



Aging Considerations and Quality of Life

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Forward - The following “article” consists of excerpts from blog entries written over one and a half years by Barbara Dahl, BSN, HTP/HTI Emeritus, a long time Healing Touch Certified Practitioner and Instructor. Barb shares her thoughts and considerations as she experiences the aging process. She begins each blog with corresponding musical lyrics – familiar to the elder generation.

All of us witness and experience aging. When we are younger, our lives are filled with work, play, children and more. Aging does not seem to impact us personally unless we have an aging family member or loved one. At some point in our lives however—aging becomes a very personal affair and one that cannot be sidestepped. We become aware can no longer do all of the things we once did. Sometimes this awareness creeps in slowly and gradually, at other times it comes like a bolt of lightning.

Although this article is not about Energy Medicine specifically, the thoughts and considerations presented offer insights and information for our personal growth, our own aging process and that of our clients.

It is of particular interest to note that growth, wisdom and curiosity are for those of all ages. The choice of whether to pursue these things is ours.

Dreams of Doing

Lyrics: *People/ People who need people/ Are the luckiest people in the world.* (Popularized by Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*)

A columnist quoted a woman, who was counseling residents in a retirement home, “to keep their world as big as they can.” It is easy to let the outside world shrink as we move from careers and family responsibilities of parenting our young and taking care of home and yard. If we are fortunate, we ease into our elder years with health intact and finances to cover expenses with enough left over to fulfill those dreams of—cruising down the Amazon, learning how to tango, celebrating grandchildren’s graduations, etc.

My world recently shifted and opened up another notch via attendance at two different Circles. In indigenous cultures, Circles are the sacred gathering place for wise elders to hold and share important conversations and connection. The first Circle I attended, the Circle of Friends, is based on the work of a German healer, Bruno Gröning. I only recently learned of this remarkable man and healer and was drawn to the Circle, one of hundreds around the world keeping his legacy alive. Like the Buddhist concept of the Bodhisattva, the belief is that a spiritually elevated being survives beyond death to serve sentient beings in their spiritual growth. Bruno, who died to this dimension



in 1959, stated his intention to make himself and his healings available to those who remained here after his death. You can Google him for more background. He is clear that healings do not come from him. They come through him from the Divine.

The second Circle, the Wisdom Circle, grew out of my attendance at the Sage-ing Conference in August 2014. "Sage-ing circles are where wise adults share important and powerful conversations about life."

The Sage-ing Institute evolved from the work of Rabbi Zalman Schachter and what he labeled Spiritual Eldering. The Circle decided to read his book, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, as a starting point for a discussion on how it relates to our lives now.

thoughts about what we wanted in this elder stage of our lives. My response came readily and even surprised me—I want to know my purpose. I am no longer a wife, a working nurse, a Healing Touch instructor—roles that directed and gave purpose to my life. Those roles were not, of course, the only roles. I am still a mother, grandmother, sister etc., but I sense that although very important to me, they are not primary at this stage of my life. I think there is a greater purpose for these elder years.

Guten Tag

Lyrics: *Like a tunnel that you follow/ To a tunnel of its own/ Down a hollow to a cavern/ Where the sun has never shown.* (Windmills of My Mind, Songwriters: Michel Legrand, Alan and Marilyn Bergman)

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I know there are vibrant people living in retirement homes—I have met them and worked with them. Still, one of my concerns regarding retirement living is the homogeneous environment made small by sameness, where the topic of conversation relates to poor health and negativity—mostly related to the many losses we experience the longer we live. According to Christianne Northrup, MD, research shows that it is the people with whom we hang out who determine our beliefs about aging, and I might add, just about all of our beliefs. I like choosing the folks with whom I hang out and especially those with whom I live.

