montana: Back to basics.

When Mary was about to graduate from university she went into the employment office and said, "I want to do something interesting and not what probably sounds interesting in this office." She had not anticipated how her life would change with the job offer she got.

She took a job teaching Braille to a young girl in Montana who

had fallen off her horse and was now blind from the head injury. The trip by bus from Massachusetts to Montana was the beginning of a new life and, "nothing has been the same since. And, it was just great."

Adjusting to a rural lifestyle was the beginning of Mary's connection to the "basics" of life. She was brought up in an urban centre in an "academic and super sophisticated family" atmosphere. She expressed her immediate love of a rural lifestyle when she said, "after I'd been to Montana, that was it. Then I knew that something was much more real than golf clubs and putting greens."

What was real, for Mary, was the direct involvement with the land for survival. Hauling water from the well, separating the cream and making butter, growing a garden and raising animals were all part of "learning how to be self-sufficient [by] doing everything in a basic sort of way." Some parts of this adjustment were more difficult than others, such as having to see the pigs that she'd raised be killed, but she said, "I knew that I had to become accustomed to certain activities that were foreign to me and to all those things that were just so normal to people who had lived on ranches and farms all their lives."An important part of that self-sufficiency was the opportunity and challenge to discover "all sorts of way to improve life and use your ingenuity." She described their refrigeration system as "a large barn made of logs that was full of sawdust and ice cakes. We cut ice on the rivers and creeks in the winter time and stored them in this sawdust."

She discovered aspects of herself she never would have had the opportunity to discover if she'd stayed in the city. This rural

lifestyle felt right for her. The challenge to learn the ways of ranching life, to use her ingenuity and invent ways to improve their lives she described as "captivating." The ultimate goal of learning the ways of the land and cooperating with nature was "keeping alive." The strength of her attachment was summed up in her statement, "I hated leaving there. It was a great disappointment that we couldn't keep on with it for ever and ever."

Her commitment to the basics has been an enduring one. Her house is simple and functional. Kitchen gadgets are noticeably absent. Two small tables she made 50 years ago while living on the ranch are still essential pieces of her living room furniture. There is a warm, familiar feel to her living space. Objects of art and decoration, gifts from family and friends, each have a story of their own. In the 20 years that I have known her very little has changed. She has moved several times, mostly to accommodate her husband's failing health, but the important things around her have remained the same.

However, her present lifestyle is a compromise. She declared emphatically, "I'd rather go back and be simple again and belong to a community that had a composite feeling and exercise to change things." For Mary, the ideal living arrangement would be:

> ....belonging to a community that is on a level of perspection, harmonious with the needs of the planet, the environmental and practical aspects of being alive. I look at all these magazines and the stuff that comes in the paper, the emphasis on having your hair slick and gorgeous and having the right clothes for the season and all that sort of thing

> and it makes me almost ill to realize how little people understand how much more important it seems to me the days when I used to haul water out of a hole in the ground and hang a bucket on the wall with a hose heading out of it to take a bath and cook my meals on a very old-fashioned woodstove.

Aging: Shrinking time.

"I was not aware of getting old until I discovered that time was disappearing" was the way Mary described her experience of aging. This experience had influenced all aspects of her life. She no longer had time to garden or make furniture. Her political work had been streamlined to keep it simple. This loss was tangible when she said:

> I think the older I get the more I realize that I'm failing to function as I once could and would love to be doing. I used to be so much more active in a constructive fashion than I am now. I used to be advancing all sorts of new ideas like the composting toilet that we had. Time has vanished, shrunk. I think that's probably a part of aging. You can't see it happen but it comes to you no matter what you do.

Mary measured this sense of vanishing time by the event. Each request on her time had to be weighed carefully. Her ability to accomplish many things in one day, to move quickly between one thing and another and to focus on more than one thing at a time

was no longer possible. Time, for Mary, was measured in the number of things she accomplished. If less got accomplished in a day, then there was less time in that day.

Changes to her ability to remember things as well as she once had, she thought, made it necessary for her to keep her commitments simple and few in number. When determining the particular areas of her life that had been affected by aging she said, "forgetting is one of the things, memory, wow, my top story is just a muddle." She now was only willing to commit herself to those things that she knew she could accomplish. To explain how this change had affected her life she gave an example of a recent request that she had to decline. She was asked to house and host a guest lecturer coming from out of town to give a talk to a local environmental group. She was already committed to something else that day and described how her life had changed by saying, "now, ordinarily, a long time ago, I would have figured out a way to work it in all together. But it's too complicated now."

Mary responded to the changes in her memory in a realistic and responsible way. She spoke about a plan that she had that she felt would be very helpful in bringing together many groups and organizing information in a much more efficient way. But she was unwilling to initiate this plan unless she knew that "there would be other people besides [her] in a position of responsibility, willing to be responsible because [she was] getting so forgetful." She didn't think that "being in charge in a sort of office would be a very good idea if anyone was going to count on [her] to be responsible."

Mary acknowledged that aging was a "mystery" to her, something she "didn't know about." When reflecting on "not feeling as old as I see other people feeling old" she speculated that, "it

might just be stubbornness on my part." To explain this mystery she said, "I am 82 a half and I don't feel that I am as handicapped as a lot of people I know who are 82 and a half. And yet, I also have some friends who are 85 and 86 who are tremendous performers, poets and peaceniks, doing all sorts of things."

The activities Mary chose to engage in had not changed with the coming of older age. She hadn't experienced a decline in her physical vigor nor a desire to withdraw her involvement in her many activities. Her changing memory had meant a re-organization of her commitments to allow her to focus on one at a time and to concentrate on the things that do not require complex memory skills. She emphasized her continuing commitment when she said, "I realize that I've lost touch in small particulars but certainly not with the issues themselves. It seems to me even more important than it once did because I can see the end closer."

Self-in-relation.

Who is this woman apart from her whirlwind of activity and passionate commitment? Mary described her experience of living alone for the first time in her "entire life" by saying, "I don't know where I am." She used the spatial reference of where to describe her feeling of detachment from others. Mary explained this detachment as a loss when she said, "all of the experiences of my life have been in the midst of other beings and responsible to and for our relationships. I miss that." Not being in the "midst of other beings" was felt by Mary as a physical loss, a difficulty in orienting herself.

Her ability to provide the tangible, sustaining elements of life

depended upon the physical existence and needs of others. Her "refrigerator would get empty" if she wasn't certain that her daughter and family would be there for dinner occasionally. She expressed this lack of connection with her own needs by saying, "I don't know what to have for dinner. I often forget to have dinner because something else interests me more." She described how she had resolved the problem of forgetting to eat by letting her two dogs, "tell me that it is my dinner time when it is their dinner time. So we all eat together. They eat there [pointing to bowls in the corner of the living room] and I eat sitting in this chair listening to the news!" For her, the dogs have "supplanted the family that I used to plan for, feed and take care of" and she considered them members of the family. Having the dogs to feed, walk and take care of had helped to ease the transition to living alone when her husband died 2 years ago. Even though caring for two dogs could be seen as an unneeded responsibility, she remarked on the joy they bring to her life when she said, "I love their companionship and I love seeing how they react to various things that happen."

She summed up her feelings of adjustment to living alone by saying, "It really is like starting over and thinking for myself for the first time and not for other people. It's not easy." Her sense of herself had been a reflection mirrored back to her by the needs and presence of others in her life that depended on her.

She expressed an acceptance of this adjustment because she just, "takes for granted that things change and that you establish what seems like a reasonable relationship with enough other people to keep going. I don't think that there is anything very tangible about what I can say on this subject, not that it worries me greatly."

There was a reluctance for Mary to think about herself apart from her commitment to the preservation of the planet and the activities she engaged in to that end. Getting the message out was paramount to her. Questions I asked of her that directly inquired about her experience of herself took her by surprise. She answered, "I'm so unused to thinking in terms relating to me that I haven't really sat down and had to figure it out." Her sense of self, now, was in relation to the commitment she had to the future. In response to my speculation that she may feel "guilty" if she spent more time on herself she answered, "Definitely. When I find myself kind of gliding into this kind of thought I say, 'come on now'. It's important for me not to waste much time thinking about my clothes, my food as long as I'm clothed and fed!"

This reluctance to focus on self was consistent with her commitment -- her commitment is who she is. It would be counterproductive to all that's she's saying and believes in to focus on herself. She simply said, "I don't have time to think!" She had an urgent message to share.

When I asked her how she would describe herself to someone else, she laughingly replied:

> Horrors! Well, I must say that I am always surprised at the indifference I find at what I am trying to say among most people. I have certain friends that harmonize with me but I feel that we are quite exclusive as far as the broad world is concerned and I'm sure that I am regarded and that I regard myself as some sort of a weird exception that doesn't need to be listened to because I am not speaking in the common tongue. I hope to be able to reach a few people that haven't already said, 'oh well, she's cuckoo!'

