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COMPOSING A FURTHER LIFE

The Age of Active Wisdom

Mary Catherine Bateson

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *Composing a Life*

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Acknowledgments

THE SUBJECT MATTER of this book began to intrigue me in 2000–2001, when I was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study writing about lifelong learning. For three years after the fellowship, I taught a seminar on adult learning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, building on the teaching and research I had done on life history narratives since I was appointed a Robinson Professor at George Mason University in 1997. In each of these positions, I benefited from colleagues and from students exploring their own life histories. Putting together an anthology of my own papers for publication in 2004 also stimulated my thinking about learning along the way.

My interviewing for this project began in 2006, and my greatest debt is to the men and women who sat down with me to discuss the decisions they were making or had made about later adulthood, patiently going back to early childhood as I asked about the origins of interests developed later, and trusting me to use and edit their words without masking their identities. Because I have also drawn on more fragmentary conversations with others who were not part of the larger project, I must leave their names, not used in the text, unlisted, but I express my gratitude to them. Early on, Lois Bateson helped me to hone my thinking and interviewing.

This project would not have been possible if I had not had the good fortune to share in discussions of aging and demographic change in other contexts. Knowing that I would need to connect with others working in the field of aging, in 2006 I accepted an appointment as visiting scholar at The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, and in 2007 I received a research grant from the Sloan Foundation

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which, although it was originally intended for a single year, I spread over my working expenses for three years.

Other settings were important for my thinking and conversation. I was invited in 2002 to join a group of women exploring the personal meanings of growing older, and together we undertook the project called Granny Voter, described in Chapter III. For nearly a decade, I have been an intermittent member of a Harvard Medical School seminar on life histories and case histories conducted by Inge Hoffmann, where I presented some of my ideas. Starting in 2004, I served as a visiting lecturer and then a consultant for the Americans for Libraries Committee and their projects, Libraries for the Future and Lifelong Access Libraries. It was the library work that made me realize that demographic changes literally require a change of consciousness and led me to start a discussion group through the public library of the New Hampshire town where I live.

During this period, there has been a swelling tide of publication on aging. Because my primary focus is not on old age per se but on the period of active engagement that usually begins after fifty and may extend until eighty and beyond, depending on circumstances, I have not extensively reviewed the geriatric literature. I obtained Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's work *The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk, and Adventure in the 25 Years After 50* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009), which focuses on approximately the same period, when this work was in the home stretch. My most important intellectual debt is to the work of Erik H. Erikson on the human life cycle, which has given me a theoretical base to build on. Permission to reproduce portions of his charts was given by Kai Erikson.

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Composing a Further Life

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Prologue

When I could walk no further, I simply collapsed. My previous image of the desert had been of a sandy waste, level or twisted into undulant dunes, but this was all rock and mountain with a few dry, thorny bushes. Two young men stayed with me while the rest of the group went ahead, and after an hour or so the three of us started up again, with one of them supporting me on either side. My feet could take turns moving forward as long as they did not have to carry my weight. That was 1956. I was sixteen, having joined an Israeli youth movement hike into the Sinai Desert, which was under Israeli occupation following the Suez campaign.

That feeling—of being supported on either side—came vividly back to me on a trip to Poland more than half a century later. I was sixty-eight, still busy professionally but working out new forms of engagement after retiring from teaching. I was in Poznán to attend and speak at a conference on conflicts between cultures, which would start the next day, but I had arrived on a holiday, the Feast of Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi is celebrated in spring, often with processions that

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move from one outdoor altar to another, suggesting a sort of pilgrimage as the consecrated Host is lifted up and prayers are said at every stopping place. Knowing that this would be the perfect day to get a sense of what it meant to the Polish people to have regained the right to public devotion—the feast is now an official holiday—after half a century of Communism, I had asked the conference organizers to arrange my pickup from the airport so that I could go to Mass and join a procession.