The Next Chapter

Lyrics: *When I was seventeen IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR...But now...I'm in the autumn of the year/And now I think of my life as vintage wine from fine old kegs/From the brim to the dregs.* (Songwriter: Ervin Drake - a Frank Sinatra classic)

The first day of the Sage-ing Conference I found myself partnered with a lovely gentleman to share

My mother, who lived just long enough to observe 100 years, struggled with painful arthritic knees and other conditions often associated with aging. Like many others, she often declared that getting old was not easy. While attending the Tapping Summit, I listened to a presentation by Pat Carrington, PhD on *Aging Gracefully*. She is in her late 80's, without any health problems, does not take prescription medications but does take supplements. Certainly her perception on life and aging is different from others her age or even younger. One of her health tools is tapping.

Our culture fosters growth in our young, i.e., growing up. Growing old has a whole different connotation, a negative one. Carrington focuses on the word *grow*. "We need to see ourselves as growing." Part of her tapping script is, "I choose to notice how different I am than I was a year ago or even a few months ago. I choose to find it natural to learn new things."

How am I different than I was one year ago? I am wiser. I was eight months into widowhood then and



saying a final goodbye to my mother. I have had to deal with a plethora of challenges—I have had to grow. I have had to grow up just as a first grader has to learn and grow. Some lessons are harder than others. I have had to learn to do my taxes! Currently I am learning German in anticipation of a trip to Germany later this year.

My newly acquired wisdom is teaching me to embrace the challenges and not resist. It is an important lesson. As they say, what you resist persists.

Tidying Up

Lyrics: *It's time to see what I can do/ To test the limits and break through/ No right, no wrong, no rules for me/ I'm free.* (Let it Go, from the animated Disney film, Frozen)

I am living above chaos—with a basement that seems like a wasteland. Little by little I fill a bag of discards and transport it to the collection truck but at this rate I question whether I will live long enough to finish the job. Before our current home, we had never lived longer than eight years in one place and every move was a process of elimination - sorting through our stuff and choosing what to keep and what to leave. In the twenty-seven years in this home, very little has been discarded and much has been accumulated. Most of the accumulation is cluttering the basement. A currently popular non-fiction book is *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* by Marie Kondo. Originally written in Japanese, it is subtitled: *The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*. I bought it—thinking there may be an easier way to clean out the basement. Perhaps there is a happy shortcut other than setting fire to the mess.

It is strangely comforting knowing that many are dealing with the same problem or this book would not be a best seller. But what does it have to do with the Aging Adventure? For the very reason that no matter what form of elder living is chosen down the road— independent, retirement home, adult family home, moving in with a family member, it will most likely be smaller than the space currently housing that lifetime

collection of stuff. Unless your stuff includes materially valuable items, your heirs probably will not be as attached to your things as you are. So, it is purge time.

My mother thought a lot about the disposition of her belongings and together we created an inventory list of items and their desired destination so that by the time she downsized to her final residence, many items were already in the possession of her heirs. What was left landed in my basement. It should be easy for me to clean out the basement but it is not. I feel like I am giving away a bit of my mother again and again. Letting go is hard.

What's in Your Bucket?

Lyrics: *To dream the impossible dream... To try when your arms are too weary/ To reach the unreachable star.* (*The Impossible Dream* from *Man of La Mancha*)

Those in the know have observed that individuals having the most difficulty in the last stage of life—as they prepare to pass through the veil—are those with the most regrets. Thus, we have coined the term Bucket List for those things we want to do before we die. When you consider the really important things in life, I have been truly blessed and in terms of what is left to do—I have a fairly short Bucket List. So when a dear friend shared her excitement about a new program for holistic nurses, I was surprised at how much I regretted that it was no longer an option for me. The regret is more a holdover from years ago than something I truly desire to do today.

Now retired from acute care hospital nursing and from my role as a Healing Touch Instructor, it is challenging to find what I can do, what dreams remain. In my adolescence, I dreamed of being a movie star. During my stint as editor of our high school newspaper, I had the thrill of lunching with alumni journalists who had risen to the top in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *The Seattle Times*. So, naturally, as I prepared to go to college, I fantasized about being a journalist. I never dreamed or fantasized about being a nurse and yet that was my calling. I had not even heard of Energy Medicine and yet I was called to it. To what



am I being called in my 70s? What is your “being” called to?