The ability to imagine how other people perceive her, to joke about it and dismiss it portrays a very solid self-identity. Her sense of self had enabled her to lead her life according to her convictions rather than by society's expectations. Her identity was not unknown to her but rather, she chose not to focus on it and used it to further what was important to her.

Peg

Peg was 88 years old and lived alone with her cat in her home close to the ocean. Her eyesight had gradually diminished until at the time of the interviews she was considered legally blind. Although she had some on-going pain in her leg from a fall, she lead an active life and spent most days in her garden.

Life in a beach community.

A sense of belonging may not happen often in one's life time and for some may not happen at all. For 35 years Peg was part of a community that she still felt connected to. They were her people. In this community she was at home. She still included herself when she used "we" to refer to the community she left 22 years ago. Leaving was not a choice. After 35 years of hard work, turning 65 acres of wilderness into her home and a business of rustic tourist accomodation, the government appropriated her land to be included in a wilderness park. There was bitterness in her voice when she said, "you can't get to my property now. The bush is all grown over and I don't want to get in anyway. All the work that we put into it and it's all not there. They burned everything."

It took three years for her to finally get financial compensation for her land. How could she replace 1/4 mile of oceanfront? In search of new land, she was discouraged because "everything looked horrible, it didn't look right."

Her land on the ocean was originally bought by her and her husband during the mid-1930s. Together they began an ongoing struggle to clear enough land for their own use. When describing the land she said:

> There was nothing there, you realize, when we bought the property. There was an old shack on top of the hill which we lived in the first winter. The wind blew in and out. We put cardboard and anything we had around and propped it up at the back because we thought it was going to blow over.

When I commented that she and her husband were "real adventurers" she laughingly changed it to "real crazy!" They built their first house for $75. The only materials that they purchased were the windows and the flooring. The rest was "scrounged" from the beach. Scrounging was part of the community lifestyle. She said, "if you wanted something you just had to go out and look for it." She didn't have to look too far. Freighters that went by her property "would lose their deck load when it was stormy. So it was beautiful lumber." Being part of a community that was always on the lookout for something useful, she was quick to add, "We often worked all night getting it or somebody else would take it! Everybody had piles of stuff."

The early years of the Depression were a useful preparation for her resourcefulness. Alone and barely 20 years old she moved to California because there was "nothing to do in Canada and California looked a little brighter." She chose the warmer part of the state and "practically lived on avocados because they were so cheap." She learned that she could rely on herself. Her self-reliance grew out of the necessity to "do whatever you could do to make a nickel." She described that time as "rough going" but added "I always survived."

Ten years later she returned to Canada to help care for her dying father. She met her future husband and they gathered together enough money to pay cash for their oceanfront land. Even though they only spent $300 that first year, including the cost of their house, Peg remembered it as "living on luxury things." They had crab, salmon and clams right from the beach. At the time of the interview she still had the original grocery list she sent to the Hudson Bay Company during that first year. They didn't own a car, in fact, there was only one vehicle in the whole area. There were no roads near their property and the dirt roads closer to town were impassable during the winter. Supplies had to last at least 3 months. That first order cost them $25!

Occasionally, in the winter, someone "walking through" would appear out of the bush bringing their mail and greetings from town. This occasion was mutually beneficial as the "walker" got a warm, dry rest, a cup of tea and a snack.

For ten years Peg and her husband worked together building first one home and then another, creating a small tourist business of rental cabins and holding back the ever-encroaching forest. When they collected enough building materials it was time to

build another cabin. Before they began they would go down to the beach at low tide and draw a pattern. By drawing the cabin to scale on the beach, she remembered, "[we could] mentally put the furniture in different places and see if that would work. If it didn't, you changed the house or changed the furniture or the cupboards. [That way] you didn't build the wrong thing."

Reflecting back, at age 88, on that time in her life there remained a great sense of accomplishment, of satisfaction. But more than that Peg spoke about her experience as being a "pretty good foundation for everything else." In answer to a question about how she now maintained such an independent lifestyle she said:

> ....doing something from scratch, like we bought the land and clearing it, there were no power saws or things like that. Sawing down the trees, burning the stumps, clearing the land and at the end of the day you could look and you might have a section the size of the rug (indicating her living room rug) cleared because the salal was way over your head. Building the house ourselves with hammers, nails, saws, levels and a square, that's it! I think that leads to a pretty good foundation for everything else. You've done it! You realize that you can, out of practically nothing, but hard work, build something.

The value Peg placed on her self-reliance and resourcefulness was apparent when she said, "I wouldn't trade my life with the life of kids today. I think they are pampered, push button creations. If we had a depression today half the kids would starve

because they have no knowledge."

Having easy access to a grocery store was still something Peg hadn't gotten used to. While living on the beach much of their food had to be canned, whether it was home grown, gathered from the natural gifts of the sea and forest or ordered every 3 or 4 months from the Hudson Bay Company. One especially fond memory was the yearly razor-back clam canning done right on the beach. Friends would gather together to dig up 500 or so clams, clean them and then bottle them in clean jars over bonfires on the beach. Often the process took well into the night. Reflecting on the comraderie she felt with her community she said, "it was a good life, interesting, and you met lots of good people."

There were very few paycheques coming in to the people in the community so "you automatically shared with others and they shared with you. You never threw anything out because if you didn't want it somebody else would." She remarked that she'd recently been driven through an affluent section of the city where she now lived. It was garbage collection day and her disapproval was apparent when she said, "It's pathetic. Everything was out there, even bicycles. And I was thinking, well, you could make a cart with the wheels, you could do something with it but they don't."

The peace and tranquillity of that little ocean community changed abruptly with the coming of the Second World War. Roads suddenly sprung up. An airport was planned and her husband obtained a job as a surveyor. Military personnel brought their wives and families to live in their cabins; some even built cabins on Peg's property. The coast became "a very busy place" as the military prepared for the possibility of an invasion. Even though

the residents were suppose to move, nobody did. Peg jokingly recalled that, "we thought the salal was so thick that they [the invaders] would never find us!"

The expected invasion never came and after the war ended the beach community gradually returned to its former tranquil atmosphere. However, the following year a surprise discovery was to change Peg's life forever. Her husband discovered a big bomb that had washed up on the beach. They notified the Navy and a boat of Navy men was sent out to defuse it. Instead of landing in town and being driven out to the beach, the crew decided to land directly on the beach. They made it in and defused the bomb. However, on their way back out, the boat capsized. Peg and her husband struggled to save the Navy men's lives. Her husband and one of the men drowned.

After telling me this story, Peg considered how she had made the decision of what to do next when her husband died so suddenly. She remembered thinking:

> ....you should never pull all your roots up when anything happens because then you have nothing. So I thought I would give it a year and see how I could manage because, you know, it really was in the bush. And I did. I saw I could manage and so, I stayed until the government kicked me off.

"Having something" for Peg was having her land. Her roots were there. A connection to this land and to this community were already established.

Peg lived on her property another 25 years. She continued the dream that she and her husband had begun. She learned to hold the

wood with one hand and hammer the nail with the other. She finished the cabins and rented them to people traveling through or to city people who wanted an adventure. She worked to hold her ground against the persistent forests. She grew food and preserved her harvest. She maintained close ties with the community and strengthened the bonds that had begun.

Making the transition.

After Peg's land was appropriated by the government she set out to find a new home. Nothing seemed to compare to her oceanfront property. Finally she bought a small cottage on a bay in a new community on the other side of the island. It was still country living but the challenge and wildness were gone. She lived there for 15 years and enjoyed what she called, "a very, very close neighbourhood." Even though it was more than an 8 hour trip from her old community many of her friends kept in contact with her. She never learned how to drive but she bought a car so she and her friends could get around when they came to visit.

As Peg approached 80 years old, her eyesight, which had always been poor, began to deteriorate. Soon afterwards she moved to the city, where she now resides. She lives in the city out of necessity. When comparing her current lifestyle to country life she said, "Cities don't really interest me. You don't have a personal touch in the city. It is harder because everything is laid out for you."

Her land on the beach was raw, untouched, waiting for her "personal touch." It was not "laid out" for her. She created her own lifestyle by carving out an existence in the wilderness. She did it

from "scratch." In the city her property was clearly defined by fences, her house was built to someone else's design, her mail was delivered to her door and the grocery store was two blocks away.

The bond that was forged during the 35 years Peg spent in the beach community still remained strong. She had frequent contact with many who still lived there and she kept up with all the news. There was a sense of "oneness" with the community when she spoke about it. It was her lifestyle. Close to the land was the way she continued to live in her little city house on a 50 x 100 foot lot. She had created a microcosm of the life she had on the beach. She remained a valued, distant member of the community.