They had already been warned that, when it came time for me to speak at the conference, I would need to do so sitting down, so when we set out from the church in a great crowd of people, I found myself supported by a tall Polish nun who cares for congenitally disabled children on one side and one of the conference organizers on the other. I'm okay walking, but standing in one place gives me difficulty now, and there was as much standing to be done as walking. They had accompanied me expecting to help—it was part of their welcome and their thanks for my willingness to come to the conference. I learned a lot about the new Poland from being in that crowd, taking in its holiday mood, a relaxed but focused attention to the readings and homilies, a sustained blend of gaiety and reverence.

Back in 1956, hiking with the Israeli youth movement, I was learning a new way of thinking about what it means to be a part of a community, a new understanding of both dependence and independence. I have told the story before, but like many remembered events of youth, it turns out to have new meanings with the passage of the years. I had gone to Israel the previous summer for a two-week visit, accompanying my mother, who was acting as a consultant on the assimilation of immigrants from around the world, immigrants who combined a sense of unity as Jews with sharply different appearances and cultural backgrounds. I had quickly become fascinated by the idealism of the young Israelis I met and their sense of living simultaneously in the present and in ancient history. So, two days before we were supposed to return to New York, I had announced to my mother that I wanted to stay in Israel, learn Hebrew, enter an Israeli school, and complete my senior

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year of high school there. She had agreed, and friends had found a teacher of intensive Hebrew for me and a household in Jerusalem where I could stay, with a daughter my age and two younger children. I had promised my mother that, if war broke out, I would return to the United States, but when the Suez campaign began, I cabled to her my wish to stay and finish, and again she agreed. I had taken on the most challenging intellectual effort of my life and "declared my independence." I was competent by then in Hebrew, the school year had begun, and I had moved on and rented a room on my own.

Most of my classmates belonged to youth movements, so after the fighting was over, I joined a large group from several cities on a trip into Sinai during the Hanukkah vacation. The main portion of the trip was a three-day hike, away from the trucks, on which we would carry all our own food and water, the kind of challenge that was familiar to members of the youth movements and totally new for me. But it also had the flavor of a pilgrimage, a visit to the desert described in the biblical Book of Exodus, where the Jewish people wandered for forty years and were fed manna from the skies. By the time we went, it was clear that Israel would soon withdraw from its brief occupation of the Sinai Peninsula and return it to Egypt, so this seemed to my companions to be a single chance in a lifetime. We had celebrated Hanukkah by lighting kerosene-soaked rags in tin cans instead of candles, sitting in a wide circle and singing the traditional songs.

Before we set out, we had been warned that the trek would be grueling and that anyone who was not strong enough would have to be carried out. We confronted a first lap up a long, narrow path, just steep enough to require an occasional handhold and full of bits of loose stone. Three quarters of the way up, I realized how badly prepared I was, and it seemed irresponsible to go on and become a burden on the others, so I stepped out of the line, knowing that the trucks would still be at the bottom of the hill to pick me up when I returned. But no, I was not allowed to stay behind. Enthusiastic comrades took my backpack and sleeping bag and pulled me into the line without so much as a canteen to carry, assuring me that, unburdened, I would be fine, that they

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were happy to share the load. For two days I managed, but just barely, dozing on the rocky ground at every rest stop. It was in the afternoon of the third day, on our way to a kibbutz where we would spend the night, that I collapsed.

The next day, when the trek resumed and I was somewhat rested and still unburdened, someone asked if I would carry his camera and step out of the line from time to time to take a photograph of the group. I felt absurdly honored to be given a task I could do, the privilege of making a contribution, and found myself reflecting on the contrast between the ethos of mutual help that was fostered by the youth movement and my American emphasis on independence, on not being a burden on others. Half of me was euphoric and full of love for my comrades. Half of me was ashamed and resentful that they had exposed my weakness, angry at my need for help.

Today, as I read the literature on aging, this story has a new meaning. Just as the theme of independence training is pervasive in American child-rearing advice, the literature on aging is full of discussions of independent living, the desire not to be dependent, the belief that one should take responsibility for oneself in order not to be a burden on others, stand on one's own two feet. All this came into focus as I walked in procession with my new Polish acquaintances, ready to help me stand, and I was glad of their help.