I have found that in the doing—you discover your being. I do not know that I am driven to a “glorious quest” but I am still growing. John Lennon’s mother told him that happiness was the key to life. In school when he was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he wrote “happy.” They told him he did not understand the assignment. He told them they did not understand life. Do you think that being happy is a glorious quest at any age? What makes you happy?

Quality of Life

Lyrics: *A dickey-bird whispered haven't you heard/ Spring is here, Spring is here/ A little crow sang a happy hello/ My favorite time of the year.* (The Dickey-Bird Song. Lyrics and music by Howard Dietz and Sammy Fain)

A friend and I were having a discussion about end of life issues and the subject of Quality of Life came up. Are you able to define the Quality of Living that you would want at the end of your life when, for example, your health has taken a turn for the worse, you are dependent on others for the basics, your only real company is the TV and an occasional call and visit from a family member? Defining Quality of Life actually proved more difficult than I expected and the

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For my dad, it was pain. He hurt, and at age 94 he could not do the kind of things that had given him pleasure and satisfaction. When paramedics took him to the hospital where he was admitted, he refused all tests and treatment. This particular hospital offered in-house hospice care and a doctor’s order was obtained with the objective being total comfort care. The nurses had a way of assessing the pain level of a hospice and semi-comatose patient that differs from asking a conscious patient to rate their pain on a scale of one to ten and dad was kept comfortable with IV drugs.

Ask most people and they cringe at the idea of a nursing home. Dr. Atul Gawande writes in *Being Mortal* about a doctor, Bill Thomas, who took the job as Medical Director of a nursing home and was appalled by the lack of Life Quality. His solution was out-of-the-institutional-box. He brought in two dogs and two cats for every floor and 100 parakeets. Each resident was given a pair of parakeets to look after. It was transformational. People now had a purpose. Success of the program was measured in lower amounts of medication needed for anxiety and psychosis. The residents became more active and lived longer because life was now worth living. This approach to nursing home care became known as the *Eden Alternative* and functions now as a non-profit that provides resources, tools, and ongoing support to Eldercare organizations and home-based consumers.

The presence of animals would definitely add quality to my life as would a window that looked out on the changing seasons and wildlife. Recently, as I stood watching a hummingbird drink from the feeder, it flew inches from my nose and vibrated there for several seconds before darting off. Let there be a hummingbird feeder outside my window. I could happily skip yet another rerun of *Law and Order* or *Castle*, but now and again a concert from Lincoln Center would be nice, a Rick Steves tour of Europe and a PBS mystery. If I am blessed with good eyesight, let there be books and books to read. Hopefully I will be interest-



ing enough that my kids and grandkids will want to talk with me and visit—often.

Circles

Lyrics: *Some say/ "The walls between us stand so tall"/ They don't see there's just one sun/ Shining on us all.* (Barbra Streisand from her album *Higher Ground*)

I recently completed a six week class on the *Inner Journey of Aging*. It was facilitated by a former president of the Sage-ing Institute.

Each week in the class we explored different age-ing themes: Life Review, Life Repair, Leaving a Legacy, Life Completion and Becoming a Sage. Typically, we worked on a class exercise, writing, as much as time allowed, and then sharing what we had written with a partner. These exercises were never completed in the one and a half-hour classes, but were meant to be completed afterwards. Well, you know how good intentions go - they quite commonly get lost somewhere. So now, two of us are meeting on an irregular but scheduled basis to share what we have written at home. The sharing was an important and meaningful part of the class and it now serves as the incentive to continue the work. I am currently working on "Ethical Letters" —a letter to each of my three sons that will be given to them after my physical body releases my spirit to the next dimension.