Although legally blind, she spent most of her time tending her large, well maintained garden. She no longer planted vegetables that had small seeds, as she couldn't see them, nor those that had little shoots that needed thinning. But potatoes, tomatoes, onions, swiss chard, beans and many more vegetables were carefully nurtured. Her back deck boasted many "scrounged" items. Old tires became planters. Worn out kitchen chairs became deck chairs. Everything was used and re-used. Even the straw hat she donned when she went out into the garden had seen better days.

Friends in and out.

Although Peg never had children of her own and had been a widow for almost 50 years, her life was anything but solitary. Her house was a hub of activity each time I went there to conduct an interview. An event had just happened or was about to happen; potluck suppers, out of town guests or trips to see old or new friends were being planned. If an old friend met an interesting,

new person, that person was brought to meet Peg, he or she was likely to become Peg's friend. Two people picked up hitchhiking 30 years ago on the coast were still in touch. When they passed through the city they came and visited.

During the first interview, a woman about the same age as Peg sang out a cheery greeting as she came through the back door. When she left Peg remarked, "that's how my house is, friends in and out." Friends from the coast stay with her "whenever they are in town. They just phone and say they are coming to town and I say, 'O.K. when are you getting here?' One family comes and they have 4 kids. They just sleep around" (indicating the floor).

To emphasize that her friends were always welcome at her home she said, "[my house is] not a big house in any sense but it *doesn't matter* ! We had 20 people for dinner at Christmas in this house, in this room and everybody sat down formally." She was part of a community of friends. One shares what one has.

Peg's "family" was one of creation. Some members had been in her life for many years and others are relatively new additions. Commenting on this method of creating a family she said, "through the years, and you know, that's good, you can pick and choose them. I've had a lot of children, hundreds of them!" She had discovered a pattern in her life that she described in the following way:

> After you've lived [a long time] you notice that people come in and out of your life, the same people in different places but there seems to be that connection, although you may not keep it, it's there. And then, all of a sudden, there they are again.

I never feel like an old person.

Peg had a very simple way to explain her relationship to aging, "I ignore it!" Although her explanation may have been simple, she came to this conclusion with full awareness of the physical changes to her body. She revealed the clarity with which she saw her present life situation when she said:

> I realize that [there are] many things that I used to do that I can't do anymore. I can't see properly and that's a limitation. This leg doesn't work properly. Because of my eyes, I fell. But, otherwise, I'm very, very lucky to have so many younger friends and I never feel like an old person. I mean, I feel if they can do it, I can do it!

When referring to the younger friends in her life she said, "I don't think they identify me as a dilapidated old thing. I think they think [that] I'm qualified to be their age." She was not just her blindness, her aging body. Her friends saw her vitality, her keen interest in life and her surroundings. She and her friends shared similar interests, similar values. She did not deny the physical changes that limited her but they did not change her connection to herself.

Peg recounted an experience that she'd had recently when attending a dinner at a First Nations centre. She said, "they [First Nations people hosting the dinner] treated me as an elder." When she was helping in the kitchen, she was told, "you shouldn't be doing that, you should be sitting down." A while later she was

surprised when her dinner was served to her, unlike everyone else who stood in line to serve themselves. She speculated that it was being in a different culture that identified her as an older person. Although, she regarded this experience as a great honour she said, amongst her own friends she preferred, "doing the things [she] normally does."

Chapter 4: Underlying Themes

Vitality and Authentic Living

The women in this study saw themselves as having full and successful lives. Each had different priorities and activities. Each had different ways of aligning themselves in relation to social norms. The unifying factor was their feeling of potency and living according to their own values and aspirations.

Glimpses of Vitality

The portraits of the women in this study reflect the ability of each woman to lead her life authentically, with congruence between her inner experience and the outer expression of that experience. This authenticity has been in spite of the physical and social losses that accompany aging and the strong messages from society of the absence of value of being old women.

The sense of a life being fully lived that I had in the presence of each woman was not based on rational argument, but on the experience of knowing but not knowing how I knew. It was intuitive knowledge, rather than knowing, that was tangible. I began my investigation of what I knew about these women's vitality by exploring the intuitive knowledge that I felt in their presence.

With each of these women I was affected by her truthfulness, openness, fullness, and transcendence. Truthfulness was expressed in an attitude of "I am who I am." Aileen said at the beginning of her first interview, "What I say, that's me!" To Mary, expressing her opinions, even when they did not fit with popular opinions, was very

important. She explained to me that, "expressing yourself so that more than your next door neighbour or your best friend knows what's in your mind seems important," and is "the most normal thing in the world to be doing." She went on to say, "I'm sure that I am regarded, and I regard myself, as some sort of a weird exception that doesn't need to be listened to because I am not speaking in the common tongue." Despite being regarded as a "weird exception" she remained true to her self-knowledge and inner experience. There was no pretense, no attempt to be someone she was not.

With each woman there was an invitation to come and join her "where" she was. This openness was an expression of the confidence and trust they had in themselves. Their lives were open and available. No matter how busy they were there was always room for more, another place at the table or another voice in the conversation. This openness also extended to their sense of themselves. New or differing ideas were not seen as threatening but an opportunity for collaboration. There was an interest in others' opinions, experience of life and points of view. Differences were not cause for protection of the self but an occasion for expanding the self; to be sensitive to its dynamism.

A sense of the fullness in each of their lives came from the inclusion of ordinary moments as well as special memories. This attitude of respect, even reverence for ordinary life was apparent in their stories and activities. The stories Aileen chose to share were filled with joy at the wonders of life and a love for the simplicity of the moment. She told a story of a little mouse that had been hiding behind her refrigerator. A child came to visit with his mother and Aileen asked him if he could catch the mouse and put it outside. When he caught the mouse Aileen was delighted by the gentleness and care the child demonstrated. As soon as he put the mouse down

it ran straight back into her kitchen behind the refrigerator. Even though she was frightened by the mouse she laughed at the mouse's tenacity.

These women lived materially simple lives. They were good examples of how to live with less and be creative in the use of limits. Although none had extra money each expressed having all they needed; their homes, their friends, their families, themselves and a deep appreciation for the gift of a long life.

The notion of transcendence was a strong feeling in the presence of each woman. This was not a denial of the limitations that accompanied their aging but the ability to go beyond these limitations. Accommodating these limitations was not seen as a defeat, or a personal failing, nor was it merely an adaptation. By accepting the reality of changing memory, or vision, or mobility they were able to surpass these losses by a process of improvisation and creativity. They redirected their activities to accommodate these changes. A feeling of the ebb and flow of life was present, a persistent shifting of focus.

This shift in focus did not emanate from a position of impotence but in the drive to keep going, to continue on with their lives surrounded by a sense of passion, renewal and meaningfulness. The understanding of their lives in the present was built on the responsibility of acknowledging the totality of their whole lives. Regrets were not spoken of, only awareness of the total parts of themselves; their strengths and weaknesses, their doubts and confidences, and their immersion in the ordinary human problems of everyday life.

I was also aware when spending time with these women that there were moments of true authenticity. This authenticity was the

willingness to know and to be known at a deep level.
Our interactions were not caught in a web of pretense or masquerade. There was no need for it. These moments left me with a sense of truthfulness, openness, fullness and acknowledgement of who I am and how I strive to live my life authentically.

Unfolding of a Life

Jean Shimoda Bolen (cited in Anderson and Hopkins, 1991, p.xii) characterized a sense of self as a "sacred dimension that enters everyday life when outer life is an expression of inner life" and points out that there is a universal human longing to be in touch with a sense of self. For the women in this study their awareness and understanding of themselves directed their lives.

The creation of a sense of self is an ongoing, lifetime project and as organic, continuous and gradual as the passage from birth to death. Identities are invented and characters are fashioned through "hundreds of thousands of tiny gestures, intonations and acts," suggested Novak (1971, p.44). With each new choice and each new conflict one becomes more uniquely individual. In this way the self is not a fixed entity but is continuously reconstructed over time. The goal cannot be to arrive but to be always on the way; on the path that leads one to becoming more of the person that one was always intended to be.

It is important to note here the differing perspectives on the sense of self that have shaped the perspective of this study. Modern philosophical thought and popular belief in Western culture have placed strong emphasis on the discovery of an essential, unitary self and the potential to determine one's own destiny. This notion has been adamantly criticized by post-modern and some feminist

thinkers who advocate a view of the self as multi-faceted and indeterminate. This view suggests that the individual self is inseparable from and contingent on its social and political environment. It is not in the scope of this study to advocate either position but to present these women's lives as they describe them and to examine the way they have created their lives to their benefit.

The courage to "be open to the voice within," as Meinrad Craighead (cited in Anderson & Hopkins, 1991, p.140-141) suggested, is "how life happens. As again and again, it plunges you into the unknown." Every time one of the women in this study made a choice amongst possibilities, what was important to her was revealed. The trust and confidence each woman had in her ability to make choices in her own best interest directed her actions and provided an intentionality to her life. Under the guidance of this dynamic inner self, she identified her needs and wishes as they changed over the years and discovered realistic ways to achieve them in her life.