It seems to me that independence is simply an illusion. Certainly it is an advance when a toddler can walk across the room, deal with buttons and shoelaces, and brush his own teeth. Later on, he will be able to cross the street or the country alone, to manage money and time, and finally he will become an adult who can support a household. Perhaps the custom, rare in human history, of isolating an infant in a crib in a separate room fosters the ability to cope later on, or perhaps it merely reflects the goals of the adults. Certainly it was a step forward when the thirteen colonies declared and defended their independence from Britain. But the United States depends on Britain today as an ally, and Britain depends on us. We depend on the Arab world as suppliers of oil, and they depend on us as consumers of oil and exporters of a vast range of

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goods. Countries depend on each other to maintain freedom of trade and hope that the integrity of local markets will be sufficient to protect global financial stability; far too little has been said about the way in which financial irresponsibility and turbulence in the United States harms people around the world.

Everywhere on the planet, the continuity of life depends on the rain forests and the bacteria in the soil and the plankton in the oceans, and we depend on the civility of other human beings and a vast network of exchanges to live our lives. Even where we "pay our own way," we are dependent on others for that possibility and for the availability of what we need. Even where we think of ourselves as taking rather than receiving—as when a man pulls a fish out of the water for his meal—we are dependent on the lives we take. In many places the fisherman wisely thanks the fish—for letting itself be caught—or the river—for offering the fish—or God—for providing the needs of his life; but this is easily forgotten—the more so when we depend on unknown fishermen and a chain of unknown handlers and shippers to get the fish we eat to the store.

With all these references to independence and to the need to avoid ever being dependent on others, we are caught in a false antithesis, for the choice is not between dependence and independence. The reality of all life is interdependence. We need to compose our lives in such a way that we both give and receive, learning to do both with grace, seeing both as parts of a single pattern rather than as antithetical alternatives. The modern disability movement and the legislation it led to in 1973 and 1990 were primarily concerned not with mandating support and benefits but with the possibility for interdependence;[1] the basic theme was the effort to increase the ability of people with disabilities to participate and to become contributing members of society. The larger society has the responsibility to offer not handouts but the context that makes participation possible.

Similarly, as parents, we can find ways to make our children aware that they are contributing members of the household and that the chores they are asked to do are tokens of trust and are received with

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thanks. From their birth on, we depend on our children for the joy and meaning they give to life, even though we are paying the bills. We could do the same with our parents and grandparents. As people grow older, some of the ways they have contributed in the past may no longer be possible, but the challenge to society is not only to provide help and care where these are needed but also to offer the opportunity to contribute and care for others.

What strikes me as I remember the story of that trip into Sinai is that the culture in which I had grown up had prepared me not only to avoid needing the help of others but to resent being helped. I do not think I am alone in that; I think it is a pervasive attitude in American society. Yet if I so dislike the idea of needing help, I may turn that negative attitude onto others in that position and dislike or despise those who need my help, offering it only reluctantly.

This notion of standing on one's own two feet and needing nothing from others resonates with American concepts of masculinity and with the mythology of pioneers, frontier scouts, and cowboys, but it is by no means limited to males. It is a style that works against mutuality and that risks encouraging taking rather than sharing, exploitation rather than cooperation. Yet most people's lives do provide opportunities to learn to value and practice interdependence and mutuality in some relationships, experiences that could be extended to other contexts. If we have had caring parents or caregivers, without which we would not have survived, we carry with us from infancy the experience of trusting others to nurture and care for us.

The cost of our emphasis on independence is high. It seems to me logically impossible, for instance, to build a sustainable environmental ethic on the myth of independence, just as it is hard to see the rejection of interdependence as compatible with any faith except the lonely cult of the self. We need to do more to give children the experience of both giving and receiving, teaching and learning, helping and being helped—and make sure to include some of each in our own lives from beginning to end. We need to practice accepting kindness as well as giving it and to avoid reacting to the offer of help as an insult.