Doing our work prepares us as Spiritual Elders to mentor others. There are good ways to mentor and there are better ways. In the Wisdom Circle, we spend a lot of time listening. We are not there to fix one another or feed our egos by delivering sage advice. Instead, we listen as each takes his/her turn sharing issues related to the age-ing process. When you are in your sixties, seventies and eighties, it is all about the age-ing process. One person is hoping to resolve the estrangement with a younger brother; another in finding direction and meaning after retirement, and another coping with the declining health of a spouse. The class exercises and the wisdom circle allow us to go deeper in our process to be our authentic selves. Does that sound gloomy? Difficult? Yes, we are deal-

We learn from each other and we grow together spiritually.

ing with some heavy topics, but there is laughter and hope generated in the sharing. We learn from each other and we grow together spiritually. We leave the Circle connected and refreshed.

Harvesting Life

Lyrics: *To everything – turn, turn, turn/ There is a season – turn, turn, turn/ And a time to every purpose under heaven.* (Turn, Turn, Turn! From Ecclesiastics, Sullivan, Peterik, and Seeger)

I like the concept of harvesting, defined by the author of *From Age-ing to Sage-ing* as "gathering in the fruits of a lifetime of experience and enjoying them in old age." He observes that elders "have not been schooled in the high art of enjoying their achievements." One of the exercises we did in the *Inner Journey of Aging* class was to take our lives as one cycle of a year divided into segments of seven years and jot down the highlights. So, for example, the first seven years was January. I am now in the November (ages 70-77) of my life, a time to reflect on achievements.

I recently did a little walk through a portion of my history while cleaning out a box of papers and reading emails saved from years ago. I was surprised by how many things I actually did. Efforts that were not particularly successful then but, in retrospect, led to something else that was more successful. "When we harvest our lives, we receive return on our investment in the form of inner riches."

A Summer's Day

Lyrics: *Starry, starry night/ Paint your palette blue and grey/ Look out on a summer's day/ With eyes that know the darkness of my soul.* (Vincent, Don McLean's hit song)

Imagine wanting to grow up to be an astrophysicist.



After a visit to the Hayden Planetarium at age ten, that is all Neil deGrasse Tyson ever wanted to be and now he is Director of the Hayden Planetarium. After watching him on *60 Minutes*, I had to Google to learn more about his boyish enthusiasm and adult passion for the stars, universe, cosmos, and his explanation of why we humans are made of stardust. I was left wondering if he is one of the scientists who believes in a higher power, that creative spiritual force called God.

Science can not prove God and because of that inadequacy science then denies Her for lack of proof. I

about what they believe to be true from reports of others, and religions do not agree on that. It is why we turn to artists, poets and nature.

Why am I thinking about Neil deGrasse Tyson and Vincent Van Gogh on a summer's day? Because I am supposed to. Because if I am to become a sage and Spiritual Elder I must continue to grow mentally and spiritually and that requires that I wonder, ponder on the unknown and satisfy my curiosity. That is how we grow and evolve at every age.


Today I am curious about stars, the cosmos and Van Gogh's turbulence.


can not prove Her either but I know that the scientific method is limited because I have experienced the scientifically unexplainable.

I believe the same could have been true for the artist Vincent Van Gogh. What did he actually see when painting that starry night? Musician Don McLean had a special sensitivity to the artist and perhaps because of my many years as a nurse in a psychiatric setting, I, too, *suffered* for his sanity. During the depth of his psychosis did Van Gogh actually see the turbulence of his starry night that is generally considered the last unsolved mystery of classical physics? "Is it possible that Van Gogh's mind, warped by disease, was prepared to grasp phenomena that have baffled physicists for centuries?" (Discover Magazine, October 2006, Kathryn Garfield) I think of all the times I have spent listening to psychotic patients' delusional talk and felt I understood on some level what they were experiencing, "*what you tried to say to me*," wanting to understand the particle of truth in their delusion. There is that fine line between sanity and insanity and artists often butt up to the edge.

Science can not prove there is a higher power nor can science disprove it. For that matter, institutionalized religion can't prove it either. Religion can only talk

Today I am curious about stars, the cosmos and Van Gogh's turbulence. Next, I am going to be curious about goose bumps – the Blue Angels are in town.

What are you curious about? 

 Author Barbara Dahl's blog posts can be found at www.RosesInJanuaryDotCom.wordpress.com