The manner in which these women "created themselves" was an active, conscious, mindful activity. Being creative demanded the courage to resist the prescribed social roles and expectations of society. In this way their minds and spirits were always open to what was fresh, new and as yet unknown. Mc Donald (1983) described this capacity as the ability to learn to "live life rather than simply pass through it" (p.125). She suggested that knowing and creating oneself is a difficult task when she said:

> To know ourselves in a world where practically everything converges on us to make us unaware of who we are requires a serious search for self

> and an examination of one's values and one's philosophy, of one's consciousness of self, and of the experience of one's body and feelings, all in an effort to arrive at freedom and inner strength, at courage, at creativity, at love of self and others, and at humankind's transcendence of time (p.114).

The awareness of and connection to a sense of self is not an isolated activity. Its existence is embedded in social relationships and to one's sense of connectedness beyond the self. Maintaining one's self-identity requires interaction and feedback from others. Each of these women maintained active involvement with her friends, family and communities. Through this involvement they had frequent validating experiences to maintain their sense of who they were and what they wanted. Conversations with them were not casual or superficial. I knew where they stood, and in the process, the validation of self was mutual.

As each woman created her life, a story was told. Anderson and Hopkins (1991) implored women, in their book The Feminine Face of God, to discover their own "soul story" and to not overlook their own story in imitation of someone else's (p.95). Each life tells a story no matter how much or how little one searches for the truth or influences the course of that life. The lives of the older women in this study told a story of authentic lives creatively meeting the challenges of old age.

Living Authentic Lives

The women in this study had the courage and conviction to "stand out in a crowd." Living naturally or genuinely for them was the

ability to transcend the social roles that were alienating to their sense of self and resisting the traditional expectations of society. When Mary was encouraged at age 20 to marry a wealthy man who could offer her a life of country clubs and "endless days of golf," she fled to Montana to teach Braille to a blind child and eventually traveled to Syria with a Montana cowboy.

When Peg's husband died unexpectedly she decided to remain on their land for a year to see if she could handle it. She trusted her inner self to guide her decision. She not only remained alone on this land for 35 more years but continued single-handedly to realize her dreams until she was forced off the land by government appropriation. Aileen laughingly tells a story about hugging her chimney sweep and not caring about getting dirty and appearing like a "crazy old woman."

The resistance to the imposition of societal norms allowed each woman to live in a way that expressed who she was. Each exerted influence over the authorship and creation of her life. This freedom has also avoided what Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1975) referred to as "the most exhausting thing in life; being insincere" (p.32). Little energy was expended on being someone she was not. When listening to her inner voice, energy was not wasted on suppressing her true feelings. By shedding the social mask there was more room for vitality in her life.

This notion of vitalizing energy was expressed in Anne Truitt's (1982) statement, "the hallmark of a decision in line with one's inner development is a feeling of having laid down a burden and picked up a more natural responsibility" (p.66). Leading a life that does not resonate with the inner self, the cultural environment, or is in imitation of someone else's life is an energy draining burden.

There is little energy left for vital and life affirming concepts such as passion, renewal and meaning.

The women in this study lived vital and life affirming lives. One had a passionate commitment to something important to her, another had a sense of renewal and continuance in her daily life and the third persisted in creating a sense of meaning and spirituality in her life.

The following descriptions from these womens' lives personify the concepts of passion, creative renewal and meaning. Few commitments are as passionate as the one Mary has to her political work. Her conversation, her home, her activities and her friends all revolve around bringing about the social and environmental changes that she believes are crucial to the world's continuing existence. She has little patience with activities that play into the desire to be attractive and socially acceptable by others' standards. For example, in referring to the high level of consumerism in society, she said emotionally, "I go into the (shopping) malls and it makes me almost up-chuck to see how much there is that should be somewhere else. Being useful to some people who are lying down naked in the mud."

Mary's political involvement and commitment has changed with the times. It goes beyond the conflict of the day, the new horror of the nightly news, and has endured throughout her life. At 82, rather than showing signs of slowing down or mellowing, she takes on a more vehement insistence for social justice as she acknowledges the limits of her time.

At 88 years old Peg, despite her blindness, continues to plant and tend her vegetable garden. Her schedule for each day is planned around the many hours necessary to maintain a productive garden. Her first consideration is to avoid the heat of the day or rain. Her life revolves around her garden and back deck. Some years are more productive than others but to her it doesn't matter. The source of a

crop failure is analyzed and innovative solutions are planned for the following year. Each year she starts fresh and participates in nature's ability to renew itself. This sense of continuing purpose structures Peg's life. Her love of being surrounded by growing things guides her life-style choices as she moved from rugged, untamed land to a city lot.

The meaning of Aileen's life came from the value she placed on living what she called a "spiritual life." Aileen described love as the "essence of the spiritual life." For her it meant loving and helping one another and being able to forgive. After this description she commented, "quite simple, not difficult, is it?" She believed that her ability to truly love people came from growing up with an abundance of love. She expressed gratitude that she'd had so much love in her life. She explained that she'd had "terribly sad things to go through, and a lot of suffering. But it doesn't hurt you. I have a terrific faith."

Meaning for Aileen was to find value in the world beyond her self. Mc Donald (1983) suggested that the "proximity of death in the later years adds value to life and living. Death itself makes life meaningful and each day precious" (p.123). At 92, Aileen used her faith to look back at her long life and give meaning to her experiences that shaped its course. But most importantly, she experienced each day of her old age as a precious gift to be lived fully and well.

Testing of the Spirit

When you fall down at my age, the great secret is not to try to get up too quickly. Just lie there. Have a look at the world from a different perspective. Dame Edith Evans

The women in this study maintained a persistent sense of themselves through the ability to hear their inner voices, express themselves, make an impact on their world, and learn from the continuing sense of themselves in relation to others, despite the physical and social losses that accompany aging. The images they have of themselves remain familiar even though their bodies sustain the inevitable changes of time. Barbara Anderson (1979) called this capacity an "age-free living style" and said, "most of todays eccentric old are accustomed to living on the fringes of the social map" (p.71).

Living an age-free living style requires an enduring awareness of the self that Kaufman (1986) referred to as being "ageless" (p.6). It was this sense of agelessness that caused Aileen, to remark, "I don't think about my age until I look in the mirror and then I nearly faint!"

By gradually incorporating age-related changes into their present-day lives all three women transformed each new limitation into more appropriate modes of living. Being aware of their frailities and limitations, these women met the challenge with creativity, by diversifying their activities to continue to get their needs met. They affirmed life in spite of its limits. It was their vitality that "shed light on the meaning of frailty as it shows itself in the day-to-day experience of aging" (Wondolowski & Davis, 1988, p.264).

All three women maintained a sense of self while acknowledging the changes in their lives by creating a living space that reflected their present lives. Their homes enabled them to continue the activities and tasks that they considered useful, meaningful and valuable. Home for each woman was the centre from which she validated herself through a continuing connection with friends, family, and community.

Aileen could no longer venture out of her house to maintain the close contact she had with her friends. This might have been a deep loss for her as time with friends was one of her most treasured activities. Instead she created a warm, hospitable nest for friends to come to her. She was rewarded by having a constant stream of visitors that contributed to the affirmation of her self as a fully functioning human being and her strong desire to keep living. She expressed this desire when she said, "I sit in the woods, in here, in my little cottage, but I meet all kinds of interesting people who come to my door in some funny way. So I don't want to pop off!"

Relevance to Counselling

"As older women age, they become more of who they already are." These words by Ruth Raymond Thone (1992, p. 45), articulate the view that aging is a process of evolving towards greater diversity. Because the culture in which these women lived had so little concern for the role of older women, they had the freedom to choose their own lifestyles. This positive consequence of limited social roles for older women opens up avenues to self-fulfillment.

May Sarton (1977) wrote, "there comes an age when an older woman doesn't have to prove anything to herself or anyone else. She becomes more herself and more powerful" (p.198). Aileen confirmed this experience when she said, "I can do anything, just anything and it doesn't make a hoot of difference."

These insights can assist counsellors in contextualizing the age and needs of older female clients. Counselling older women requires value-free views of gender, physical and mental ability, and choice of lifestyle. It also requires awareness of the limitations and choices that social norms place upon older women. These social

norms can include prejudices such as sexism as well as agism. Viewing older women as a client group with unlimited possibilities for change, growth, creativity, and choices is essential.

The counsellor's ability to be aware of social barriers to vigorous lives for older women is key. Even more important however is the knowledge that older women have the ability and right to choose for themselves. This study celebrates that older women's lives are evolving each day and not simply marking time as death approaches. This agency and fortitude, this endurance and vigor, is what counselors can affirm and encourage for their clients' later years.

