



The Age for Change:
An E-Book for People 50+

A Coming of Age publication

Edited by
Gloria Hochman



A Wild and Wonderful Journey: An Introduction

“I wish you had asked me. I could have told you plenty to put in your book.”

This comment came from the well-dressed woman in the purple suit who sat at an adjacent table as the three of us—Dick Goldberg, Mady Prowler and I—were having a spirited conversation over lunch about how those of us over 50 negotiate relationships with our adult children.

Dick is National Director and Mady the Assistant Director of *Coming of Age*—a project based on the belief that the gift of extended years gives those of us 50+ the chance to engage with our personal and public communities in a way that will enrich our emotional lives, contribute to society, deepen our relationships and bring us new fulfillment.

The book you are about to read, *The Age for Change*, is part of that project.

The reaction of the woman dressed in purple was typical. Whenever we mention to anyone what this book includes, the response invariably is something like, “How do I get my hands on it?”

Our chapters focus on:

- What now? where do I go from here?
- Dealing with our adult children
- The changing nature of intimate relationships
- Reconciling (or not) with people from whom we’ve become estranged
- The meaning of work in our lives
- The many faces of loss
- How friendships change
- Building new communities

Putting the book together has been an exciting adventure. Dick, Mady and I talked, disagreed, shared personal experiences and considered how to frame each chapter. We let down our guard, speaking candidly with each other about how our lives have been impacted by the changes middle age inevitably brings. Our lively conversations stretched from minutes into hours, and they were difficult to end. We were having too much fun...and learning so much from each other.

We hope you will have the same experience we did, sharing your thoughts with friends or in a group, or reading the chapters on your own and “talking” to others through our online comments section.

I thank Dick and Mady for their direction, insight and support, the writers who contributed their expertise to these chapters, and Temple University emeritus professor and author Don Rankin for his meticulous reading of the chapters and editing suggestions. Additional thanks to Sam Cohen and Kevin McConnaughay for their computer expertise and to Annette Earling for the attractive graphic design and formatting of the printable edition.

When I was growing up, my dad always encouraged me to “express yourself.” I took his advice seriously and I hope you will too. We’re eager for you to be part of this book. We welcome your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for other issues you would like to see us add to this living document. Please let us hear from you. You can reach us at info@comingofage.org.

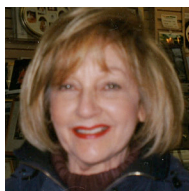
Gloria Hochman

Editor

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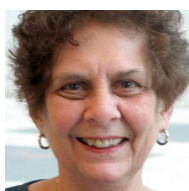
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Melba Newsome is an award-winning writer with feature credits in many national publications including, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *Time*, *Reader's Digest* and the *New York Times*. Her passions including travel, politics, literature and gourmet cooking. She lives in Charlotte, NC where she promises to start a vegetable garden every year.



Nissa Simon, who lives in New Haven, Connecticut, writes about health-related topics for national magazines. She was senior editor at *Reader's Digest New Choices*, a magazine for men and women over 50, for more than 10 years. As the magazine's first health editor, she developed the publication's award-winning approach to health, nutrition and fitness. She is also the author of two books on health for adolescents, *Don't Worry, You're Normal* and *Good Sports: Plain Talk about Health and Fitness for Teens*. She has produced a radio program for Yale University, edited the New York City Mayor's Management Report and taken boxing lessons, where she learned to deliver a solid left hook and strong right uppercut.



SaraKay Smullens is a licensed diplomat in clinical social work and a trained family therapist and educator. She has been certified as a group psychotherapist by American Group Psychotherapy Association and as a certified family life educator by the National Council on Family Relations. A recipient of a lifetime achievement award by the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Association of Social Work, SaraKay is a best-selling author of "*Whoever Said Life is Fair?*" and "*Setting Yourself Free: Breaking the Cycle of Emotional Abuse in Family, Friendship, Love and Work.*" Her paper, "Achieving An Emotional Sense of Direction," can be found at (www.sarakaysmullens.com)



A Pause for Reflection

By Anndee Hochman

Rodger Broadley took a literal trip down memory lane.

To mark the 25th anniversary of his ordination as an Episcopal priest, Rodger spent a four-month sabbatical re-visiting significant places from his past—his childhood home in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, a remote ski lodge in northern Vermont, the Benedictine monastery in Austria where he'd spent his junior year of college—and taking old friends out to dinner.

“The theme,” he said, “was to see if I'd grown up. I connected with half a dozen friends from high school and college whom I hadn't seen in years. What a gift! I ended [my sabbatical] at the ocean, in Cape May, New Jersey, praying and sitting and jumping in and out of the water. I felt this sense of completion. It was wonderful to feel that I've carried my past with me in a way that has really nurtured me.”

Few people have the time or means to journey through their personal histories in such a tangible way. Rodger, 58, was supported during his sabbatical by a Lilly Endowment grant for clergy. But in midlife, many share that yearning to review, re-evaluate and reconnect.

“In general, every time people hit a birthday that ends in zero, it's a time of reckoning,” says psychologist Judith S. Beck, president of the **Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research** in suburban Philadelphia. “A decade causes them to think about the

last ten years and the next ten years. People also have times of reckoning when there's any major life change. It may be when they become empty nesters or when there's some kind of health, relationship or work crisis. Those tend to make people start a period of reflection.”

Whether it comes at 50, at 60, at retirement or when the first grandchild is born, that reflection is often laced with questions: What have I accomplished? What do I regret? If I've lived more than half my life, what do I want to do with the time that remains? What would I like to change? What must I learn to accept?

Rodger pondered his decision to remain pastor of a diverse, urban church rather than “climbing the ladder” toward a larger parish or more prominent position. He also wondered if he'd lost touch with some old friends because, after coming out as a gay man while in seminary, he'd never talked with them about his sexual orientation.

He hesitated before tapping out the phone numbers of those friends. “Here I was, 53, out in my ministry and afraid to call people because I thought I wouldn't be accepted. Those calls were really hard to make, and they were so worth making. There were tears. Most people said, ‘Oh, it's fine that you're gay.’ I came to realize those people were still part of me.”

After the sabbatical, Rodger also felt affirmed in his decision to remain with one church, in one city. “I look

around and I think, ‘I still like this place. It fascinates me.’ Staying in one spot, being committed to it: a lot of my peers don’t get that.”

Never Too Late

For others, a period of midlife introspection becomes the catalyst for change: embracing a different career, launching a new hobby or fulfilling a long-deferred dream. “At this age [midlife and beyond] people are more willing to look beyond who they’ve been and who they’re supposed to have been and think, ‘Am I living my life or somebody else’s?’” says Meg Newhouse, a life coach, author of *Life Planning for the Third Age: A Design and Resource Guide and Toolkit*, and principal creator of the **Coming of Age** project’s life-planning curriculum, **Explore Your Future**.

Marc, 63, had always been “the business guy,” the one who handled administrative details at a day camp for underprivileged kids, the one who eventually earned a six-figure salary at an insurance company.

Then, last summer, on a trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, Marc realized it was time to shift gears. “I was walking by the water’s edge, thinking, ‘Who am I and what am I; how am I going to move ahead?’ It was a realization that I had to spend more time doing what I wanted to do rather than what I thought I had to do.”

Meanwhile, the insurance company had folded. Mark had tried unsuccessfully to find a job doing administrative work for a non-profit company. But, he’d always dreamed of starting a career counseling practice. Why not now?

Marc’s income plummeted—he grossed \$6,000 in 2009 and was supported by his wife, a nurse—and his sense of identity was rattled. “As for most men, my career and my role as a provider had been my identity. Being provided for was very hard to adjust to.”

On the other hand, Marc gained the deep fulfillment of becoming the “helping professional” he’d always wanted to be. At his 45th high-school reunion, he found himself shouting to people over the Oldies tunes, “I am enjoying myself, starting a career counseling practice

and living my dream.” He remembers that day by the ocean and the clarity it brought. “I’m getting too old not to be me,” he says.

Regrets and Repair

In midlife, a period of reckoning can aim the spotlight on relationships, says Brendan Greer, a psychiatrist and chief operating officer of **Philadelphia’s Council for Relationships**. As the time-consuming tasks of building a career or raising children subside, people often take a close, sometimes painful, look at relationships with spouses or partners, siblings and friends.

“People are absolutely thinking about the fact that their time on earth is more limited than they once thought,” Greer says. “That affects their relationship concerns: Do I want to spend the next 30 years with this person, or do I want to fix things so the next 30 years work out better?”

“I will hear from folks, ‘I wish I’d had a better relationship with my parents. I wish my parents had been more present, less depressed, more giving or less alcoholic.’” Others feel bad about ruptured bonds with siblings or strained relations with adult children.

Can those broken relationships be healed? Psychologists and clergy say it depends—on the depth of the hurt, on the willingness of both people, on their expectations for change.

Rebecca, 62, didn’t expect miracles. She simply felt, when her mother entered an assisted living facility, that she needed to spend more time with her. Rebecca’s childhood hadn’t been an easy one: her father, now deceased, was abusive, her mother distant, and she’d worked hard to make peace with that part of her past. Week after week, she and her mother would watch *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*; during the commercials, Rebecca asked questions: “What was it like to be married to Dad? Tell me about your childhood.” Sometimes her mother lamented, “I must have been such a bad mother to you,” and Rebecca responded, “Mom, you did the best you could.”

“In the last year of her life, when I would leave, she

started to kiss me goodbye on the cheek. She had never done that. The first time, I thought it was an anomaly. But she persisted, and I could tell that something had moved in her heart. She wanted to have a different kind of relationship with me.”

Judith Beck says the regrets that typically come with midlife—whether they concern relationships, missed opportunities or unmet dreams—can either nudge people toward change or drag them into inertia.

“If you say, ‘Okay, I didn’t get the master’s degree,’ but it spurs you to either get the degree now or take some courses without credit or expand yourself intellectually in another way, then the regrets are good. A lot of people, unfortunately, get stuck in regrets.”

Beck advocates managing those regrets by focusing on the present: “How am I going to improve my life *today*? It could be a resolve to improve an existing relationship, or to go out and meet new people. The regrets will always be there. But if your attention is on something else, the regrets will fade into the background.”

Totaling the Balance Sheet: Struggle and Resilience

The neighborhood “prophets,” guys with names like “Justice” and “Jimmy the Hustler,” didn’t think Warren would survive past the age of 20. He was a wild kid who ran with gangs, spent time in juvenile detention and was so impulsive that he once ran *toward* a guy with a gun, holding up a trash-can lid as a makeshift shield.

At 25 and home from Vietnam, Warren picked up a string bass for the first time. “I’d seen players, so I knew how to hold it,” says Warren. “It was like holding a woman. I didn’t know it was going to be a career...I just knew I was going to play.”

That first caress of the strings grew into a life as

a professional musician, the leader of a jazz ensemble and the co-founder of a popular neighborhood jazz festival. If there’s a refrain in his life, Warren says, it’s “going against the odds.”

Warren’s other recurrent melody has to do with transformation: turning grim situations into small moments of peace or opportunities to grow. When, for instance, he was in juvenile detention, alone in a stripped-down cell, he fit a cookie box over the bare ceiling bulb to create a softer light, “a mood,” he recalls. When, at 49, he needed surgery to insert a heart valve, he let that medical scare be a call to gratitude.

“That was like a rebirth for me,” says Warren. “Now, at 62, I feel like everything counts—a glass of water, a good conversation.” He even values the rough lessons of his adolescence and early adulthood: “I learned determination and the ability to tolerate almost anything. No matter the situation, I’m going to make it as

positive as possible.”