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At every stage, we are talking about learning. At later stages of the life cycle, we are learning to deal with the new circumstances of an aging body and a changing social setting, and drawing on a lifetime of experiences for helpful precedents. Not everyone has a story as dramatic as my Sinai trek, but everyone has had experiences of depending on and learning from others. Reflection on those experiences often reveals a degree of mutuality that offers a precedent for interdependence. Although children may not notice it, parents do learn from their children and teachers from their students, and often very young children find themselves cheering or consoling their parents.

Human life expectancy at birth in industrialized countries has increased by some thirty years since the beginning of the twentieth century. We are living in new territory, drawing the maps that will give it meaning. Older adults are healthy and active decades longer than they would have been in the past, reflecting on their lives in the effort to understand who they are in a newly emerging stage of life and discovering the wisdom they have to offer. Composing a further life involves thinking about the entire process of composing a life and the way in which early experience connects to later. It involves looking with new eyes at what has been lived so far and making choices that show the whole process in a new light and that offer a sense of completion and fulfillment. This book is a study of a small group of pioneers exploring that process.

We can look backward and be grateful for the river and the fisherman, and we can look forward to find ways to contribute that complete our stories.

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year-olds in the United States today. Today's sixty-five-year-olds are starting new careers or continuing old ones, traveling around the world, and eloping with new loves.

What is less widely understood is that this is happening at a time when both individual life cycles and populations have taken on radically new structures. We have not added decades to life expectancy by simply extending old age; instead, we have opened up a new space partway through the life course, a second and different kind of adulthood that precedes old age, and as a result every stage of life is undergoing change.

Different societies look at age-groups differently. In some places status is governed by small differences of age, in others all children or all old people may be grouped together. However, virtually every society does make distinctions between children and adults and does recognize changes in the participation of older adults, creating at least three major stages of life, which may be subdivided further, stages that correspond for many individuals to generations: childhood (not yet adults), parenthood (adults), and grandparenthood (elders). With the survival of many grandparents to become great-grandparents and the improved health conditions of older adults, we have in effect created the first four-generation society in history.

Here I am not using the term *generation* to refer to twenty-year cohorts with catchy nicknames, although cohorts do indeed share characteristics determined by the changing contexts in which they have grown up and lived. I am referring to the presence of coexisting generations defined by their roles and activities, with individuals moving from one to the next as "the younger generation" becomes "the older generation" around the campfire or the table; children become parents, and parents become grandparents, often by about the age of forty, which was regarded as a fairly ripe old age through most of human history. Today's grandparents, including a considerable proportion of Baby Boomers, are different from grandparents in the past and much healthier and more numerous.

This is new. Every society has some members who are not yet

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full participants—infants, children, and those approaching adulthood, whom we now call adolescents. And every society has adults who are simultaneously full participants in maintaining the society and in its perpetuation as they produce and rear children. And every society has at least a few older members who are past their reproductive and child-rearing years, often in declining health. This older generation typically withdraws from some kinds of participation, but the pattern always includes some continuing contribution, often of a sort that is not open to younger adults.

We know from cross-cultural studies that postreproductive adults—elders—have played a key role in human societies through time. Many of these elders have been grandparents and a few have been great-grandparents (a very scarce resource through most of history), but in terms of the ancient three-generation structure, they have played similar roles. This has been the human pattern: three generations or stages of life, diverse and changing through time, defined in relation to the others and to their forms of participation and only secondarily as age-groups.

Now, however, older adults, many of whom are grandparents but who have an unprecedented level of health and energy, time and resources, fit into society in new ways, often much like younger adults. And for the first time in history there are large numbers of *great*-grandparents, who look and act somewhat, but not precisely, the way grandparents used to. Biomedicine has once again created a profound change in the human condition. We have inserted a new developmental stage into the life cycle, a second stage of adulthood, not an extension tacked on to old age.