Closing

In no way do I expect that this analysis is the final commentary on older women's experience. It is offered as one possible interpretation of women's lives, recognizing that there is no conclusion for questions of this nature. Striving for deeper understanding is an ongoing process. Each generation of women will move into their later years with their own unique cultural and historical experiences.

The women in this study have known the "breadth of existence" and now they "seek to know the depths" (Missinne & Willeke, 1985, p.43). They pursue the meaning of their long lives in the same way that they lived their whole lives, with the vitality that comes from having the courage to lead authentic lives and the awareness of their connection to the world around them. McDonald (1983) described old age as a "breathing space before we die, in which to see why we did what we did" (p.21). Through the remembrance of death an appreciation of each present hour is created.

Very old women are a reminder that what is seen in them so clearly is a process which is shared by all women. Rather than silence the voices of those who remind us of our own destiny we must restore them to their rightful place of teacher and mentor.

I wanted these women to rise off these pages and stand before you, the reader. I wanted you to hear their voices of hope, feel their passions, and see their courage. These very old women teach me to stay in touch with my own aging and the importance of "being" instead of "having" or "doing". They are my prophets.

References

Allen, M. N., & Jensen, L. (1990). Hermeneutical inquiry: Meaning and scope. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 12 (2), 241-253.

Anderson, B. G. (1979). The aging game: Success, sanity and sex after 60. San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.

Anderson, L. (Director). (1987). The whales of august [Film]. Beverly Hills, CA: Nelson Entertainment.

Anderson, S. R., & Hopkins, P. (1991). The feminine face of God: The unfolding of the sacred in women. New York: Bantam.

Antonovsky, A. (1986). Intergenerational networks and transmitting the sense of coherence. In N. Datan, A. Greme, & H. W. Reese (Eds.), Life-span developmental psychology: Intergenerational relations. (pp. 211-222). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum

Atchley, R. C. (1982). The aging self. Psychotherapy: Theory, research, and practice, 19, (4), 388-396.

Bateson, M. C. (1989). Composing a life. New York: Penguin.

Beauvoir, S. de. (1972). The coming of age. New York: J. Putnam's Sons

Benner, P. (1985). Quality of life: A phenomenological perspective on explanation, prediction, and understanding in nursing science. Advanced Nursing Science, 8 (1), 1-14.

Bergum, V. (1991). Being a phenomenological researcher. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), Qualitative nursing research: A contemporary dialogue (pp. 43-57). Newbury Park,CA:Sage.

Berman, H. J. (1986). To flame a wild life: Florida Scott-Maxwell's experience of old age. The Gerontologist, 26 (3), 321-324.

Birren, J. E. , & Bengston, V. L. (1988). Emergent theories of aging. New York: Springer.

Bolen, J. S. (1991). Foreward. In S.R. Anderson & P. Hopkins (Eds.), The feminine face of God: The unfolding of the sacred in women. New York: Bantam.

Bowles, G. (1984). The uses of hermeneutics for feminist scholarship. Women's Studies International Forum, 7 (3), 185-188.

Butler, R. N. & Gleason, H. P. (1985). Productive aging: Enhancing vitality in later life. New York: Springer.

Carlsen, M. B. (1991). Creative aging: A meaning-making perspective. New York: W.W. Norton.

Carson, T. R. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research. Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 4 (2), 73-85.

Chappell, N. L. (1990). About Canada: The aging of the Canadian population, Department of the Secretary of State (Cat. No. S2-184/6-1990). Ottawa, ONT: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Valle & M. King (Eds). Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. Educational Researcher, 19 (5), 2-14.

Connidis, I. (1989). The subjective experience of aging: Correlates of divergent views. Canadian Journal on Aging, 8 (1), 6-18.

Cox, P. & Niadu, S. (Directors). (1993). A woman's tale [Film]. Montreal, QUE: Alliance Releasing.

Curtin, S. (1972). Nobody died of old age. Toronto: Little & Brown.

Erikson, E.H., Erikson, J.M. & Kivnick, H.Q. (1986). Vital involvement in old age. New York: W. W. Norton.

Evandrou, M. , & Victor, C. R. (1989). Differentiation in later life: Social class and housing tenure cleavages. In B. Bytheway, T. Keil, P. Allatt, & A. Bryman (Eds). Becoming and being old: Sociological approaches to later life (pp. 104-120). London: Sage.

Friedan, B. (1986). Us, not them: Breaking through denial of age. In G. D. Rowles, & S. Reinharz (Eds.) Qualitative gerontology. (pp. 311-314). New York: Springer.

Gottlieb, N. (1987). Dilemmas and strategies in research on women. In D. S. Burden & N. Gottlieb (Eds.), The Woman client: Providing human services in a changing world. (pp. 53-66). New York: Tavistock.

Greengross, S. (1985). Ageing: An adventure in living. London: Souvenir.

Guba, E.G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 29, 75-92.

Gutmann, D. (1987). Reclaimed Powers: Toward a new psychology of men and women in later life. New York: Basic.

Harris, L. (1975). The myth and reality of aging in America. Washington, DC: The National Council on the Aged.

Havinghurst, R., Neugarten, B. & Tobin, S. (1968). Disengagement and patterns of aging. In B. Neugarten (Ed.), Middle age and aging. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962). Being and time. New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927).

Hess, B. (1990). Gender and aging: The Demographic parameters. Generations, Summer, pp.12-15.

Heynen, J., & Boyer, P. (1990). One hundred over 100: Moments with one hundred North American centenarians. Saskatoon, SK, Canada: Western Producer Prairie Books.

Hooyman, N.R. (1987). Older women and social work curricula. In D. S. Burden & N. Gottlieb (Eds.), The Woman client: Providing human services in a changing world. (pp.263-279). New York: Tavistock.

Hooyman, N.R. (1988). Older women: The state of knowledge. Gerontology Newsletter, 13 (1), 1-10.

Jacobs, R. H. (1991). Be an outrageous older woman: A RASP: Remarkable aging smart person. Manchester, CT: Knowledge, Ideas & Trends.

Kahana, E. & Kahana, B. (1983). Environmental continuity, futurity, and adaptation of the aged. In G. Rowles & R. J. Ohta (Eds.), Aging and milieu: Environmental perspectives on growing old. (pp. 205-225). New York: Academic Press.

Kalish, R.A. (1981). The new ageism and the failure models: A Polemic. In C. LeFevre & P. LeFevre (Eds.), Aging and the human spirit: A reader in religion and gerontology. (pp. 123-127). Chicago: Exploration.

Kastenbaum, R. (1973). Epilogue: Loving, dying and other gerontologic addenda. In C. Eisdorfer & M. P. Lawton (Eds.), The psychology of adult development and aging (pp. 699-708). Washington, DC: American Psychological Ass.

Kaufman, S.R. (1986). The Ageless self: Sources of meaning in late life. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 14 (2), 171-185.

Kline, C. (1975). The socialization process of women: Implications for a theory of successful aging. The Gerontologist, 15 , 486-492.

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. American Journal of Occupational Therapy 45 (3), 214-222.

Leininger, M. (1985). Nature, rationale, and importance of qualitative research methods in nursing. In M. Leininger (Ed.), Qualitative research methods in nursing (pp.1-22). Orlando, FL: Grune & Stratton.

Levinson, D. J. (1978). The seasons of a man's life. New York: Knopf.

Lewittes, H. (1982). Women's development in adulthood and old age: A review and critique. International Journal of Mental Health, 11 (1-2), 115-134.

Lincoln, Y. S. , & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lindbergh, A. M. (1975). Gift from the sea. New York: Vintage.

Macdonald, B. (1983). Look me in the eye: Old women, aging and ageism. San Francisco: Spinsters/ Aunt Lute.

Maddox, G.L. (1991). Aging with a difference. Generations, Winter, 7-10.

Maddox, G.L & Busse, E.W. Eds.). (1987). Aging: The universal human experience. New York: Springer.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1989). Designing qualitative research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

May, K.A. (1989). Interview techniques in qualiltative research: Concerns and challenges. In J.M. Morse (Ed.), Qualitative nursing research: A Contemporary dialogue (pp. 171-182). Rockville, MD: Aspen.

Mc Donald, S. (1983). Trust in God but tie your camel. Ottawa, Ont: Novalis.

Mc Leish, J.A.B. (1983). The Challenge of aging: Ulyseean paths to creative living. Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.

Miles, M. S. , & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Missinne, L. E. , & Willeke-Kay, J. (1985). Reflections on the meaning of life in older age. Journal of Religion and Aging, 1 (4), 43-58.

Morse, J.M. (1991). Qualitative nursing research: A free-for-all? In J. M. Morse (Ed.), Qualitative nursing research: A Contemporary dialogue (pp. 3-10) . Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nelson, E.A. & Dannefer, D. (1992). Aged heterogeneity: Fact or fiction? The fate of diversity in gerontological research. The Gerontologist, 32, (1), 17-23.