Beck says that ability—to reframe a difficult situation as a springboard for growth, to find ways of acting positively rather than suffering passively—is key to resilience, in midlife or at any time. “It’s not events or situations that lead to your emotional reactions; it’s the way you perceive them. If you’ve just gone through a divorce and think: ‘This is terrible, I’m so unlovable, I’ll never find anyone else,’ you will be very anxious and sad. If you say, ‘That was terrible and I wish it hadn’t happened, but I will go out and make my life better,’ you will probably not be nearly so upset. “People who are resilient tend to see setbacks as temporary and not completely their fault, if their fault at all, and as remediable.”

Carmen, 55, sips coffee in the student center of the west coast university where she works in the art center and gallery. Near her cup is a stack of journals in which she draws, pastes images clipped from magazines and

“People who are resilient tend to see setbacks as temporary and not completely their fault, if their fault at all, and as remediable.”

writes about her past, her parenting and her future, mostly in her native Spanish. “I reflect about my life almost every day,” she says. “I’ve kept these journals since high school.”

Her life—half of it spent in Peru, half in the United States—has been marked with sadness. Her parents both died when Carmen was in her early 20s, and after an 18-year marriage, her husband stunned her with the news that he wanted a divorce.

For a time, Carmen was devastated by the loss of her marriage and all that came with it—the large suburban home, the luxury cars. She cried daily; she had no appetite and forced herself to swallow teaspoons of Ensure to maintain her strength. “I thought: I can choose—either I die, or I live. I chose to live.”

Now she treasures time with her 15-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son and values her own pluck and determination. “I am proud of choosing to come to this country without a penny and telling myself I was going to go to college. I’m proud of making so many friends. I’m proud of my kids.”

On a chain around her neck, Carmen wears three silver symbols of the ideas and beliefs that help sustain her: a delicate cross, sign of her faith; a winged fairy, a 50th-birthday gift from her niece and an emblem of wonder; and the figure of a full-breasted, wide-hipped woman. “This is my ‘real woman,’” she says with a smile.

Happy in Spite of It All

A Gallup Organization poll in 2007 questioned more than 1,000 Americans about their level of happiness. Slightly more than half said they were “very happy.”

Another poll, conducted in 1972-2004 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, showed that happiness generally increases with age. One of the study’s authors suggested that people develop greater self-esteem and self-integration as they age and mature.

Meg Newhouse, the life-planning coach and author, says that periods of struggle may actually lead to greater happiness in the long term. “A lot of times

people will see how they got strength from dealing with certain difficult things. They see what enabled them to move through the transitions.”

Warren, who never imagined living past young adulthood, let alone building a thriving career as a jazz musician, says that when he turned 50, “I was just glad to be alive...Some people go into their older years with doom and gloom. But for me, things are just kicking in. If I was to die now—and I want to be cremated—I’d want people to say, ‘We put this guy in the crematorium, but we can’t burn the smile off his face.’”

Some in their 50s and 60s describe a sense of well-being that has less to do with “peak” experiences and more to do with awareness, gratitude and perspective.

Carmen’s happiest moments include quiet afternoons at home, napping on the couch, with one of her kids playing on the computer nearby and the other one doing homework. Or evenings with her women friends, sharing wine and confidences. Or mornings in the art studio, when she plunges her hands into a wedge of clay. “Happiness, for me, is when you are at peace in your own soul, when you are content.”

For Rodger, the Episcopal priest, “one of the great things of being in my 50s is a tremendous reduction in anxiety. Everything’s not a federal case. I’m not as self-conscious.” With age, his priesthood has changed; he’s more expressive in the pulpit and more relaxed about the inevitable conflicts that arise in a diverse, urban parish.

Each day when Marc climbs into his car, a CD plays a song adapted from Psalm 90, part of his synagogue’s High Holiday liturgy each autumn: “Teach us to treasure each day.” That’s the mantra he tries to carry, even when struggling to earn a decent living in his new career counseling practice or worrying about his grown children.

When Linda Holtzman, a rabbi in a Reconstructionist congregation of 300, was an activist in the 1970s, happiness meant marching down Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C., advocating for abortion rights, or being part of the first Earth Day celebration. Now her happiness has a different tone.

“As a baby boomer, I and everyone I knew believed

that we could change the world and that we *were* changing the world. That’s what made me happy, thinking that we were doing it differently. “But the world didn’t change in the way we wanted it to change. So happiness needs to be based on something different. Now, my personal happiness is more about knowing that my friends and partner are there, that my kids are there. It’s a different kind of happiness: softer and richer.”

What We Leave Behind

Barry K. Baines helps people revive a 3,500-year-old tradition: writing ethical wills that articulate their values and beliefs for future generations. After years of working with hospice patients, residents in assisted-living facilities and community groups, Baines, a family physician and hospice medical director in Minnesota, wrote **Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper**. “In middle age, we are hard-wired to want to capture our life lessons, experience and wisdom and pass them on to future generations,” Baines says. In ethical wills, people typically write—in the form of a letter, a series of anecdotes or a short spiritual/ethical autobiography—their key experiences, their perspectives on faith, their hopes for the future, their desire to forgive or be forgiven. Most then share that will with loved ones, rather than saving it to be opened after they die.

Although Baines has helped many terminally ill patients create their ethical wills late in life, he advocates writing one “in the seventh inning,” rather than the “bottom of the ninth.” Making an ethical will when you’re in relatively good health, in your 50s or 60s, he says, “affords you time to act on regrets and to make amends, and to do things you said were important that you haven’t gotten to yet.”

Baines penned his own ethical will eleven years ago, at 48; he plans to update it periodically. “When I finished, I felt like this burden had been lifted off my shoulders. It’s the idea that, if you get hit by a bus tomorrow, you’re leaving a spiritual legacy, something that tells who you are as a person, what’s important to you and why.”

“When we get to midlife or later,” says Newhouse, “there is a push toward more authenticity. A desire to do something meaningful, to contribute, to leave a legacy.”

That legacy may take various forms, Newhouse says, from ethical wills and spiritual autobiographies to scrapbooks, digital archives, memoirs or simply time spent reflecting on the values and ideas one wishes to pass on.

Keeping a journal to chronicle daily experiences, thoughts and dreams is a valuable gift to future generations. “There’s an African proverb: ‘When an old person dies, a library burns down,’” says Gregory McGann, a clinical social worker in Gainesville, Florida. “I encourage people to keep journals and jot down all those thoughts and impressions of their daily lives that would be lost otherwise.” “When I ask groups of people to think of a legacy they got from somebody who cared, 90% of the people come up with intangible legacies—something a parent modeled or stood for, a word of encouragement, a phrase,” Newhouse says. “The more aware we are that we are leaving legacies all the time, the more thoughtful and intentional we can be.”

Warren, the jazz musician, says he realizes that his sons and grandchildren are always looking to him as a role model. That’s why, years ago, he quit his habit of drinking heavily; that’s why he plays with his grandsons, laughing and being silly; that’s why he reminds them of the lessons his rough youth taught him: “Stand tall, value integrity, take a stance—even if it may be unpopular—and never back down.”

Although Jim, a pediatrician, can’t make up the time he lost with his children while building a practice, he makes it a point to be involved in his grandchildren’s lives. He visits them often, telling stories of his parents and grandparents and how different life was for African Americans half a century ago. But he also shares practical advice: how to tie a one-handed knot or straighten a bent nail. “Intergenerational contact is deeply rewarding for both grandchildren and grandparents,” wrote the late Gene Cohen, architect of the concept of creative aging. “Sadly, in many families neither generation had a chance to know the other in any mean-

ingful way until there was no time left.”

Queen Nur, 52, a professional storyteller who frequently performs and conducts workshops in schools, yearns to leave both concrete and intangible legacies. There are the family tales, the traditions of African-American poetry, storytelling and drumming that she sees her daughter carrying forward (her two-year-old grandson recently had a drum-themed party). She wants to publish children’s books and infuse more storytelling in school curricula.

“And there’s something I want to leave behind spiritually, too: how to be at peace with oneself after 50. That’s one of the things I’m living toward.”

Carmen’s legacy is in her artwork, her journals and her commitment to children in her resource-poor neighborhood, including the little boy who spends a lot of time at her apartment because his mother works long hours. “The older I get, the more concerned I am about youth, about my neighbors.”

For Rebecca, legacy isn’t about grand ambitions but, instead, small, daily interactions—whether sending an e-mail to a friend from 40 years ago or helping her 14-year-old son with his homework. “There’s a wisdom that comes from surviving 60 years,” she says. “It’s the knowledge that things will go on, regardless: People will get up, go to work, fight wars, make love. So, what about my life will help the world turn better? There’s more urgency to be intentional about my actions.”

“People will get up, go to
work, fight wars, make love.
So, what about my life will help
the world turn better?”

A Future Full of Promise

Warren dreams of conducting a 100-piece orchestra on a beach.

Rebecca, who plans to retire in three years, envisions days spent cooking, making mosaics, walking in the woods and enjoying time with friends.

Marc has faith that his career counseling practice will grow and that he can eventually develop a specialty in counseling men through life transitions. After all, he has seen himself travel numerous religious paths—born Jewish, he converted to Catholicism in his 20s, became interested in New Age thinking, then

returned to Judaism and explored Buddhism later on. He’s also found fulfillment in a second marriage and new career. “I know I’ll never reach a point at which I stop changing,” he says. “We boomers thought we’d be over the hill at 30. That wasn’t a joke. I never envisioned that, at 63, I’d be loving life this much.”

Queen Nur’s days spill with new adventures—fishing, line-dancing, a master’s degree program focused on sustaining cultural heritage—and time with friends that, she says, feels sweeter as she ages.

“I want to continue to grow as a person, in relation to other people, in relation to God,” says Rodger, who after four months of purposeful soul-searching came home to his parish and his city. “I want to be more open, not less. The things I’m proud of in my life are things I can still expand: being a theologian, a scholar who reads Scripture seriously. I’d like to learn more and give back to the larger church. I’m never bored. There’s a great future ahead of me, still.”

Glossary: Chapter 1

Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research— nonprofit institute in suburban Philadelphia, founded in 1994, to establish national and international training programs in cognitive therapy and clinical care and research consultation.

Coming of Age— nonprofit organization launched in 2002 in Philadelphia, which helps people 50+ explore their future, connect and contribute through opportunities—both paid and unpaid—in their communities, and provides training to nonprofits on how to build their capacity to capture the energy and expertise of this population.

Ethical Wills— Baines, Barry K. Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper. Da Capo Press, 2002.

Explore Your Future— a four-session workshop series, provided by Coming of Age, which gives employees

and individuals a unique opportunity to consider “what’s next” in their lives. It is a hands-on learning experience that focuses on helping participants create a vision for making their future satisfying and rewarding.

Newhouse, Meg— life-planning coach, author, group facilitator, teacher, coach, program designer, and founder of the Life Planning Network. Maintains a web presence at *passionandpurpose.com*.

Philadelphia’s Council for Relationships—founded in 1932 as the Philadelphia Marriage Council, this independent, nonprofit organization provide clinical care, education, research, and training with the aim of improving the quality of personal relationships.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: A Pause for Reflection

1. If you could be 25 again, what, if anything, would you do differently? How do you think these different choices would have changed your life?
2. Think of a time in your life that was challenging or sorrowful? What did you learn from that period? How have you used the perspective or wisdom that you gained from those struggles?
3. Do you keep journals, write letters, maintain a blog, scrapbook, or other ongoing record of your life? If so, what do you learn from this practice? If you don’t, is there a record-keeping practice you would like to start?
4. Rodger talked about the anxiety and relief of “coming out” to old friends. Are there aspects of yourself or your life that you have kept hidden from others? What might be the risks and benefits of revealing those secrets?
5. Do you find yourself thinking it is “too late” to do something – pursue a new hobby or skill, move to a different place, change some aspect of your behavior? Is that really true?
6. Does the idea of writing an ethical will intrigue you? What are the values that you want to pass on to your loved ones?