A decade ago some of us began calling this stage a second adulthood, but that phrase too easily evokes the second rate or secondhand—or even a second childhood of incompetence. I think we will need to think in terms of a first adult stage we can call Adulthood I, a very busy and productive time, which includes both our primary child-rearing years and the building of careers, and a new stage we can call Adulthood II.[1] Adulthood II may begin as early as age forty (for example, for athletes,

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whose first careers may last only twenty years) and extend past eighty (for example, for politicians, if they reach the Senate, and many self-employed people), for many years of participation and contribution. Both as individuals and as a society we are being taken by surprise by this change, yet so far most of the discussion focuses on its financial implications, not on its opportunities. How will the new room be used? How will the rest of life be different?

Those who are grandparents today are unlike the grandparents they remember. They adore their grandchildren, but they just aren't sitting still. They won't behave like stereotypical grandparents, with long memories and short walks, until they are great-grandparents. They are often colleagues to their own children, working side by side as adults. Historically, wisdom has been associated with elders. Today's grandparents combine the same length of experience with continuing mobility, so I think of Adulthood II as the stage of *active wisdom,* which precedes old age.[2]

We are going through a profound change in the status of the human species. The easiest way to assess that change is to consider the importance of an extended childhood in the process of becoming human, *Homo sapiens.* From very simple organisms up through mammals, learning very slowly became a key to survival; most organisms are hatched or born equipped with the specialized behaviors they need to survive in their environments, or can acquire them in a matter of days or weeks, without an extended period of dependency. Human development, by comparison, is exceptionally labor intensive, requiring the attention of multiple adults over long periods of time. Even in comparison to other mammals, human infants and children are helpless in a way that is conspicuous and seems terribly inefficient. But it is this helplessness that is the key not only to the flexibility that has allowed humans to adapt to every environment on the planet but also to the long adventure of exploration and invention that we call culture. Even more important, it is what prepares human beings to give and receive love and is the seedbed of conscience.

For humans, even the most rudimentary skills of survival must be

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transmitted from generation to generation early in the life course. Transmitting even a fraction of the larger culture requires a period of enculturation that now lasts twenty or more years and often continues to the end of life. It seems that the experiences of helplessness, dependence, and vulnerability are essential to becoming human. Human infants have no option of walking or flying away after a few weeks or months but willy-nilly are forced to stay with caregivers, normally creating the context for learning, along with an array of information and skills, how to love and how to trust.

When we look at aging from a Darwinian perspective, it is clear that the same apparent anomaly exists at the end of life. If the hen is the egg's way of making another egg, the hen that is no longer laying is useless except for the stewpot. In many species, the spider lays her eggs and dies—she has made her contribution to the future (and sometimes she kills her mate, his contribution also completed). Yet even as natural selection has reinforced a period of dependent learning for the survival of offspring in some species, natural selection apparently reinforces the possibility for elders in some species to live on while their young mature, sometimes to produce another brood, and sometimes beyond that capacity as well.

Studies of species that live in groups, where members of the pack or herd tend to be related—for instance, a herd of deer—have shown that the survival of a few postreproductive animals, in this case a few old does, increases the chance of survival of young born in the herd, because the old does remember where to find food or water in a year of drought or very deep snow, contributing to the *inclusive fitness* of the group.[3] Human society is conspicuous for the role played by adults other than parents in the rearing of the young—in fact, teaching is more distinctively human than learning, as is the institutionalization of teaching roles. Anthropologists have looked at human groups and demonstrated that the presence of grandparents—particularly maternal grandmothers—reduces infant and child mortality, which is to say, increases the likelihood that children will grow up to pass on their genes, presumably the same genes that kept their grandparents healthy

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and supportive. And here, too, love and trust must be part of the equation, particularly the trust between a new mother and her own mother, which allows her to accept help and advice more easily than from a mother-in-law.[4]