Neugarten, B. (1972). Personality and the aging process. The Geronotologist, Spring, 9-15.

Neugarten, B. (1980). Acting one's age: New rules for old. Psychology Today, April, 1980.

Neugarten, B. (1985). Interpretive social science and research on aging. In A. S. Rossi, (Ed.), Gender and the Life Course. (pp. 291-300). New York: Aldine.

Nickerson, B. (1991). Old and smart: Women and aging. Ladysmith, BC: All About Us Books.

Nouwen, H. J. M., & Gaffney, W. J. (1974). Aging. Garden City, NY: Image.

Novak, M. (1971). Ascent of the mountain, flight of the dove: An invitation to Religious Studies. New York: Harper & Row.

Novak, M. (1983). Discovering a good age. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 16 (3), 231-239.

Ostrow, A. (1983). Age-role stereotyping. In G.D. Rowles & R.J. Ohta (Eds.), Aging and milieu: Environmental perspectives on growing old. (pp.153-168). New York: Academic.

Packer, M. J. (1989). Entering the circle: Hermeneutic investigation in psychology. Albany, NY: State University of N.Y.

Palmer, R. E. (1969). Hermeneutics. Evanston,IL: Northwestern University.

Polkinghorne, D. , & Addison, R. B. (Eds.) Narrative knowing and the human sciences. Albany, NY: State University of NY.

Poon, L. (1980). A last word. In L. Poon (Ed.), Aging in the 1980s (pp. 622-623). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Reich, W. T. (1978). Ethical issues related to research involving elderly subjects. The Gerontologist, 18 (4), 326-337.

Rich, A. (1985). Moonflower: A book of affirmations. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1981). Hermeneutics and the social sciences. (J. Thompson,Trans. and Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1970 to 1979).

Rodeheaver, D. (1987). When old age became a social problem, women were left behind. The Gerontologist, 27, (6), 741-746.

Rowan, J. & Reason, P., (1981). Human inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research. New York: John Wiley.

Rowles, G. D., & Reinharz, S. (1988). Qualitative gerontology: Themes and challenges. In G. D. Rowles & S. Reinharz (Eds.) Qualitative geronotology. (pp. 3-33) New York: Springer.

Ryff, C. D. (1982). Successful aging: A developmental approach. The Gerontologist, 22, pp. 209-214.

Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. Advanced Nursing Science, 8, (3), 27-37.

Sarton, M. (1977). House by the sea: A journal. New York: Norton.

Scott-Maxwell, F. (1968). The measure of my days. New York: Penguin Books.

Scott, C. (Director), & Wilson, D. (Producer). (1991). Company of strangers [Film]. Montreal, QUE: Alliance Releasing & National Film Board of Canada.

Stahl, S. D. (1989) Literary folkloristics and the personal narrative. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). Introduction to qualitative research: The search for meanings, (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley.

Tesch, R. (1987). Emerging themes: The researcher's experience. Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 5 (3), 230-241.

Thone, R. R. (1992). Women and aging: Celebrating ourselves. New York: Haworth.

Truitt, A. (1982). Daybook: The journal of an artist. Markham, ONT: Penguin.

Ward, R.A. (1979). The aging experience. New York: J. B. Lippincott.

Weber, S. J. (1986). The nature of interviewing. Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 4 (2), 65-71.

Wondolowski, C. , & Davis, D. K. (1988). The lived experience of aging in the oldest old: A phenomenological study. American Journal Psychoanalysis, 48 (3), 261-270.

Appendix A

Review of the Literature

In this section I will review the literature on: 1) the greying of nations, 2) stereotypes and heterogeneity of aging, 3) theories of aging, developmental models and changing perspectives, and 4) the aging process through the eyes of women.

Greying of the Nations

Today's older people are pioneers in a world where old age is no longer unusual and their experience will shape and define societal roles for those who are elders tomorrow. Because of technological advances in medicine, sanitation and agriculture each succeeding generation looks forward to a longer life cycle than the last (Anderson,1979). The result of this expanded life cycle is a massive shift in the population throughout the world. We are now witnessing a phenomenon which Greengross (1985) called the "greying of the nations" (p.13). Although we have increased the length of our life spans, we have not channeled equal energy into defining the nature of those added years or creating positive roles and meaningful institutions through which they may be enjoyed (Kaufman, 1986).

Later life has always been looked upon with varying degrees of ambivalence. With the turn of the century came demographic, economic, scientific, and ethical changes that solidified opinions that later life would be a troublesome time. New technology

rendered older workers outmoded and they suffered a subsequent decline in status and power. With the emergence of pension plans and alternative means of financial support, "what to do with" older people became a new social problem (Rodeheaver, 1987).

Stereotypes and Heterogeneity of Aging

There is no single pattern by which people grow old. Each chooses a path with a combination of activities that is most consistent with their long established values and self-concepts. This suggests, as Neugarten (1972) has pointed out, that persons age in ways that are consistent with their earlier life histories. How people manage their life in middle-age is the best predictor for how they will adjust to old age. For some people aging can be a positive experience, for others a decidedly negative one, and for most a fluctuation between the two. The quality of the experience can also change over time (Atchley,1982). Unlike other age-related transitions, for example, into adolescence and adulthood, Kahana and Kahana (1983) pointed out that there are no complementary rites of passage, social gains, or normative preparations for passage into old age.

Conventional gerontological research has tended to focus upon mean-level differences or other measures of central tendency which allow age-based generalizations to create a portrait of the average. These normative patterns present an oversimplified picture of the changes that occur as individuals age (Nelson & Dannefer, 1992). Consequently, individuals in later life are treated as a single category, maintaining the assumption that older individuals share common experiences and life-styles (Evandrou & Victor, 1989).

Nelson and Dannefer (1992) reviewed gerontological research, published in the Journal of Gerontology in the years 1979 and 1980, in which heterogeneity was reported but was not necessarily the focus of the research. Their findings indicated that 65% of the studies showed a pattern of increasing diversity and variability with age. The results of their review also revealed that although the phenomenon of heterogeneity of the aged is not well documented, there is an increasing trend to see the aged as highly diverse.

One important consequence of research conclusions that create a generic portrait of an older person is the adoption of this view by society. Old age becomes a mask which conceals the essential identity of the person beneath. With the loss of power and social status older people become "invisible," unimportant and shunned in our busy world. Neugarten (1980) pointed out as most gerontological research has been based on the needy aged and the problems of aging, the image of old age is portrayed as an inevitable period of physical and mental decline. Old age is typically characterized as synonymous with isolation, poverty, and sickness. The older person is traditionally viewed as someone who moves and thinks slowly, lacks creativity and ambition, and is irritable, cantankerous, shallow, rigid, conservative, and enfeebled (Ostrow, 1983).

Florida Scott-Maxwell (1968) commented on this view of old age, in her book, The Measure of My Days, when she stated:

> We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high. If it

> is a long defeat it is also a victory, meaningful for the initiates of time, if not for those who have come less far (p.5).

A study by Harris (1975) compared the actual prevalence of problems in later life with what the general public thought the prevalence to be. Not one problem that a majority of the general public thought applied to most older people actually applied subjectively to even a quarter of the elderly. The personal rejection of the negative view of aging is consistent with the high levels of well-being reported by the elderly (Connidis, 1989). Atchley (1982) agreed stating that despite widespread agism and negative stereotypes most older people are able to sustain a positive self-image and age successfully.

Theories of Aging, Developmental Models and Changing Perspectives

Theories of aging vary in the extent to which they emphasize and attempt to explain the following three descriptors of growing old: 1) biological, 2) social and, 3) psychological (Birren & Bengston, 1988). For many years the acceptable theories of successful aging had been structured by a belief in the combination of the social experience of aging and an individual's personality. Three theories, in particular, activity, disengagement and continuity, stress the psychosocial experience of successful aging.

Activity theory suggests that personal satisfaction depends on a positive self-image which is validated through continued active

participation in middle-aged roles. When roles end because of age-related changes, (e.g., retirement), they must be replaced to avoid feelings of decline and uselessness (Ward, 1979). This theory has been attacked on many fronts. Maddox (1991) found that activity can decline without affecting morale; in fact, a more leisurely life style may be perceived by some as one of the rewards and rights of old age. Originally thought to explain life satisfaction, older people see this decrease in activity with aging as inevitable and manage to maintain a sense of self-worth and satisfaction (Havinghurst, Neugarten, & Tobin, 1968).

Disengagement theory is described as the mutual disengaging of the individual and society. This theory is based on the belief that disengagement is biologically intrinsic, inevitable and universal, and is the essential condition of aging well (Maddox, 1991). Older people, by decreasing their social and emotional interaction and involvement, avoid the demoralizing and alienating impact of their increasing inability to fulfill roles. Ward (1979) described the benefit of disengagement as a way of neutralizing the potential social trauma associated with biological decline and death. It frees older people from behavioral norms and expectations. Society has a complementary interest in removing inefficient and ineffective members.