What Now? Figuring It Out

By Nissa Simon

*Tell me...What Is It You Plan To Do With Your One Wild
and Precious Life?*

— Mary Oliver

As you reflect on your life and identify how you may want to reconfigure it, these stories may inspire you and help show you the way:

Jane, 59, who had been a marriage and family counselor all her adult life, has given it up to lead a congregation in a small-town church.

Susan, 58, who was a stay-at-home mom until her youngest daughter, Dahlia, entered ninth grade, now owns a vibrant business painting portraits of pets, an occupation that combines her love of both art and animals.

Jane and Susan typify the kinds of transitions people often make when they are in their 50s and older. In her book, **My Time**, Abigail Trafford says, “The biological calendar has been reconfigured so that people are physically younger than their chronological age... creating a whole new stage in the life cycle.” Instead of slowing down, more baby boomers and beyond are seeing this time of life as a new opportunity. It may be their last chance to reinvent themselves—to chase a dream, to find a new career, to pursue a hobby, to make a difference in the world. There is no right or wrong way to move toward the future: each person’s approach will be different, and discovering what suits

best is part of the adventure.

For Jane, the moment that changed her life came during a short-term move to Africa when she was 55. Her husband, a high school teacher, had been selected to teach in Gabarone for six months as part of an international exchange program. Jane took a leave of absence from her job.

The first day they were in the small town in Botswana where they were to live, the door to their house snapped shut and wouldn’t open. “Our neighbor helped us find a locksmith—no small task in that town,” Jane says. “The next morning when I went to thank him, he replied, ‘There is nothing to thank me for. In Africa, neighbors are family.’”

Jane recalls that event as an “aha!” moment, the sudden introduction to a sense of community and family that she realized had been missing in her life.

“When we returned, I explored various options and finally surprised myself and stunned my family by enrolling in divinity school,” Jane says. “It was a way to integrate what I had done professionally with my new understanding of what I wanted out of life.”

Would she have chosen this path when she was

younger? No, she says. “Considering divinity school was a midlife change for me that grew out of a newly recognized deep need to find community in my faith.”

When Susan was in college, she took several studio art courses on weekends because she was passionate about painting. But she didn’t pursue a career in art because her parents convinced her she couldn’t make a living at it.

While volunteering as an assistant to the art teacher at her daughter’s school, she learned that the town’s animal shelter needed help. “When I was a kid, my fantasies about what I’d do when I grew up often involved animals,” Susan says, “so I volunteered at the shelter as well.”

For a shelter fundraiser, Susan painted portraits of the animals waiting to be adopted. People who saw them were awed at the accuracy of the likenesses and a few commissioned her to paint their pets. One picture led to another and Susan found herself in business.

“Painting these pet portraits gives me deep pleasure,” says Susan. “I can see myself continuing along this unexpected career path for many years to come.”

On a whim, Harvey, who had always liked tinkering with cars, took a course in restoring antique automobiles and found that he loved it. He spent his weekends happily polishing chrome fittings and replacing rumble seats. Harvey’s goal became to open his own business some day.

Three years ago for his birthday, Harvey gave himself the gift of more time to hone his skills. He spoke with the head of his department and together they came up with a plan that allowed Harvey to pare down his work week to give himself time to pursue his new passion. He plans to continue this arrangement until he can take early retirement and spend all of his time doing what he enjoys most.

These few examples demonstrate how midlife changes can revitalize your life. Maybe you’d like to do the same thing, but don’t know how to begin. These are a few suggestions: Think about what excites you, what gets you out of bed in the morning, what you would like to do and who you would like to become. Look at your values—what’s important to you; your passions—what you like to talk about and spend time doing. Take inventory of your gifts and talents, your dreams and your goals.

If you have no clear-cut sense of direction, you might begin by glancing backward. Make a list of what you loved to do when you were younger and had fewer responsibilities. Piano lessons? Coin collecting? Model railroads? Photography? What was your passion? Maybe you’d like to go back to school to learn more about a subject you excelled in or investigate an area about which you are curious. Perhaps exploring a new business venture, taking tango lessons, tracing your family roots or becoming involved in a book club would be rewarding and fun.

The world can be wide open to satisfying new opportunities if you open yourself to the possibilities.

Rediscovering Old Passions

Richard went into the plumbing supply business when he graduated from high school and has stayed there ever since. But at 57, he found himself bored with his work and with his life. He was forever picking fights with his wife Ann over nothing. Finally Ann told him that if he didn’t do something about it, she was leaving. That day he made an appointment at a counseling center.

When the counselor asked him what he was interested in, Richard answered, “Nothing much except watching baseball games on television.” But when she asked him what he had liked to do when he was young,

Make a list of what you loved to do when you were younger and had fewer responsibilities. Piano lessons? Coin collecting? What was your passion?

his face lit up as he described his childhood hobby of carving and painting miniature wooden knights. He recalled with a sense of wonder how satisfying it was to put the finishing touches on a figure he had carved and add it to his collection. The counselor suggested that he explore this interest to see if it would be as absorbing now as it was then. The answer turned out to be a resounding yes...Richard bought a set of tools and a stock of wood and started carving once more.

Today he takes great pride in his new collection of finely carved and meticulously painted wooden knights. He spends his spare time going to miniatures shows and trading tips—and knights—with others who are as enthralled as he is with carving and collecting medieval figures. Fights with Ann have become a rare event.

Passion Counts

“Most of us need something in life to be passionate about,” says David Carlson, a psychoanalyst in New Haven, Connecticut. “The most important thing is to do what you love.” It might mean developing a fulfilling hobby as Richard did, but it also may be finding a whole new career.

Marie, 60 years old, found money tight after her husband George died. She realized she’d have to find a job but she had no skills to fall back on. “I married George when I was 20 and got so caught up in being a wife and mother that I didn’t have time for anything else,” says Marie.

Looking for work can be intimidating for someone who hasn’t held a job in decades. How does she know what kind of job she wants? Will prospective employers even give her an interview? How can she convince them that she would be a good employee? Can she compete with youngsters who are seeking the same kind of work?

Judith Ulrich, a psychotherapist in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, conjectures that sitting around and mulling over phantom worries won’t get someone like Marie anywhere. Her first task is to muster the courage to start a job search. “To do that,” says Ulrich, “she might

consider seeking out a friend who also needs encouragement to pursue a venture of her own. They could agree to meet regularly, talk about what each of them wants and figure out ways to achieve their goals. Just as people get more exercise if they schedule regular walks with a friend, the emotional support Marie and her friend give each other will foster the self-confidence each of them needs.”

It didn’t take long before Marie’s weekly conversations with her friend Lucy nudged her toward a new career. On a visit to Marie’s home, Lucy admired her friend’s eye-popping garden, one Marie had designed to fill the lonely days after George’s death. She encouraged Marie to volunteer at a local botanical center or join a garden club where she might get leads on jobs.

After six months of networking and volunteering, Marie learned about a nearby flower shop with a job vacancy because one of the employees was taking maternity leave. She applied for the position and began working full time the following week.

What to Do?

Building the self-confidence to pursue a dream isn’t easy. The self-doubts people live with for years surface and shake their nay-saying fingers in warning. But experience and skill build with age, and most people have a great deal to offer once they identify their strengths. That’s the first step.

When she turned 30, Diana had what was then called a nervous breakdown. Her doctors prescribed medications and told her that if she didn’t take them she’d probably be dead within six months. “I chose not to follow their advice,” she said. “I knew in my heart their diagnosis and their prescriptions were not right for me and so I learned how to heal myself.”

For the next ten years Diana taught school while learning about her illness. She chronicled each day in her journal. But thoughts about becoming a writer nagged her. So she applied to a nearby university as an administrative assistant in the communications department and worked her way up to writing a column for

the staff newsletter. “My writing took off and a number of organizations hired me for various writing jobs. And, on the side, I began to write essays, the love of my writing life.”

On the eve of her 60th birthday when she had blown out the last candle on her chocolate cake, Diana heard a faint but insistent voice in her head. It reminded her that time was catching up with her. If she didn’t push ahead with her essay writing now, she would forever be trapped in a cocoon of regret.

Six months later, Diana had found a writing mentor to help her polish her essays for publication. “To my astonishment,” says Diana, “she said that what I had was not a collection of essays but a significant book about my illness and my life’s journey.” Her book, which is near completion, will deal with the power of self-knowledge and the experience of writing about it.

“I talk to many people between 60 and 65 who feel that it’s time to do something about the plans and dreams that they’ve put off for years,” says Kate Allen, a psychiatric clinician. “There’s something about that age that focuses people on reviewing their lives and thinking about what they want to do now.”

Finding a passion doesn’t have to mean waking up one morning and shouting “Eureka!” It may be that what will become an all-consuming interest starts out simply as a diverting pastime, and it’s also possible to throw yourself wholeheartedly into a pursuit that looked fascinating but turns out to be a great big bore. So what? Drop it. You don’t have to force yourself to be interested, and no one’s keeping score. If you want to flit from project to project, go right ahead. If you find your life’s one true delight and want to stick with it, that’s terrific too.

Whichever way you go about it, figuring out what you’d like to do is a magical gift to give yourself. It may be as simple as zeroing in on what you care most

about...and going after it. Some men and women switch gears and turn their lives around 180 degrees. Others, like Diana, write their memoirs; still others decide to spend time with grandchildren.

Many discover the need to be socially responsible. Renowned psychoanalyst and social scientist Erik Erikson calls this developmental phase of life **Generativity**, a time of reaching out to others, giving back to the community, sharing your time, wisdom and expertise. “I am what survives of me,” he wrote.

For the Greater Good...and Yours

Harry unexpectedly lost his beloved wife Carolyn to cancer. They had long looked forward to driving through Europe. In anticipation of the trip, the table in their den was covered with travel brochures. After the funeral, Harry threw them out.

He grieved for Carolyn month after month; he declined dinner invitations and didn’t return calls from friends. Finally, he decided it was time to re-enter the world; he wanted to help others going through the kind of emotional crisis he had experienced. He became certified as a grief counselor and volunteered his services to the hospice unit of a nearby hospital where he’s been a source of comfort to the patients’ families. They and the hospital staff think he’s wonderful, and Harry has found

that helping others also helps him. He knows that he will always mourn Carolyn but is grateful that out of his own grief he has found a way to ease the pain of others.

A study by Stephan Meier and Alois Stutzer in the February 2008 issue of *Economica* reveals that people who give back to their community through volunteer work, whether with an organization or in a less formal way, are the most satisfied with life. And research funded by the Economic & Social Research Council in Great Britain and published in the journal Bio-Medi-

“I talk to many people between 60 and 65 who feel that it’s time to do something about the plans and dreams that they’ve put off for years.”

cine indicates that helping others “raises the quality of life.” The study reveals that “when we volunteer our time to do something for others, such as helping out an elderly neighbor or taking part in a local community project, it can be good news for our health, our children’s education and results in greater life satisfaction. Volunteering has a positive influence, irrespective of a community’s social class or wealth.”

Volunteering can mean anything from helping in a neighborhood soup kitchen to using specialized skills, such as a librarian reading to hospitalized children or a doctor giving up a Saturday to work in an inner-city health clinic or a teacher who mentors a foster child and encourages him to complete high school.

Even in these uncertain times when people are losing their jobs and their homes, when once-certain pensions disappear from one day to the next and savings shrink in value while prices rise, more Americans than ever are giving their time to help others. One report estimates that in 2008 Americans donated approximately eight billion hours of volunteer service.

Nonprofit organizations whose budgets are diminishing as the demands for their services escalate frequently count on volunteer help for survival. To find the right fit, many communities have opened clearing-houses that match a person’s interests and skills with a volunteer organization that needs help. Opportunities abound.

Helen, 58, found herself out of a job when the corporation that employed her outsourced the work of her accounting department. The employees received severance pay and that, together with savings accumulated over the years, would cover her financial needs. Her emotional needs were another matter.