Most human groups value their elders, and a great many societies have evolved specialized and valued roles for the old, some of them depending on obvious assets, like length of experience, and others involving more subtle values. Among the San Bushmen of southern Africa, for instance, the hunt for game with poison-tipped arrows depends on moving rapidly across the veld, first to approach the quarry and then to follow for several days as the poison does its work. When men become too old to participate in the hunt, they become the makers of arrows—and tradition ascribes to the arrow maker the primary credit for the kill, so that in the distribution of meat to all the members of the community, the arrow maker is treated as the source. Looked at pragmatically, the making of the arrow is indeed a contribution, one that could be made by a younger man but has been reserved for the old, but less of a concrete contribution than the honor it is given, which makes it central to the solidarity of the band. Similarly, only when women are too old for childbearing are they permitted to become shamanic healers, a translation of the love and care they have given their children to the health of the wider community. In both cases, an appropriately limited effort is recognized as having a profound value.[5]

A similar alchemy occurs in a New Hampshire yoga class I have attended for over a decade, consisting mostly of women past middle age, and a few men.[6] Midway though the class, the participants pair off to give each other neck and shoulder massages. The younger members of the group have strong fingers and strong arms and give fairly energetic five-minute massages. But others, in their seventies and beyond, with arthritic fingers, can only manage the lightest touch, like butterflies alighting and taking off, and themselves need to be handled gently. Both kinds of touch are equally valued in the exchange. The older members of the group emerge as experts in a type of touch used in Swedish massage called light stroking, or *effleurage,* surely efficacious in

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learn from his pupils? How does the comedian feed on laughter and the artist on recognition, and how does the politician rely on the trust and enthusiasm of supporters?

Through questions like these we can discover the reciprocities in the emerging shape of lives as we gradually become a four-generation society—a society in which great-grandparents are as common as grandparents were in the past and possibly more so. We may find that longevity contributes as much to our humanity as has the extension of childhood. In the meantime, however, the fear of becoming useless and dependent erodes the spirit as definitions are turned into fact, for the most toxic aspect of aging is the negative beliefs that seniors may come to have about themselves and about each other.

Aging today has become an improvisational art form calling for imagination and willingness to learn. Increased longevity will challenge us not only to revise expectations but also to discover unexpected possibilities, arranging life in new and satisfying patterns, and to explore how newly perceived possibilities relate to earlier life choices. In the process we will encounter gradual—or sometimes sudden—shifts of consciousness and identity that accompany awareness of the new situation.

When do you move from Adulthood I to Adulthood II? When you reflect that you have done much of what you hoped to do in life but it is not too late to do something more or different. The doorway to this new stage of life is not filing for Social Security but thinking differently and continuing to learn. Adulthood II is characterized by the wisdom culled from long lives and rich experience, the most acceptable and positive trait associated with longevity, but combines it with energy and commitment in the context of a new freedom from some kinds of day-to-day responsibility, a freedom that challenges expectations and may even be frightening. Together these produce the *active wisdom* that older adults have to offer, which gives them the potential for altering the shape of public and family life in America.

Adulthood II comes as a gift and offers new choices, but it may take time to assess the possibilities. Erik Erikson used the term *moratorium*

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for periods when young people put off commitment while they struggle for a sense of identity, sometimes lasting well beyond college. Many older adults take a somewhat similar interval for further study or travel or experimenting with some model of retirement that proves to be temporary, trying to find a meaningful activity they are ready to engage in during this new stage of life. I have sometimes used the metaphor of an *atrium* to describe Adulthood II, stretching my architectural metaphor, as if the new room added to the house were an atrium in the center, with doorways to all the other stages or rooms and open to the sky, but the metaphor seems most appropriate to the transition into Adulthood II, searching for the next step.[8] Adulthood II will eventually give way to old age and is marked by the consciousness of mortality, but for many it is a time of new beginnings or for the revival of earlier interests.

My hope is that this book will challenge individuals not only to thoughtful discernment and creativity in composing a further life but to greater engagement. We need the members of the grandparent generation—those in Adulthood II—to restore a dimension of long-term thinking to our decision making. For the great irony of our time is that, even as we are living longer, we are thinking shorter. We live in a society where working adults are experiencing ever-increasing stress and striving. Members of the parent generation are straining to meet next week's and next month's deadlines, quarterly reports, and a fast-recurring election cycle. Most women and many men are working two shifts. Under pressure, horizons are shortened.