Carlsen (1991), however, presented a different outlook in her book Creative Aging. She maintained that one of the tasks of the later years is not just determining how or when or whether to disengage, but to continue to creatively decide how much and in what way to continue to engage. This engagement she interprets as "a process of evaluating the possibilities within the acknowledgment of personal limitation" (p.46). Erikson, Erikson,

and Kivnick (1986) called this process "truly involved disinvolvement" and described the balance between integrity and despair as a dialectic that honors the losses of age at the same time it provides opportunity for the integrities of age (p.50).

The third theory, continuity, emphasizes the psychological stability of the personality. The critical factor in adjustment to old age is previously acquired coping strategies and the ability to maintain continuity with previous roles and activities. Prior knowledge of individuals' personality type is thought to be helpful in predicting their response to the aging process.

All three theories have been criticized as too simplistic as they do not take into account the myriad of variables that affect people's adjustment to aging (Maddox & Busse, 1987; Ward, 1979). Carlsen (1991) contends that, because of the shortage of developmental models in the last third of life, the understanding of the developmental capabilities of older people is speculative.

Levinson (1978) stated that it was an "over-simplification" to regard the entire span of years after 60 or 65 as a single era (p.38). He suggested a new era of late-late adulthood which begins around 80. He defined the developmental process within this era when he asked:

> What does development mean at the very end of the life cycle? It means that a man (or woman) is coming to terms with the process of dying and preparing for his own death....To be able to involve himself in living he must make his peace with dying....He must come finally to terms with the self-knowing it and loving it reasonably well, and being ready to give it up (pp.38-39).

Carlsen (1991) reviewed existing developmental models and suggested that, rather than perceive developmental changes as a set of linear stages brought about by tasks, challenges or demands, to see changes as a "movement through forms" (p.53). Development is a "cycling and recycling of developmental questions and interactions, of systems of thinking, doing, and relating which gather, break, and reform within larger and more encompassing systems of personal being" (pp.53-54).

Peck (1956, cited in Carlsen, 1991, p.52) offered a schema of alternatives for later life which constitute life questions. These life questions take on a unique form according to the needs and circumstances of each individual person. Each of the three alternatives are expansions of earlier life decisions. The three alternatives are: 1) ego differentiation vs. work-role preoccupation, 2) body transcendence vs. body preoccupation and, 3) ego transcendence vs. ego preoccupation. The challenge of these dilemmas is to find new determinations for self-identity and meaning that are not linked so closely to work-roles, to the health of the body, and to narcissistic preoccupation with the self.

Carlsen commented on Peck's schema by suggesting that:

> When a mind becomes preoccupied with what is lost rather than with what can yet be -- preoccupied with the losses of personal independence, with the insults to the body -- then this is a mind that will lose its capacity to break loose, to step back, to transcend some of the difficulties of age (p.53).

Erikson's (1986) eight stages of life development are well-known and recognized in the field of human development. More recently in their book, Vital Involvement in Old Age , (1986), Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick asserted that the eight stages are not rigid in their evolution but that they are "ever evolving, ever synthesizing, ever reforming within and around each other" (p.79). With a focus on old age, the researchers' have suggested that a person needs to maintain a vital investment in life that is weighed against the backdrops of the later life struggles of generativity vs. stagnation and integrity vs. despair.

The first concept, (generativity vs. stagnation), is characterized by the juxtaposition of mental growth or mental decline, energy and motivation or boredom, being absorbed in others or being absorbed in self, and involvement with the next generation through altruistic and creative acts or narcissistic self-indulgence. The second concept, (integrity vs. despair), balances the ability to nurture a sense of coherence and wholeness, a continuity and consistency of self while acknowledging the despair that comes with the losses of age and the preparation for death. Erikson has written that integrity is the ability of some old people to "envisage human problems in their entirety" and to "represent to the coming generation a living example of the closure of a style of life" (p. 80).

Kalish (1981) characterized the way society has described the nature of aging by formulating a series of five models. The first is termed the Pathology Model. Old age is simply seen as being pathological; a time of sickness and strangeness without much chance for change in a positive direction. The second is the Decrement Model. This model focuses on age-related changes that

are generally negative (e.g., loss of mobility). The third, Minimal Change, maintains that older people are presumed to be continuations of what they were as younger people with only small, age-related decrements. More recently a model emphasizing diversity, the Normal Person Model, has become popular. In this approach older people are simply people, like all other individuals. Even though they do resemble each other in some ways, they differ in more ways than they are similar. Changes are seen as health-related rather than age-related.

Kalish (1981) proposes a fifth model, the Personal Growth Model, which maintains that the later years can be a period of optimum personal growth. These later years are usually relatively free of responsibilities towards parents and children and repetitive or unstimulating jobs no longer consume time. There may be a decreased concern for how they are viewed by others and diminished need to be competitive. Many older people have worked through their fears of their own death, and therefore learned better than any others how to develop priorities that satisfy them. There is the motivation caused by knowing the future is finite. In Kalish's words, "the time boundary justifies their ignoring the minutes of life, if they wish, and to concentrate on what matters to them. They do not mark time; they use time for themselves" (pp.126-127).

The notion of personal growth in later life coincides with Carlsen's (1991) view of the developmental unfolding of one's life as "transformational" rather than cumulative. By searching developmental models for the end points, qualities, or personal, cognitive expansions for mature, healthful living, she has shaped

an image of creative aging that transcends the defeating representations of age so tightly linked to what happens to the body.

Both Kalish's (1981) Personal Growth Model, which stresses success instead of failure, and Carlsen's (1991) view of creative aging fit well with the shift in research focus from the search for generalizations regarding characteristics of the aged to a more complex view. By taking into account the many personal and situational influences which mediate the effects of aging, a richer and deeper portrait of aging emerges.

Vitality, Creativity and Meaningfulness in Later Life

"I grow more intense as I age" were the words of Florida Scott-Maxwell (1968) when she described her experience of moving from her seventies to her eighties; while "my seventies were interesting, and fairly serene, my eighties are passionate" (p.13).

Although chronological age, according to Neugarten (1980), is becoming a poorer and poorer predictor of the way people live, the vital and creative person in later life must find the courage and independence to resist the dominant climate of expectations of old age. Mc Leish (1983) suggested that the steady process of maturing throughout life may bring older people a courageous wisdom, a courageous compassion. He wrote:

> A creative life is not only as possible for men and women in the later years as when they were much younger, but in important respects often *more* possible. Nor does lack of

> money, nor chronic ill health, nor lack of family and friends remove these advantageous conditions for creativity in many older adult lives. They are still present even when one is naked on the shore (p.176).

Mc Leish (1983) defined creativity as "the process by which a man or woman employs both the conscious and the unconscious domains of the mind to combine various existing materials into fresh constructions or configurations" (p.24). He maintained that creativity is found in some degree throughout humankind and that those who continue to pursue life with a creative attitude will see the growth of their creative powers until the last day of their life.

Antonovsky (1986) has termed an approach and a perspective that points toward the healthful rather than the pathological "salutogenic" (p. 212). Primary attention is paid to proactive, vital, intentional kinds of living over passive, reactive, predetermined living. Carlsen (1991) proposed that, as researchers, we must search for models of health which go beyond those of the "OK," the average, the well-adjusted or the reasonable, to those which reflect an ideal of what human living can be about (p.2).

Another closely related concept is one put forward by Mary Catherine Bateson in her book, Composing a Life (1989). Bateson maintained that, "because we are engaged in a day-by-day process of self-invention -- not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it -- both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual" (p.28).

In 1983, Novak set out to study sixty of the "best" older people he could find. He chose people who exemplified a "good" age -- they were healthy, happy, active, involved and eager to tell about their lives. He discovered that a good age doesn't happen by accident; it

is something people work for and discover for themselves. This concept of work and discovery of a good age coincides with Mc Leish's (1983) view that creativity in later life must be "purchased by an effort of the will and by the adoption of a certain lifestyle" (p.34).

Novak (1983) found that his discovery had a distinct shape to it in the form of three stages that defined positive development from mid-life to old age. These three stages -- challenge, acceptance, and affirmation -- take place against a background of "denial." Novak defines denial in his study as the person's desire to stay the same. Denial may be the result of a fear of aging or a way to avoid being identified with the low status of the aged. The cost of denial is that aging comes as a shock. The first stage, challenge, comes about when one is confronted by a crisis that makes the pretense of omnipotence no longer feasible. This dawning knowledge of aging and mortality moves one to the next stage of acceptance. In agreement with Erikson's (1986) view of integrity, Novak found that by accepting life in it's entirety, one can begin to emotionally grow into later life. As one moves into the third stage, one can affirm her/his acceptance of aging through her/his actions. For each person this affirmation takes a different form. As people grow into old age, they are continually presented with the challenge to affirm life in spite of its limits. Each time they must make a choice.