Without a regular commute and a set workday schedule, Helen was adrift. She lost interest in herself and the world around her. Clearly she was not happy, but when concerned friends called, she insisted there was nothing wrong.

One day a former colleague told her that a nearby residence for children whose parents could not take care of them was looking for a volunteer to act as assis-

tant treasurer to write checks and keep track of where the money went.

That was five years ago. Helen goes in several times a week. She’s gotten to know the children and often has thought-provoking and stimulating conversations with them. Staff members invite her to join them for lunch and have made her feel part of the group. She loves the routine, feels useful and is enjoying a life that has become meaningful to her once more.

As David Carlson says, “Feeling needed is one of the enormous rewards of volunteering.”

Retirement and New Opportunities

Volunteering doesn’t necessarily mean working for an organization in a formal setting. Every neighborhood has someone who can use assistance, and spiritual leaders of local houses of worship almost always know of congregants who need a helping hand.

When he retired at 65 from his job as a quality control manager for an auto parts manufacturer, Peter began spending three afternoons a week befriending a neighbor—an elderly woman who lived alone with her half dozen cats and was cantankerous enough to have alienated her family and friends.

“It was a challenge,” Peter says, “but I thought that I could offer this much-troubled neighbor the kind of support that would give her a better life.” For 18 months now, Peter has taken 87-year-old Cecelia to town for shopping and medical appointments, helping her feed her cats, tidy her house and weed the garden. He sees his job as keeping her attached to the world and making sure that she gets the health care she needs. “Cecilia doesn’t have many more years left,” says Peter, “but I’ve been able to ease her life somewhat and that’s gratifying. Everyone wants to feel that they’re living in a place that’s a little better because they’re there.”

Retiring Times Two

Retirement is not always a solo endeavor: it is often a joint venture faced by couples as they enter an arena

where the dynamics of their relationship change almost overnight. This can be an exhilarating time as they re-establish the closeness of the early years of marriage or a challenging period where they drift apart and build separate lives or get in each other's way.

The best way to assure that the years ahead will be fulfilling is to start planning the future before you get your final paycheck, advises Gregory McGann, a clinical social worker in Gainesville, Florida. Will you both retire at the same time? Will one or both of you continue to work part time? What are your goals as a couple? As individuals? Do you want to go back to school together? Travel? Spend more time with grandchildren? Does your spouse agree? Retirement can be complicated.

"Make sure to talk about what your retirement will look like," continues McGann. "Discuss finances and activities. Ideally the decision should be to do something that will enhance your relationship without losing track of how important it is to retain and develop individual interests." In the best of all possible worlds, there's a common ground on which spouses can meet.

Alex and Harriet retired within six months of each other. Alex's pension and Harriet's retirement fund gave them financial security. But after they retired, they seemed to be leading completely separate lives. Alex liked to visit museums. Harriet found them boring. Harriet liked to take long hikes through the woods. Alex complained that his feet hurt. Without a structured work life, they were adrift.

As the months passed, they found themselves increasingly dissatisfied. "I finally told Alex that we had to sit down and talk this out," Harriet said. Eventually, they decided that each of them would accompany the other on a preferred activity at least once a week.

Alex bought a pair of hiking boots that made tramping through the woods easier on his feet. Harriet found that museums, especially those with large natural histo-

ry collections, were really quite interesting. And when the local nature center put out a call for volunteers to lead school tours and explain the exhibits to groups of students, they signed up as a couple.

"There'll always be adjustments to be made on both sides but communication is key," McGann says. "Two people are rarely in sync about what they want at every point during marriage but those who retire well together recognize the problems they can't solve and work to solve the ones they can."

Sometimes one-half of a couple keeps working while the other, through choice or chance, no longer has a full-time job. Some couples are content with that situation; others are not, often because it leaves the non-working partner at loose ends.

Andy retired from his marketing job when he turned 65. But his partner David, a freelance illustrator of children's books, had more assignments than he could handle and no plans to give up working.

At first Andy thought he could find enough to fill his days, but the transition from a full-time job to full-time retirement was difficult, especially since David spent all day in his studio.

Andy looked into part-time marketing work but didn't find anything interesting so he decided to try his hand as a consultant and called former colleagues to tell them he was available. At first jobs trickled in, then they became more regular. Andy now has enough work to fill three days a week and he doesn't plan on taking any more. He's kind of retired and kind of working, which is just as he wants it to be. Studies show that this kind of transition into "phased retirement" is healthier than sudden retirement. Andy certainly finds it so.

Spiritual Matters

The quest for spirituality often develops or accelerates with maturity. For some, it follows the death of a

The best way to assure that
the years ahead will be fulfilling
is to start planning the
future before you get your
final paycheck.

spouse, an event that rocks the very foundation of life. From one day to the next the world changes. There is no compass to guide us through the landscape of grief. Everyone experiences this sad time differently and no one can feel the extent of another's mourning. Religion may offer solace and support.

As a medical researcher, 67-year-old Catherine says she was always looking for answers, always searching. "That's what researchers do and I was good at it," she says.

Catherine met her future husband, an architect, when they were both in college. They married shortly after graduation, and within five years they had two children. "I had a wonderful marriage, two amazing kids and a rewarding career," Catherine remembers. "Personally and professionally, I achieved everything I had always wanted," she says. "But still I felt something was missing."

Then her husband, Jeff, developed blinding headaches. His doctor diagnosed a brain tumor and a neurosurgeon operated to remove it. Jeff was admitted to the intensive care unit and Catherine spent every minute she could with him. He died eight days later.

"I did a lot of thinking while I was sitting next to Jeff's bed holding his hand," she says. "When I walked out of the hospital after his death, I was not the same person." Catherine made an appointment to speak with the priest at her local church. She won't say anything about their two-hour conversation except that she realized that she had finally found the answers she had been searching for all those years. "It turns out I had been searching for God."

This spiritual discovery reopened Catherine's path to the future. She is cobbling together a new way of life.

She has her monthly Social Security checks and some work from a small Catholic newspaper. She'll sell the house she and Jeff had bought and rent a smaller apartment.

"With God's help, I can live my life in a meaningful way," she says.

"Part of facing the death of someone you love is being able to mourn without becoming so preoccupied with grief that you remain immobilized," says Judith Ulrich. In Catherine's case, Jeff's death challenged her in a way that reaffirmed her spiritual commitment and gave her strength to play an active role in facing her future. Her rediscovered strong religious beliefs eased the process of grieving and allowed her to move on.

Those interviewed for this chapter often said they had not expected to find this time of life as exciting and fulfilling as it turned out to be. Many said they feel a sense of adventure they haven't experienced since they were young and they see the path ahead limited only by their imagination.

Larry, a 64-year-old electrician who used to work 60 hours a week and has switched to part-time employment, sums it up this way: "I finally had time to decide what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I enjoyed experimenting with this and that, but then it all began to come together. I work just enough of the time to give my life structure, but I also spend more time with my family and I've become a literary volunteer, reading to the blind and running a spelling bee in my grandson's middle school. I also discovered I like activities I never thought I'd take part in—painting, learning to cook and, of all things, salsa lessons—and suddenly there aren't enough hours in the day. There's a richness to my life now that was never there before."

Glossary: Chapter 2

“Generativity”— phrase coined in 1950 by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson— an amalgamation of the words “generation” and “creativity,” referring to creative expression across generations.

Economica study— Meier, Stephan, and Alois Stutzer. “Is Volunteering Rewarding in Itself?” *Economica* 75.297 (2008): 39-59.

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My Time— Trafford, Abigail. *My Time: Making the Most of the Bonus Decades after Fifty*. Basic Books, 2004.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 2: What Now? Figuring it Out

1. Have you ever had an experience like Jane’s in which you went through a transition that totally changed your life?
2. The chapter asks the question of what excites you...“what gets you out of bed in the morning?” How do you answer that question?
3. If you are still working, have you considered what skills and interests you have that you want to express in a new way? If you are retired, how have you chosen what to pursue? Is what you are doing making you happy and/or serving others?
4. If you want to move in new directions, but feel a lack of self-esteem, what can you do to achieve your goals?
5. What are your hopes and dreams for your next ten years?
6. What do you do if you and your partner are out of “synch” in terms of continuing in your present situation or planning for the future? Have you had to change your ways of communicating?
7. Do you believe that this time of your life can be rich and fulfilling?



Who Is This Stranger?

Navigating New Waters with Adult Children

By Gloria Hochman

Debbie had always been the “perfect” child. She was a straight A student, was voted most popular in her high school graduating class and had somehow missed the rebellious teenager stage. In her Ivy League university, she was the first woman to be editor of her school newspaper and was graduated magna cum laude.

Her parents were shocked when after graduation she turned down a magazine job anyone would have killed for and set off across the country to work for **VISTA**, a domestic version of the Peace Corps. A year later, they were jolted even more when she flew home to reveal that she was a lesbian, would probably never marry and had no wish to have children.

Carol had never wanted to live far away from her parents. After high school graduation, she continued to date Chris, a good-looking, personable young man she had met through her best friend. Four years later, she and Chris, who had become the manager of a children’s clothing store, married and settled in a suburban Chicago home half an hour away from her parents. The relationship between Carol and her parents was easy—every-day phone calls, casual pop-in visits and frequent dinners together.

When Carol began to complain that she needed space, that she felt stifled by so much togetherness, her parents were puzzled...and hurt. When she demanded that they take a six-month breather away from each other, they

were crushed. There had been no arguments, no apparent tensions. What had happened to the idyllic relationship they thought they had with their 31-year-old daughter?

When Sammy was just a freshman in college, he had already selected the corner office overlooking Fifth Avenue that he would move into after graduation. He had been looking forward to joining his father’s highly successful real estate firm and was taking a double major in business and marketing to prepare himself.

But by the time Sammy was ready to graduate, he had changed his mind. Going into the family business didn’t appeal to him anymore. He wanted to become a massage therapist and move to Boulder, Colorado.

His parents couldn’t imagine why his dream—and theirs—toppled so suddenly. They had always assumed that Sammy would follow his father and his grandfather before him to become the third generation of their family to enter the respected corporation that they had created from scratch. No matter how much they pleaded with Sammy to reconsider, his mind was made up.

They bought him his first massage table.

A Challenging New World

These are just a few cases where parents are forced to rethink and renegotiate relationships with their adult

children. Of the dozens of families interviewed for this chapter, most said they had struggled to come to terms with the new rules and roles imposed by their children. Scenarios they never could have imagined.

Most of them said they had raised their children to be independent, but didn't expect that to translate into emotional or physical distance. They encouraged their children to express themselves, but secretly wondered when enough was enough. They took Dr. Spock's advice on permissive parenting, and were surprised when their children sometimes turned into self-focused, insensitive adults.

Now they are figuring out new ways to express what's on their minds without alienating their children and sabotaging their relationships with grandchildren.

Communication Counts

Most of us don't think about it consciously, but parents will spend at least twice as much time being a parent to an adult child than to a young child living at home. Yet countless books, magazine articles and discussion groups on child rearing focus on the infant, toddler and teenage years. Most of us face the next challenging stage in parent/child relationships without much guidance. We lack the background, the tools, the resources, the language and the perspective that would help us muddle through this.

While most parents acknowledge that they expect their children to leave them, actual separation is often brutal for them and becomes almost unbearable when physical and emotional distance pushes them and their children even further apart.

Communication—or the lack of it—is a big issue. How many calls are too many? How often is too often? Which questions are okay to ask? Which advice is it best not to give? How much worrying is permissible? Why do so many adult sons and daughters hear every

piece of unsolicited advice as criticism? As Editor Jane Isay says in her book of the same title, welcome to the world of **Walking on Eggshells**. Isay, the mother of adult children and grandchildren, turned to writing her own book when she discovered she was not alone in feeling confused and upset about how to parent her adult children.

Some parents wonder when they will get “their turn” at enjoying life without worrying about their children's jobs, finances and partners. And stepparents often wrestle with their tenuous role—a continuing tug of war to feel accepted and respected by their spouses' adult children.