We tend to assume that the old, because they have fewer years ahead of them, are less concerned with the future than younger adults, but in fact the group best equipped to advocate for the future are thoughtful older adults—those in Adulthood II—who have time and perspective for reflection combined with the willingness to consider new ideas and acquire new skills; who can speak up about issues that will affect future generations, particularly issues of the environment, and engage in bringing that future to pass. They are not ready to sit on the sidelines. Older adults are concerned about the future of their children, grandchildren,

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nieces and nephews, as well as students and the children of friends and neighbors, who will live in that future but cannot yet influence it. There is a potential for alliance between concerned young people and their grandparents, working together to protect the future. It is worth remembering that the environmental movement of today was once dismissed as consisting only of "little old ladies in tennis shoes."

Older adults have seen a lot of change and learned a lot about how to adapt through good times and bad, how to acquire new skills, and how to distinguish positive from negative change. Yet ironically the message that older adults receive from politicians and advertisers and even from each other is to be concerned primarily with their own comfort. Individuals coming up to retirement at this point in history are beginning to reimagine the shape of lives and escape from stereotypes. Ageism is pervasive, affecting young and old alike, slowing this process of discovery by shaping the way older adults look at others of the same age, making them hesitant to work together to influence the future.

Nevertheless, there are significant efforts to ensure that those who live longer can continue to contribute to society, including the work being pioneered by Marc Freedman in the areas of civic engagement and encore careers, and research supported by the Sloan Foundation on how workplaces and jobs need to be structured to optimize the contributions of older adults.[9] The movement of women into the workforce created gaps in child care and community life, which are partially being filled by retirees, and many industries are concerned about future shortages of skilled workers. There is already widespread interest in ways of reengaging retirees, either through flexible arrangements for paid work or as volunteers. The possibility of productive work lasting an additional decade will do more than supplement the workforce and can lead us to rethink the values and meaning of work. Freud famously said that what gives meaning to life is to love and to work—*lieben und arbeiten*—and these are the keys to understanding the restless searches of today's older adults.

Each of the liberation movements of the twentieth century has had to struggle against internalized prejudices and negative images of the

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self or of other members of the same group, which had to be overcome in order to embrace a different vision and believe that it could be achieved. In each such transition there have been risks—risks of excessive radicalization and acting out and risks of backlash. Yet beginning with the civil rights movement at mid-century and proceeding through the feminist movement, the disability rights movement, and the gay liberation movement, group after group that was excluded from full and equal participation has stepped forward, moving from a demand for equal rights into the fulfilled promise of new contributions.

Forty years ago, looking at their lives with the newly developed possibility of planning their childbearing, young women discovered the need to break out of inherited assumptions about who they were, what they could do, and what they should want in their lives. They had imagined their futures in terms of a set of culturally imposed stereotypes and had been trained to desire what society was ready to give them. Just as those women found they could not follow the model of their mothers, today's sixty-somethings remember their own grandparents as elderly without feeling elderly themselves. They are beginning to understand that they will not age in the same way and at the same pace, and above all that they must discover or invent new patterns for the years beyond traditional retirement, often as much as three decades, far too many years to spend on golf, television, and bridge, far too valuable to be expended on kinds of volunteerism that do not fully engage their skills or benefit from their perspectives.

Today, men and women approaching retirement (and the cohorts that will follow them), with newly achieved health and longevity, face the same challenge that new-wave feminism presented to women: to develop a new consciousness and to free their imaginations for the future. The same kind of process that occurred in liberation movements in the past is needed as older adults learn to discover and affirm who they are, the wisdom they have to offer, and how to make it effective in the world. I believe that, like the consciousness-raising of the sixties, this process of discovery must rest on learning, reflection, and conversation, leading to engaged action, and that consciousness will

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