Carlsen (1991) maintained that life is there to create. The more one is willing to free her/his beliefs for active questioning and reframing, the more one is able to play with ideas, the more one can keep a certain gullibility and naivete in opening her or himself to the world, the more one can relax her/his rhythms to

enter this "sacred moment, the more one can open her/his eyes to mystery -- the more one can incorporate into a style of living that can be called creative" (p.35).

Kahana and Kahana (1983) specifically looked at a group of older people whom they name the "adventurous aged" (p. 206). The participants were chosen for the study because of their future orientation and the ease with which they had made a major residential move. Kahana and Kahana classified their participants, whom they termed well-adjusted, into four types:

1.The Explorers: These older persons seek and often find a new life-style, a different routine, and a different environment from that to which they have been accustomed. They look for new stimuli, new activities, and enjoy travel. They do not prepare carefully for the move, may even relocate on an impulse, but relish the surprises that await them. They score high on risk-taking and may view retirement as a liberating opportunity for a new beginning and for adding a new dimension to their lives.

2. The Helpers: These older persons seek fulfillment in their later years through altruistic endeavors. They find joy in "doing for others" (p.220).

3. The Fun Seekers: This group of older persons look for gratification in a leisure-oriented life-style. They often looked forward to retirement years as a period for a well-earned vacation and welcome relinquishing work and family obligations to actualize themselves with self-improvements and fun-seeking activities. They tend to be highly sociable and seek association with other older persons of like background and interests.

4. The Comfort Seekers: These people may have worked long, hard hours planning, saving and dreaming of the day they could

retire in comfort. They spend much time enjoying their home and live a relatively disengaged, quiet life-style.

Kahana and Kahana (1983) concluded from this study that adventurous older people often seek discontinuity rather than the continuity and congruence formerly associated with successful aging. They suggested that their findings broaden the view of the range of aging experiences and patterns of successful aging. The researchers proposed that the adventurous aged pose a challenge to gerontologists to reexamine the stereotypes and to consider alternative pathways to integrity in the later years (pp.224-225). The findings of this study strengthen the concept of diversity mentioned previously in this review of the literature.

Carlsen (1991) characterized meaning-making in growing older as "the taking of what we have to make of it what we can" (p.3). Meaning and meaning-making are the shapers and sharpeners of experience and the ordering and reordering of personal reality and significance. When older people endeavor to make sense of their lives by exploring who and what they are, they create the self. It is by the progressive, evolving, mysterious, creative meaning-making that lives of older people take on a form, that keeps them alive in the moment, that continues to grow even unto death (p. 64).

Jung (1933, cited in Ryff, 1982) in discussing the uniqueness of old age, described the art of living as the most distinguished and rare of all the arts. He added that only a few people are artists in life. It is in the study of these artists that research stands to transform the meaning and significance of old age.

Aging Through the Eyes of Women

A secret we carry (is) that though drab outside --
wreckage to the eye, mirrors a mortification -- inside
we flame with a wild life that is almost incommunicable.
Florida Scott-Maxwell, 1968

The life experience of older women is not the same as that of older men. Women and men enter old age with vastly different personal and social resources as a result of life course experiences within social structures influenced by gender. This reality is often overlooked by researchers who compare the young-old (e.g., old people who are vigorous and healthy [Neugarten, 1980, p. 78] and old-old (e.g., old people who are ill [Neugarten, Ibid.] without reference to the sex composition of the two populations (Hess, 1990). Given the predominance of older women, their longer life expectancy, and the greater problems they face, it might be supposed that women, rather than men, would be the major focus of gerontology (Hooyman, 1988).

Yet, older women have been largely invisible in gerontological research and practice until the mid-1970s (Hooyman,1988). For example, Hooyman reported that women were not added to the Baltimore Longitudinal Study, one of the major studies of older people across the life course, until 1978. Since most social science research has been conducted by men, studies of women have naturally been influenced by male views of women in society and by male definitions of problems. Distortions about the condition of women have resulted. Only through studies of women's own experience and language will these distortions be corrected (Gottlieb, 1987).

Hooyman (1988), in a review of the demographic, economic, health, and social status of older women, suggested that caregiving for dependents (e.g., children, husbands and older relatives) shapes many of the problems faced by women in old age. Women who devoted their lives attending to others' needs often face years of living alone on low or poverty level incomes. They are more likely to have inadequate health care, live in substandard housing and have little chance for employment to supplement their limited resources. The consequence of living a life caring for others means that problems of aging are increasingly women's problems, with older women more likely than older men to be poor, to have inadequate retirement income, to be widowed, divorced and alone, to be providers of long-term care to other older relatives, and to be the recipients of nursing home care.

But, despite their greater problems, most older women display resilience and innovation in the face of adversity. It has been speculated that this greater resiliency may be due to their more frequent role discontinuities and changes during earlier life which have taught them how to adjust to change (Kline, 1975). Women's ability to shift from one preoccupation to another, to divide one's attention, to improvise in new circumstances, has always been important to their survival. Bateson (1989) proposed that, because fluidity and discontinuity are central to the reality in which women live, their traditional adaptations are a resource. She also suggested that the materials and skills from which a life is composed are no longer clear and that it is no longer possible to follow the paths of previous generations. She maintained that although this is true for men, it is especially true for women. Women's whole lives are no longer dominated by the rhythms of

procreation and the dependencies that this creates.

Another important factor of women's resiliency is the male-female role reversal that has been observed in many studies of later life. Beauvoir (1972) explained this change as a movement towards androgyny as sex differences phase out with age and Lewittes (1982) referred to it as the "unisex" of later life (p.126). Gutmann (1987) put forward a stronger developmental hypothesis when he stated that "older women become more assertive and dominant with a surgent vitality that cuts new channels in whatever setting they find themselves, whether the family home or the nursing home" (p.158). In a study by Peterson (cited in Gutmann,1987, p.158) of a community-dwelling group of urban aged, he found that the women especially seemed to have a tenacious hold on life, and continued to survive in spite of chronic ill health.

As women move beyond midlife they are released from sex-role imperatives. This release frees them to change in a variety of directions that are more satisfying. Lewittes (1982) reported that many theorists, (Neugarten,1972; Gutmann,1987) found evidence that, with age, women move from passive to active mastery modes and men move in the opposite direction. Of course, life does not improve for all women after midlife. There are many women who cling to the old and do not develop new and more satisfying roles. Economic and health differences also influence a woman's ability to be an active agent in her own behalf.

In Gutmann's (1987) transcultural research, the major recurrent theme is the post-menopausal acquisition, by older women, of the ritual powers and religious status that were previously closed to them (pp.158-159). In Western society, however, Gutmann claimed that although his review of the data revealed the protean energy

and vitality of older women Western society provides relatively few conventional roles for its organized expression.

Jacobs (1991) agreed with the above criticism when she wrote in her book, Be An Outrageous Older Woman, that:

> In our later years, we are re-creating ourselves as seasoned older women. We have reached those years in which we *can* be very creative because we have stored wisdom and experience. We don't have a lot of role models so we *have* to be creative (p.69).

Summary of the review of literature

Although the number of people living longer and active lives is increasing dramatically, scientific research and public interest has been limited to the declines and problems of this last third of life. Present developmental theories do not account for the complexities and diversities of aging nor do they engender the notions of personal growth or new capacities. An important consequence of this view of aging is the negative stereotypes and reactions of society. Older people, as a result of loss of power and social status, are often invisible.

Recently, a few gerontologists and researchers have challenged existing theories by focusing on older people who lead proactive, vital and intentional lifestyles. Studies that go beyond the concept of aging as a social problem look at creativity, choices, challenges and personal growth. In particular, Carlsen (1991) described the process of making meaning of experience as a way of understanding

and accepting personal reality.

Even though older women outnumber older men, they have only recently been added to studies of later life. Existing knowledge of older women is therefore distorted. Only through studies of older women's own experience will these distortions be corrected. Older women have, in spite of greater problems, shown resilience and innovation in the face of adversity. It is speculated that this ability comes from their experience of fluidity and discontinuity and from the move towards more active mastery that has been observed. Having been released from sex-role imperatives they are free to change in a variety of ways that are more satisfying.

VITA

Surname: KOVAR Given Names: BOBBY LYNN MOORE

Place of Birth: S.F., Calif. Date of Birth: April 6,1945

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1990 to 1993
	1979 to 1982
North Island College	1978 to 1979

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University of Victoria	1982

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Dean's Scholarship 1990-92

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of it users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without written permission.

Title of Thesis: Not Just Survivors: Portraits of Three Vital Older Women

Author [redacted]
(Signature)

BOBBY L. M. KOVAR
(Name in Block Letters)

December 21, 1993
(Date)