Parental love is a complicated and ambiguous emotion: there is a fragile, often elusive, balance between not loving enough and loving too much, especially as older children stumble through a sometimes prolonged trail to adulthood. The key questions are: Am I being too indifferent or too controlling? Whose needs am I serving, my children's or my own? How do I weigh their thoughts and feelings

against my own different ones? Do I let them have their own voice...and really listen to it?

Your Approval Matters

I should have asked myself those questions the day my 23-year-old daughter announced that she wasn't sure she wanted to become a writer. “I'm not certain,” she told me a bit hesitantly, “whether I really want to write or I'd just be going into the family business.” (My husband and I are both journalists and authors.) I was devastated—our daughter was a gifted writer and I believed that the world would be deprived of a great talent.

It took a year of soul-searching with the help of an insightful therapist for me to come to terms with what I knew intellectually but rejected emotionally. My daughter may have a different calling from mine, but

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one just as fulfilling to her and as valuable to society. She had the right to her own voice and, most important, to my approval of her choices.

Approval, in fact, is a critical element in parent-child relationships, sought and coveted by children throughout their lives, from childhood to old age. No matter how old, how independent, how successful someone is, parents' opinions count. Take 52-year-old Kenneth, a St. Louis physician known nationally for his work in schizophrenia and bipolar illness. "All my life, I wanted my father's approval," Kenneth confided to me. Kenneth and I became friends after I had interviewed him for an article about mental illness. Kenneth has received countless awards for his work and kudos from his peers, his wife and his children. But it was his father's recognition that he wanted the most... and almost never got. He sent him published journal articles that his dad didn't acknowledge, and newspaper accounts of his accomplishments to which his father didn't respond.

Kenneth's disturbed relationship with his father goes back a long way. He traces it to a turbulent childhood characterized by his own moodiness and temper tantrums—reactions, he says, to his parents' loveless, tempestuous marriage. He tried to connect with his father from time to time, he says; his overtures were always rejected. But when he heard that his father was dying, Kenneth made one last, desperate effort. He drove to the hospital, arriving after official visiting hours, carrying his latest journal article for his father to see. And, finally, his father, from his deathbed, whispered the words Kenneth had waited 52 years to hear:

"Son, I'm proud of you." Kenneth sobbed.

Letting Go

Most parents have agendas for their children, and hopes for their futures. When children throw them a curve, it not only sends their dreams crashing, but dramatically alters the way they had expected their children to live on for them. Some parents never make the adjustment.

"When I was growing up," says Carol's mother,

Linda, my grandparents lived with us, my cousins and aunts came to our house almost every Sunday and we had dinner together at least twice a month. We had keys to each other's homes and felt comfortable dropping in when we were in the neighborhood. Sure, there were the usual squabbles—whose turn was it to have Thanksgiving dinner or which cousins got to stay overnight this week, but basically we were a big happy family.

"That's the environment Carol grew up in and when she told my husband and me that she needed what she called 'space,' I have to admit that I felt stunned and rejected. My world, as I knew it, caved in."

"It is a complicated letting-go process," says **Sara-Kay Smullens**, a Philadelphia social worker, author and family therapist, "coming to terms with the reality that your child has his or her own life, and that you don't have the same place in it you once did. It is hard recognizing that your son or daughter has found somebody in life who is even more important than you are and giving blessing to that union. It is a painful thing to step back and say, 'I'm not number one any more nor should I be.'"

In early marriage, says Smullens, "the first challenge is the loyalty shift from parents to partner. Parents who resist that bring terrible pain to their children and to themselves."

Earlier generations, more concerned with putting bread on the table and keeping their children healthy than with personal fulfillment, were, as in Linda's case, more interdependent and involved with extended families. Today's adult children have an infinitely more challenging task staking out the boundaries—learning how to be loving sons and daughters and, at the same time, preserving their own separate identities.

Leave and Cleave

Religious traditions and dictums register in on the boundary issue.

Richard B. Miller, a professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University, said in an address at the university's Family Expo, "The Lord teaches that children

must *leave* their parents and *cleave* with their spouse. “

“In Judaism,” says Smullens, “the chupah, the canopy under which a couple marries, represents their home, which is a sacred place, and people, parents included, come in at their invitation.”

Even if your children have given you a key to their home, it isn’t license to come and go as you please. And the same principle applies to adult children who should not drop in on parents without calling. Miller calls it the principle of reciprocity, critical to establishing an adult-to-adult relationship between children and parents.

“Once children leave home, parents have all kinds of freedoms they didn’t have before,” says Smullens. “They could be making passionate love in the living room or huddled together watching a movie. There needs to be respect on both sides for each other’s personal worlds.”

Your Dreams or Theirs?

Debbie, who had stunned her parents by revealing she was a lesbian, is curled up on the crimson velour sofa in her parents’ home in Santa Monica. She sips an iced tea, snacks on pretzel sticks and speaks eloquently about what she calls “my situation.”

“When my parents were raising me, says Debbie, “they emphasized that they wanted me to be healthy and happy. And as long as I turned out the way they wanted—got into an Ivy League College, got the lead in the school play, learned to play the violin— everything was fine. But as soon as I told them I was a lesbian and that’s what made me happy, everything changed. They didn’t want to meet my girlfriend and refused to have her at their home for Christmas dinner. They said that what I was doing shamed and embarrassed them. How could they tell their friends? They would probably have to move out of town. They insisted that I turned to women because I couldn’t find a man who wanted me. Even my grandmother told me I wasn’t normal and that maybe if I lost a few pounds, a man would find me attractive.”

Debbie couldn’t tolerate estrangement from her

parents who had implicitly doled out love with conditions throughout her life. They chose her private middle school, not one Debbie wished to attend, so she could meet boys and girls from what they considered “good” families. When she abandoned a friend of whom they didn’t approve, they “celebrated” by taking Debbie to her favorite restaurant for a lobster dinner.

In order to restore her relationship with her parents, Debbie gave up her girlfriend, moved back home and pretended that her lesbian life was over. But secretly she was miserable, wrestling with losing her parents or losing herself.

“I don’t know what my future will look like,” she says. “I want to have a partner and be happy. But what makes me happy will devastate my parents whom I love so much. I can’t do that to them.”

“When children grow up and make choices that trouble us, parents have to ask themselves, ‘Is what we want for them really for *them* or for *us*?’” says Smullens. “To keep our relationships with them successful, we have to be very careful about intruding into their lives because it is their lives, not ours.” Smullens has two daughters, a stepdaughter and a stepson, and except for issues of health or safety, she tries to follow her own rules.

Worrying Too Much: A Turnoff?

Worrying about children comes naturally to parents. After all, when children are young and parents are responsible for so much of their lives, they worry about all sorts of things, from why their baby won’t sleep to whether their eight-year-old can cross the street safely to how competent a driver their 17-year-old daughter’s boyfriend is. That is not likely to come to an abrupt halt once the children become adults. Parents continue to worry about their children’s health, finances, relationships and their struggles juggling work and family. But, according to a study conducted at the University of Florida, they must find a balance that will not feel stifling to the adult children with whom they are trying to carve out a successful relationship.

“The amount of worry shared by parents and their grownup children can feel like a warm comforter or a wet blanket,” the Florida study finds. “Just the right amount of concern can solidify ties between parents and their adult children, but too much fretting may feel burdensome. If someone knows you worry about them, they may see it as an expression of love and caring, but at the same time they can feel irritated and annoyed by it,” says Elizabeth Hay, the psychology professor who led the research.

“It’s socially and emotionally supportive to worry and share your concerns, but you need to do it in a way that doesn’t make the other person (your son or daughter) feel that you perceive them to be incapable of managing their own affairs. You don’t want to undermine their autonomy, and maintaining autonomy is important in parent-adult child ties.”

The Unbearable Separation

Alice is a tall, well-built, attractive woman who bears an uncanny resemblance to Michelle Obama. She is the mother of 32-year-old Owen whom she raised alone after she and her husband divorced when Owen was four. She and Owen were extremely close and she admits that as he got older, she didn’t find a way to temper her anxiety about his health, his judgment and his future. He went to an out-of-town college, and Alice agonized constantly about his ability to adjust and to be productive. She questioned his maturity because he had shown signs of irresponsible behavior in high school, neglecting his studies and preferring noisy parties and girls whom she described as a little on the wild side. “I kept bugging him,” Alice says, “but after a while, he didn’t hear it anymore.”

When Alice remarried during Owen’s freshman year in college, he didn’t like his mom’s choice of partner, and made no secret of it. Alice’s therapist advised her to focus more on her husband and “let go” of her intense emotional bond with her son. “But he had been the focus of my life,” Alice admits, “and I couldn’t stand not having that relationship. Even though I had a husband and a good job, I was still obsessed with my son. He was the main person in my thoughts, and it was hard for me to separate.”

Three years after college graduation, Owen met Julie, the woman he eventually married. Just as Owen didn’t care for his mom’s new husband, Alice wasn’t keen on his choice of a wife either. Julie had her own family—a mother and father to whom she was close, a couple of sisters and brothers—and she made it clear that her relationship with Alice would be limited. “I knew my son loved me, but now he had a wife,” Alice says. “What they are doing as a couple is a mystery in which I have no role, and they keep a lot of stuff from me because they know how I’ll react. They are definitely not focusing on their relationship with me, and I admit that it’s more important to me than it is to my son.”

Now Alice has two granddaughters whom she adores. She is grateful that she is permitted to baby-sit for them once a week, but knows that she lives in the shadow of her son’s life. “I have to take my cues from them,” she says. “I’m always in the back seat.”

Alice accepts the role she has been given, but says, “It’s been an evolution for me, and it hasn’t come easily.”

“It can feel like an enormous intrusion into the lives of our adult children who are juggling their own responsibilities if they sense that we are asking them

“Just the right amount of concern can solidify ties between parents and their adult children, but too much fretting may feel burdensome. If someone knows you worry about them, they may see it as an expression of love and caring, but at the same time they can feel irritated and annoyed by it.”

to fill us up in areas of our emotional unfinished business,” says SaraKay Smullens.

“Wise parents know that when we raise our kids, they are visitors, that they are with us so they can learn how to develop ethics and competence, to know right from wrong and then go off and take care of themselves. That’s what the parent job is. It is not expecting our children to make up for what may be lacking in our lives.”

One thing to keep in mind, according to Smullens, is remembering what it was like being a young adult, all the balancing you have to do—child care, money earning, relationships with other adults and all that goes into making those relationships work. When parents are unhappy because they don’t hear from their children for a week or two, it may be, says Smullens, because of all the demands on their lives. Maybe they are going through a crisis with which they don’t want to burden their parents or don’t feel comfortable discussing with them at that time. It may be something with the kids or a work problem. And if your adult child is having problems with his partner, especially if it’s someone you didn’t like from the start, parents are often the last people he’ll tell. It makes him feel too vulnerable.

I Told You So

Naomi, for instance, who was 27 when she married Mark five years ago, did so against her parents’ wishes and advice. It didn’t matter to her that Mark had dropped out of college after two years because he found it “boring,” that he didn’t have a job and wasn’t motivated to get one. It didn’t matter that he was anti-social and made no secret of the fact that he was ill at ease with Naomi’s big, boisterous family. She insisted she was passionately in love with him and knew in her heart that things would work

out. Her wedding day was her parents’ worst nightmare. They kept picturing their beautiful daughter wasting her life with a man who would disappoint her and create distance between her and her family. And there was nothing they could do to stop it.

According to Isay, author of *Walking on Eggshells*, all that parents can do in a situation like this is to express their reservations, then step out of the picture and be supportive. If you don’t like your child’s choice of a partner, leave it alone. The time may come when your daughter (or son) may need to know that you will be there for her despite your earlier warnings and premonitions.

That’s the way it was for Naomi. Mark drifted from one job to another. Anything requiring teamwork was out because he was a loner. Anything that demanded focus and concentration was too intense for him. His position as a traffic manager for a prosperous home cleaning service bored him after six months, and he bailed out.

Meanwhile, he became more sullen and less attentive to Naomi. He would forget her birthday, ignore their anniversaries and bow out of holiday dinners at her childhood home. Only their love-making remained passionate and exciting. For five years, that was enough. Then, one day, in her dentist’s office, Naomi read a magazine article about a man so much like Mark she wondered if the writer knew him. It was a light bulb moment for her—she decided then and there that it was time for her marriage with Mark to come to an end.

She called her best friend Susan and her cousin Jason, an attorney in a nearby city. But she couldn’t bring herself to tell her parents, suspecting what she would hear.

Parents can be their children’s harshest critics and their most enthusiastic fans, often at the same time. They have so much invested in their children and may, unconsciously or not, see them as extensions of themselves, only better. When their children veer off in a direction for which par-

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ents are unprepared, they take it personally. Narcissistic parents, particularly, may not even know that their love for their children has so much to do with making themselves look and feel good. In these cases, children are more likely to feel controlled, and struggle to find their own voice. Sometimes, they need to create physical or emotional distance until they do.

“We knew this would happen,” chided Naomi’s mother, Lucille, at a restaurant lunch where Naomi finally told her, two months later, that she had filed for divorce. Lucille sighed and continued, “If only you had listened, we could have saved you these years of misery. Thank God you don’t have any children!”

This reaction was exactly what Naomi didn’t want to hear. She had hoped for, but knew she wouldn’t get, a hug, maybe a few tears and reassuring words saying, “Dad and I are here for you. Is there anything we can do?” “Naomi’s parents were, of course, there for her, but her mom couldn’t resist the “I told you so” reaction that she had given to Naomi—and to others including her husband, her sister and her friends—all her life. It had a familiar ring...it was what she had heard from her own parents as she grew up, and she didn’t even realize how easily she was passing on that legacy.

Naomi and her mother eventually consulted a therapist who helped them reach out to each other in a closer, more intimate way.

“It was a hard lesson to learn,” says Lucille, who admits that she still has to catch herself at times. “But even though I remembered how I hated it when my mother said, ‘If you had only listened to me...’ it didn’t stop me from doing the same thing with *my* daughter. It just came so naturally.”

The Stepparenting Conundrum

Stepparents of adult children have a particularly treacherous road to travel. If the chemistry is good between them, life can be rich and joyful. But it may not happen immediately if at all, and there are landmines along the way: an adult child who resents her father’s or mother’s remarriage or feels jealous of the attention given to a

new spouse, an adult daughter who perceives that her father treats his new wife better than he did her mother, an adult son whose relationship with his mother is upended by a husband who demands more of her time. Or a stepmother who tries too hard and feels intrusive to her husband’s grown children,

When sixty-one year-old Barbara married her husband Steven ten years ago, she was thrilled that he had a daughter, Diana, 23. She looked forward to having, at last, the family she longed for. She had been married twice before but was childless.

Barbara remembers a co-worker asking about the stepdaughter she would inherit. “I naively told her,” says Barbara, that she loves me and everything is perfect.” “That’s unusual,” her co-worker commented.

At first, Diana, then at graduate school, was loving and responded warmly when Barbara indicated that she wanted to be her friend. She invited her stepmother to her studio apartment and shared her career dreams with her in a way she had not been able to do with her own self-absorbed mother. “It was as though I had gone to a mailbox and found a million dollars,” Barbara says. “I really felt I had a daughter.”

Unfortunately, the jackpot quickly disappeared mainly because Diana and her father were going through some rough times together, and she saw Barbara as being on her father’s side. Moreover, she began to feel that Barbara had usurped her role as the centerpiece in her father’s life.

“To complicate things, she was trying to find herself and didn’t want to account even to her own parents,” Barbara says. “It was like ‘who needs another parent in the mix?’”

Their relationship has picked up because both of them really wanted it to work and they never stopped talking. Now, Diana will confide in Barbara about her romantic problems and will quickly return her e-mail messages. She tells Barbara that she considers her a role model, admires her friends and loves her. “That’s enough for her, and if you asked her, she would say we have a good relationship,” Barbara says, “but I’m still living the myth that this woman would be closer to me.

It probably has to do with the baggage I bring being childless and essentially without close family.”

Is Barbara expecting too much? Probably. Diana already has a mother, and even though she and her mother don't always see eye-to-eye, she is not looking for someone to replace her. And there is no way that Diana can fill up the empty space in Barbara's life. No child, even one you give birth to, can be expected to do that. It's too burdensome.

“If you truly love and cherish your stepchildren, you step back and make room for their relationships with their blood parents,” says Smullens. “When there are family dinners, for instance, remember that they may be juggling four parents, sometimes more, and you need to be incredibly understanding. That's the reality of life today.”

When Is It My Turn?

At the same time that women like Alice, who still feels left out of her son's life, tiptoe around their relationships with sons and daughters-in-laws, other women find themselves trying to balance loyalties to adult children and budding romances with partners their children don't especially care for. Frances's husband died seven years ago when her children were 18 and 22. At first, she went into overdrive, trying always to be available for them and serving as a buffer for the grief they felt.

For the first three years, she couldn't imagine going out with anyone. But after her daughter Laura went off to college and her son Lewis settled into his own apartment, the reality of being alone hit hard. “For the first time, I was by myself in our big house and I felt very lonely,” says Frances. “But the separation didn't really hit me until Laura got a job in Milwaukee, 1200 miles away, after graduation. Lewis was dating and I could see the possibility that he would be with someone, and my part in his life would change. I let them know that I wanted them to have their own lives, and I knew they wanted to. Even though I didn't impose on them, they knew I was alone and felt a sense of responsibility toward me. We all had to sort out how to act and what

roles to take.”

Frances thought her children would welcome her new boyfriend, David. She was wrong. Lewis thought David wasn't her type. He had retired and loved outdoors activities like fishing and boating. Frances was more museums and theater. Her son urged her to keep looking. Laura had hoped for someone who looked more dapper like her father and had a professional career as he did. “It made me feel a bit sad,” Frances says, “but I knew that I had to figure out my own life, just as they were doing. David understands that my children are first in my world, and he wants them to like him.”

Frances explained to her children that she and David liked each other's company despite their different lifestyles and interests. She told them that they have to accept some things in a person that may not be to their liking. Few people present with the whole package.

“I was ready to have someone to be with,” Frances says. “It gave me a missing layer. I like having someone I can be silly with or call at odd hours to share a story. I can't do that with my kids.”

Just as parents need to be respectful of their adult children's choices, their children must reciprocate, forging a fundamental shift in the relationship that will be satisfying for both. It takes open communication, sometimes formal psychotherapy, and continued talks together as issues arise. Without those strategies, the “Santa Claus syndrome” may develop, a phenomenon says Brigham Young's Miller, where children expect parents to dish out nurturing and understanding without reciprocating.

Mom, Dad, “I'm Home”

While some parents struggle with separating from their children and giving them the autonomy they demand, others wish their children would please leave home. Especially in rocky economic times, some children settle in for the long haul or return home after they've lost their job or taken a substantial pay cut. A study by the **Pew Research Center** reveals that nearly one in seven parents had adult children return home to live in

the past year. Census bureau statistics from 2005 reveal that 56% of men and 43% of women between 20 and 24 live with their parents. Frank Furstenberg, a sociology professor at the University of Pennsylvania, anticipates that this number will increase as the job market declines and salaries shrink.

Some children are thrilled to be back at home where mom will do their laundry and cook dinner. Parents, on the other hand, who long for the privacy they think they've earned, try to figure out how to get the children out of the house.

Murray, a 65-year-old father of three, said that he and his wife were at odds with each other about how long their children should be permitted to live with them. He thought that six months after college graduation should give them enough time to find a job and a place to live. His wife protested that in today's times, six months might not be enough.

"I think I was just repeating what I heard from my own parents," Murray said. "But as I thought more about it, I wondered if I was being too rigid. The goal, of course, was that my children be independent. But what rule are we breaking if they need to stay with us for a couple more years? We have the space."

Wisely, Murray, his wife Susan and their two children living at home had a family meeting. Murray and Susan would not interfere with their children's lives, but did ask them to indicate when they expected to come home at night so their parents wouldn't worry. The children were welcome to join their parents for dinner if they were eating at home, but had to give them a day's notice. Susan would not clean their rooms, wash their clothes or change their linens. They could not use their parents' cars without checking in first.

Jonathan, 25, stayed for eighteen months until he moved to New York and met the woman he married. Gayle, 22, is still at home, but plans on having her own apartment within six months.

"Actually, once the rules were in place, it worked out well," Murray says. "Sometimes you have to be flexible and remember that you can bend without breaking."

Different Strokes

Parents with several grown children usually have different relationships with each depending on personality match, geography, common interests, and often whether the children's choices mirror their wishes for them. Marian and Donald have wrestled with disappointments in their three children and two grandchildren, but still keep their doors open and maintain a close, if not always comfortable, rapport with each of them.

Donald is a physician and was thrilled to see two of his daughters complete medical school. He had envisioned them all working together in a private practice—a happy family of doctors—but that's not what his daughters had in mind. Helen wanted to work with the indigent in the poor neighborhoods of Camden, New Jersey, and Tracy abandoned medicine altogether after spending two years in her father's practice. She now makes and sells jewelry. Their 48-year-old son, Judson, who always has an attractive girl on his arm, is single and doesn't even speak about a permanent relationship. Helen's son, Evan, to whom she gave birth through donor insemination, has presented his mother with a smorgasbord of problems. He was a sullen, moody child, and at eleven, Evan became friends with a group of rowdy boys who smoked pot and shunned school. His mother found money missing from her purse and learned that Evan had taken it to buy drugs. Evan has been diagnosed with oppositional defiance disorder (ongoing defiant, disobedient and disruptive behavior) and is now in therapy.

Even though Donald and Marian were against their daughter's choice to become a single mother, they are not the kind of parents to say, "We told you so." Instead, they support their daughter, buoying her spirits when she is gloomy and taking her out to the movies and dinners.

Their older daughter, Tracy, married with three children, spends most weekends at her parents' suburban home with her husband and sons. Donald and Marian sometimes wonder why their daughter and her husband don't want a weekend alone and admit that they, too,

would enjoy an occasional Saturday night with friends.

“We went through periods when, yes, we felt all this togetherness was a little intrusive,” says Marian. “But we decided not to say anything. We don’t want to rock that boat. And we don’t want to be like so many other parents who see their children only one or twice a year.”

Even though her younger daughter has never married, Marian acknowledges that, unlike herself, Helen is a loner. “I think she’s missing out on something, but she’s not unhappy eating alone or buying a single theater ticket. I’m not that way—my husband and family are my happiness—so I project.”

Mainly, they worry about their children’s later years, what will happen to them when Marian and Donald are no longer here. “That’s our biggest concern right now, especially with Helen and Judson. We want to know that someone they can count on will be there for them.”

Where Do You Go From Here?

Many of the parents interviewed for this chapter lamented about “children who hurt them too much”—children who are inconsiderate, who speak to them sharply, who can’t accept constructive criticism, who don’t return phone calls and who keep parents on the periphery of their lives. For the most part, children say they love their parents and appreciate them, but would like them to stop giving them advice, stop suffocating them with daily phone calls, stop treating them like children incapable of making their own decisions

“Launching children is an ongoing developmental task for parents,” says David Tausig, senior clinician at **Family Institute at Chicago’s Northwestern University**. “You need to support, nurture and respect your adult children’s autonomy...and set appropriate limits with your own life.” He recommends that parents re-define themselves, reinvest in their partners, creating what he calls “a new us.”

“When children are established in their own lives, mom and dad have to look at each other and say, ‘Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?’” says Tausig.

“Sometimes they have forgotten how to be a married couple.”

Children appreciate parents—whether it’s a mom and dad or a single parent—who find new roles for themselves. They want their parents to “get a life” that doesn’t depend on them, to find nourishing activity, to travel, to take courses, to connect with old friends or find new ones. It is less burdensome for them, and leads to their coming together with their parents more as equals than as adversaries—where parents are still trying to control and children are pushing them away.

“It is tricky ground,” says Tausig. “Unless there is something really glaring, parents need to step back, as Marian and Donald have, and respect their children’s choices, even when it means anxiously watching them make terrible mistakes. Parents can’t impose their values and dreams on their children. They do not mirror us.”

Many experts in family relationships believe that the key is to keep talking. If a family has never been comfortable dealing openly with their differences, if their negative feelings have never been expressed, if their style is to avoid sticky confrontations, professional help may be needed to open the channels of communication. People are remarkably adaptable and resilient, and adult children and parents overwhelmingly want to be comfortable with each other.

There may need to be new ground rules. For parents, it may be stifling the urge to suggest or offer advice, complimenting the daughter-in-law you wish your son hadn’t married or encouraging and really listening to your child’s voice. Adult children, for their part, may need to recognize that their parents are not perfect. They need to forget the mistakes they think their parents made when they were growing up and treat them with respect and consideration. And most important, parents and their adult children need to keep talking, addressing even small slights promptly so that they don’t fester and burn. As Beverly Pfeiffer, professor at the University of Missouri, says, “Look through a long-term lens. Life is too short to...”

Fill in the blank.

Glossary: Chapter 3

Family Institute— established in 1968, the Institute is an independent nonprofit based at Northwestern University, dedicated to research and education on marital and family therapy.

Pew Research Center— Washington D.C.-based think tank.

Smullens, SaraKay— author of “The Power of Friendship” in this e- book. A short Biography can be found in the “Authors” section.

VISTA— Volunteers in Service to America, an anti-poverty program created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Often thought of as the “domestic version of the Peace Corps,” it is now part of AmeriCorps, a division of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Walking on Eggshells— Isay, Jane. Walking on Eggshells: Navigating the Delicate Relationship Between Adult Children and Parents. Broadway Books/Flying Dolphin Press, 2007.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 3: Who is This Stranger? Navigating New Waters with Adult Children

1. In the opening scenarios, why do you think Debbie, Carol and Sammy may have made such surprising changes in their lives? Do you see parallels with your own children?
2. How do you feel about SaraKay Smullens’ view that children are just visitors in their parents lives, and that we can’t expect them to make up for what is lacking in our lives?
3. As a parent, what do you think an ideal relationship with your adult children would look like?
4. How do you feel about Barbara’s expectations of her relationship with her stepdaughter? What are the most salient issues that stepparents in second and third marriages face in relating to their adult stepchildren?
5. What do you think about the way Frances handled her grown children’s objections to her new boyfriend? Is there anything she can do to promote more closeness between them? Should she?
6. What can you do when your adult children are too much a part of your life? How available do you make yourself? What is a comfortable balance of togetherness and autonomy between you and your children?
7. How do you resolve your feelings about, and behavior with, children whose values are startlingly different from yours?



How Work Gives Meaning to Life

By Melba Newsome

No one told Muriel to give up her law practice to her younger cousin. She just thought, at age 62, it was time to sleep in a couple of times a week, travel with her husband and read the stacks of books that had accumulated on the floor of her family room.

Marc Cahail survived the first round of cuts at his manufacturing company, and his employer assured the staff that there would be no more layoffs. Six months later, the 60-year-old customer service rep found himself in the ranks of the unemployed. Cahail immediately began to apply for jobs. A year later, he is still out of work with no prospects.

Rich Montrose is enjoying an “encore career,” later-in-life work that combines income with social impact. For the past six years, he has led an organization that fights homelessness, quite different from his former work as a successful writer for stage, television and the big screen.

These three scenarios are typical of changing times in a challenging work environment. We are living longer, healthier lives and, whether out of choice or necessity, many of us are working long past our envisioned retirement, have lost jobs that have taken a toll on our self-esteem, have moved on to fulfill old passions or discover new ones. We are becoming exquisitely aware

of how closely our identity and the meaning of our lives are linked to our occupations. Less than six months after leaving the workplace, Muriel and Marc recognized that they had lost more than their jobs. Each felt that something substantial was missing from their lives—a sense of identity for Muriel and a structure that had defined his life for Marc. Rich, on the other hand, says he feels a new kind of camaraderie from a job that is less isolating than his former occupation.

While we’re working, we become accustomed to a certain lifestyle—having lunch with a co-worker, stopping at a bar for an early evening drink with a colleague, making a to-do list for tomorrow’s tasks, feeling the high of a satisfying achievement. On the weekend, we talk with friends about the case we won or lost, the article we wrote, the child who had a seizure in the classroom. The conversation tells others...and ourselves...not just what we do but who we are.

When we lose that, it takes a significant toll on our self-esteem. A Rutgers survey in 2010 of 1,000 unemployed Americans crystallizes the effect of job loss. It found that those who are older and unemployed experienced anxiety, anger, sleep loss and deteriorating relationships. Some even reported abusing drugs and alcohol.

While we’re working, we become accustomed to a certain lifestyle.

What you are about to read are the stories of several people who share their thoughts about how their jobs have shaped their lives, for better or for worse, the decisions they have made about what they want to do with the rest of their lives and how they are finding new ways to maintain their dignity and express their creativity. You'll meet, among others, Andrea Perkins, 65, who wishes she could abandon her work in the sluggish real estate market, but is struggling to find an alternative; Laura Fitzpatrick, whose ego took a beating as she lost two powerful positions and wondered if she would ever be valued again; David Campbell who did a dramatic turnaround in mid life; Angela Doyne who loves her job and plans to stay with it into the foreseeable future; Dominique Browning, a high-powered editor for whom unemployment was a nightmare come true, and Patrice Fike who is making a surprising move that fulfills an old passion. While the future looks bleak for some, others find that the possibilities for those over 50 are exciting and almost endless, perpetuating the determination of baby boomers to bend, if not break, the rules.

Retiring in Stages—the “Bridge” Job

Twenty years ago, if you had told Andrea Perkins that she would still be hustling the real estate market at 65, she would have laughed. She had envisioned the flexibility to dote on her grandchildren, volunteer more frequently and indulge her passion for the arts. However, unable to get by on Social Security alone, she finds herself still buying and selling houses.

When Andrea became a realtor in 1980, it was the perfect job for a recent divorcee with two small children. She made a decent salary, met lots of people and had a flexible schedule. But 30 years later, the real estate business is a dramatically different enterprise, and not one she enjoys.

“I liked selling real estate when there was a lot of trust between the realtor and customers,” she says. “Nowadays, everybody thinks you’re trying to take advantage of them. There are so many rules and regulations and a lot of cranky people out there. I’m really

ready to move on to something else. But the \$64,000 question is what? I would be happy with full-time volunteer work if I didn’t need the money.”

Career strategist Anne Angerman of **Career Matters** in Denver, Colorado, advises people like Andrea to consider the right “bridge job.” She suggests they make an honest assessment of their skills and interests by taking the Myers Briggs or some other personality indicator test that can help them assess their skills and interests. “The key,” says Angerman, “is to match your next job or career to your interests, natural abilities and personality.”

After taking a personal inventory, Andrea began to supplement her job as a realtor with interests that might lead her toward her next venture. She became a volunteer wedding director for her church, and spends more time playing tennis, piano, bridge and participating in a book-and-supper club. Throughout the years, she has volunteered for museums and the symphony and hopes she can eventually find a job in arts and entertainment where she could put her art history degree and creativity to use.

Civic Ventures was created to help people like Andrea who want or need to continue working but wrestle with just what to do next. The nonprofit think tank focuses on bridging the gap for people who want leave the corporate world in midlife for more fulfilling work in the nonprofit sector.

Marc Freedman, the founder and CEO of Civic Ventures, writes in his book, **Encore**, that very few retirees start a second career purely for the money. At this juncture in their lives, they are seeking positions that combine income with personal meaning and social good. A poll by Princeton Survey Research Associates confirms that half of Americans ages 50 to 70 want to find work that has social impact after their primary career ends. And an online survey conducted by RetirementJobs.com reveals that workers over 50 value flexibility, stability and autonomy above cash compensation. When asked what they were looking for in work, they focused on making a contribution, keeping social connections and being able to use their skills and experience.

Those things factored into Rich Montrose's decision to exchange being his own boss—having what many might consider the dream job—for an encore career in the conventional albeit nonprofit work force.

The Second Time Around

For 30 years, Rich's work-at-home writing career gave him the opportunity to spend quality time with his two daughters. As they got older, he started volunteering with several nonprofits where he employed his writing and other creative skills.

"I loved that I was able to use my talent in a different way working with these nonprofit organizations," Rich says. "I had always said that if there was a job in the non-profit sector that would speak to me, I would pursue it. One day, my social activist daughter—the younger one—called my bluff and said, 'Dad, you should check out Idealist.org.'"

Idealist.org is an interactive website that plays matchmaker for people in search of opportunities and organizations in search of volunteers and staff. Rich took his daughter's challenge and quickly found an appealing volunteer opportunity which ultimately led to a full-time job. For the past six years, he has led a nonprofit organization that fights homelessness and allows him to use the creative talents he honed over decades. "This job has been as creative as the work I was doing heretofore," he explains. "I am working with lots of people which is something I didn't do in my other career. This effort to help people explore ways to stay off the street has allowed me to expand who I am and make a difference in the lives of others."

A Sharp Turn in a New Direction

According to the **Bridgespan Group**, a nonprofit that advises foundations and charitable organizations, we are likely to confront a "leadership deficit" of more than 600,000 senior managers in the next decade. That signals a heavy demand for retirees who want to use their expertise to make a difference. David Campbell

fits the bill. But Campbell didn't just sign up to volunteer; he founded his own volunteer organization. In 2004, the 68-year-old Campbell was managing director of a Boston-based investment-banking firm when the tsunami hit in the Indian Ocean off the west coast of Indonesia, killing more than 200,000 people in 14 countries. Campbell was compelled to help in what he called the major disaster of his lifetime.

His previous volunteer experience had consisted primarily of being chairman of the United Way in Buffalo, New York for a few years. That didn't stop him from packing a bag and flying to Phuket Island in Thailand to do whatever he could. The one week he had planned to stay turned into one month and a new career.

When Katrina happened a year later, he spent his entire vacation on the ski slopes of Telluride wishing he were in the Gulf. That's when he decided to make the jump from corporate chief to passionate philanthropist and launched HandsOn Disaster Response (HODR), a nonprofit that helps people respond to disasters.

To date, HODR, which has been renamed **All Hands Volunteers**, has provided assistance after 11 disasters in seven countries, doing everything from arranging shelter for displaced families to getting health-care for an injured child.

"I didn't plan this. It just happened," he says. "When I started, it was very useful, productive and satisfying work so I kept doing it."

Although he is working in a completely different arena, those decades of executive corporate experience prepared him to lead this organization. He knew how to manage people, delegate, and keep projects running and budgets under control.

"I live in a tent in places like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Haiti, and go out into very difficult conditions," said Campbell. "It's so satisfying because it has changed the lives of a lot of people."

Even when he's not roughing it in some devastated country, Campbell logs an average of 50 hours a week. "You live the organization every day but it adds a very profound sense of purpose," says Campbell. "Unlike in the business world, I never feel like I'm spinning my wheels."

Losing a Job—A New Opportunity?

Dominique Browning, former editor of *House & Garden*, was stunned when she learned at a Monday morning corporate meeting that her magazine would be shut down. She was given four days to pack her belongings and leave the building. For Browning, this was a nightmare come true. Work had become the “scaffolding” of her life, and for years she had had profound anxiety about becoming unemployed that she says went far beyond financial concerns.

In her memoir, **Slow Love: How I Lost My Job, Put on My Pajamas & Found Happiness**, Browning had the courage to write and say what so many feel when faced with a similar situation. “It’s a loss of stature. It’s a loss of feeling needed, a loss of feeling wanted. But it’s a loss of structure more than anything else,” she said. “It’s terrifying to go from having had a paycheck for 30 years to not knowing where your paycheck is going to come from next.”

Rather than being a downer, *Slow Love* is about reclaiming yourself after suffering a psychological and financial setback. It recounts how the devastating experience ultimately led her to find her better self. The empty nester downsized her home and slowly went from moping around the house and eating out of frustration to planting a garden, kayaking and slowly learning to revel in life again.

In an interview, Browning was asked what advice she could give others who find themselves in her situation. “Stop thrashing around, sit with the pain and fear for a while, allow yourself to mourn, and honor what is lost,” she said. “Then, get moving.”

Herman Phynes, a designer for a dress manufacturing company who found himself out of a job at age 63, is another victim of a company that closed its doors or dramatically downsized. “My division was sold and

everybody was laid off,” Herman says. “So I didn’t feel singled out, but I was out of a job nonetheless.”

“Unemployment after a long work experience, regardless of how or why it happened, is a big blow,” says Carl Van Horn, director of the **John Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University**. “Work is a big part of everybody’s life, but the identity with and affinity for it grows over time. When you’ve worked for the same company for 20 years and it goes away, that’s a huge shock.

“Older workers often have greater financial responsibilities (college tuitions, for example) and less time to make up for the problems they encounter. Their skills may have decayed relative to when they entered the workforce or their occupation has changed, often technologically, and they have to learn new skills.”

“Job hunting in a down job market doesn’t build your self-confidence,” Herman says. “When you send out 50 resumes and don’t get one call back, you start to think it’s you.”

He regrets turning down the few job offers he did get because he had thought the low pay and diminished responsibility made them too demeaning. But spending two years on unemployment has eroded his confidence and made him wonder whether he had acted too rashly by rejecting those offers.

That is the new reality in a devastated job market in which workers over 50 often face the greatest obstacles. “Seniors must negotiate a job market that, in many instances, holds their age against them,” says Dr. David DeLong, author of **Lost Knowledge: Confronting the Threat of an Aging Workforce**. “You’ve worked all your life to acquire experience and one day you wake up and find you have too much.”

The key for people in Herman’s situation is to find the place where their skill set meets market demand. This could mean taking temporary, contract or consult-

“Stop thrashing around, sit with the pain and fear for a while, allow yourself to mourn, and honor what is lost. Then, get moving.”

ing work. Herman ultimately morphed his layoff into a part-time consulting business for the industry. He is working as an independent consultant for several small businesses in the industry that value his decades of experience and flexibility. In addition to his Social Security and pension, it's enough to keep him in the black, but just barely.

Bouncing Back

Laura Fitzpatrick spent three decades climbing the corporate ladder, finally hitting the pinnacle of success in her late 40s when she was named president of a division of a major manufacturer. When the division was sold several years later, she was bounced from one job to another and ultimately to the unemployment line.

Fortunately, Laura had the flexibility to relocate which proved crucial to a job in an economic downturn. First, she moved to the Midwest for a high level position in her field that vanished in less than a year because of the recession. With dwindling options and financial resources, she took a job in Utah with an online company that came with a dramatic cut in pay and stature, as well as a boss who was 25 years younger. She was disappointed but not surprised to learn that her years of experience led to more ageism than appreciation. . “My boss once asked me if I was sure I could keep up with the 30 year-olds,” she recalls. “Your experience, ideas and recommendations are brushed off or ignored.”

Laura's situation is typical as an increasing number of baby boomers or older workers find themselves working for younger bosses. “We're going to have to adapt our attitudes and expectations and, to some extent, our standards to get along and prosper in the workplace,” says DeLong.

Laura maintained industry contacts, networked re-

lentlessly and never quit looking for a job. A year after starting at the online company, she was recruited to a high level position in a brick-and-mortar corporation where her skills are viewed as a big bonus. “It's a good thing because I'm nowhere near ready to retire, financially or mentally.”

DeLong commends the way Laura handled a difficult situation. “What happened to her can make you question if you'll ever be valued again, but she didn't let it get her down and she never second-guessed herself or her self-worth.”

Staying On Course—The Job You Love

Angela Doyne seems like a throwback to our parents' generation—stay in one job until you earn a gold watch. She has been a pre-K teacher in the same school district since graduating from college more than three decades ago. With income from the family businesses and 30 years on the job, she could easily retire at 53, but then what? she asks.

She loves to travel, is involved in community and social organizations and her youngest child is in high school. But she can't imagine being a stay-at-home mom or one of those ladies who lunch. Not only does the thought of spending days on the sofa bore her, the pre-K instructor has the same passion for teaching as when she first

walked into a classroom right out of college.

“The key to avoiding burnout is knowing where you fit best and choosing your battles,” she advises. “I like teaching the little ones. I know that administration is not for me because I don't want to deal with the politics.”

Angela is among the nearly 90 percent of older workers who enjoy their work and find it meaningful as revealed in a study by **Boston College's Center on Aging and Work**. Much of Angela's satisfaction with her

“We're going to have to adapt our attitudes and expectations and, to some extent, our standards to get along and prosper in the workplace.”

job stems from seeing the fruits of her labor. “If we want a better society, we have to make an investment in our young people now. I would still be working regardless but these kids need so much help, and I feel like I’m making a difference. When I see students from a long time ago and they have families and are doing well, I know I’ve made the right decision about the work I’ve chosen.” Angela, now 60, doesn’t expect to hold out to 65, but you never know. “When I started, I took it one day at a time and didn’t imagine being here 30 years later.”

Pursuing an Old Dream

In recent months, Patrice Fike has sold her spacious south Florida home, most of her furniture and her Mercedes in preparation for a move into a one-room studio where all of her meals will be provided. Sounds like another retiree moving into an assisted living facility, doesn’t it? But 64-year-old Patrice is moving from Miami to Manhattan to attend the General Theological Seminary—complete with the dormitory experience—where she will spend three years and \$100,000 to earn a divinity degree and prepare for her second career.

While some people struggle to identify their passion, Patrice discovered hers when she was a little girl. “I wanted to be an Episcopal priest since I was eight years old, but women weren’t ordained back then,” she explains.

With her first career choice out of the question,

Patrice sought another way to be of comfort to those in need. She became a pediatric nurse and has spent the last 40 years in healthcare. For years, she served on a pediatrics bioethics council where critical care and end-of-life decisions were made. Many times when a child was dying, she was called in to counsel the family.

Three years ago, Patrice was studying to become a deacon in the Episcopal church when she recognized the call for priesthood. “I want to explore the mind and body connection from a spiritual perspective,” explains Patrice. “I want to bring God to people when they’re not at their best in life and make their journey more spiritual and more connected. Because of my medical and healthcare background, I think I’ll be able to do that.”

It took two years for Patrice to jump through all the requisite hoops to enter divinity school. When she was accepted and attended orientation earlier in the year, she was pleasantly surprised to find that most of her future classmates were in their 50s and 60s working on a third or fourth career.

“It felt good to see so much grey hair,” she jokes. “It’s hard to believe I’m finally going to be an Episcopal priest these many years later. This is a natural evolution of my life’s work and I feel totally blessed. If you live life with a passion and can find something that gets you out of bed in the morning and lets you sleep at night, that’s the best thing on earth.”

Glossary: Chapter 4

All Hands Volunteers— nonprofit organization which provides assistance to survivors of natural disasters around the world. Begun in 2005 as a response to the Southeast Asian tsunami of the previous December.

Bridgespan Group— nonprofit organization founded in 2000. Provides strategy consulting, executive search and philanthropy advising services to nonprofits.

Career Matters— career consulting firm in Denver, Colorado.

Center on Aging and Work— The Sloan Center on Aging and Work, based at Boston College, studies emergent issues related to those topics.

Civic Ventures— a think tank on boomers, work, and social purpose founded in 1998 by Marc Freedman.

Encore— Encore: Finding Work That Matters in the Second Half of Life, by Marc Freedman (2007, PublicAffairs™)

Idealist.org— website with nonprofit postings of jobs, volunteer opportunities, and event information. Run by the nonprofit organization Action Without Borders.

John Heldrich Center for Workforce Development— research and policy center based at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Founded in 1997, its work focuses on strengthening workforce education and placement and training programs and policies.

Lost Knowledge— DeLong, David W. Lost Knowledge: Confronting the Threat of an Aging Workforce. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Slow Love— Browning, Dominique. Slow Love: How I Lost My Job, Put on My Pajamas & Found Happiness. Atlas & Co., 2010.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 4: How Work Gives Meaning to Life

1. How do you feel your work adds or has added meaning to your life?
2. Do you know people whose jobs have been affected by the recession? How are they handling their situations?
3. Who in the chapter can you identify with? Who impressed you the most?
4. Have you thought about what an encore career would look like for you? What do you think of that concept?
5. Feeling needed can be closely related to the work we do. When that work ends, how do you satisfy that important aspect of your life?
6. Have you done work in your community? What kind of work? If not, how would you like to use your skills to connect and contribute to the community?
7. Are you assessing your skills and interests for a possible job loss or retirement? If you have a choice, what do you think about retiring in stages, rather than abruptly?



The Many Faces of Loss

By Anndee Hochman

Joe, a 58-year-old nurse at an urban hospital, had become used to the occasional “brain glitch,” that instant of fumbling for a last name, a movie title or a tip-of-the-tongue word. But a recent incident unnerved him. After working for several months on a committee for recruiting and training new employees, Joe attended a meeting to report on his group’s progress.

“The facilitator said, ‘Go around, say your name, who you are and what committee you’re working on.’” Suddenly, Joe felt as if someone had scrubbed his memory. “I couldn’t remember the name of my committee or even a description of it.” Forty-five colleagues waited in uneasy silence; a few laughed nervously. “I was mortified,” Joe recalls. “It was scary. I really worry because of my mom,” who died from Alzheimer’s disease after a 12-year decline. “At those moments, I think, ‘Oh, this isn’t normal memory loss; this is a serious problem.’”

A patchy memory. A twinge of arthritis, a new sensitivity to that chili sauce you’ve always loved. Job dislocation or retirement. Adult children who move to San Francisco...or to Spain. An old neighborhood that feels unrecognizable. Technology that confounds you. An unexpected divorce. Downsizing from the family four-bedroom to a one-floor condo. The sorrow of losing parents, partners or longtime friends. The specter—unwelcome and inevitable—of your own decline and death.

In life’s middle years and beyond, many people feel

themselves undone by loss. “We’re wired for connection,” says Barbara Breitman, a psychotherapist and spiritual director who counsels individuals from both psychological and spiritual perspectives. “We feel sad when we lose whatever is precious to us—another person, our health, our home. We’re born into a web of connections. When that web is ruptured, when those invisible lines of connection are broken, we grieve.”

Naomi Shihab Nye, an award-winning poet who edited an anthology called **What Have You Lost?**, puts it this way: “Because we are human beings, we do lose. This is a central and pivotal experience of all human life.”

While losses happen throughout the lifespan, they generally grow more frequent after midlife—a time when, according to Judith Viorst in her book, *Necessary Losses*, “we may start to feel that this is a time of always letting go, of one thing after another after another.” Those losses range from the merely bemusing—you turn on the Oldies station and none of the songs strike you as “old”—to the wrenching pain of watching a loved one die.

When Appearance Changes and Stamina Diminishes

When Suzanne, 63, looks in the mirror, she’s painfully aware of what’s changed: the healthy teeth that formed

the dazzling smile of her younger adult years, the thick brown hair that used to be a source of pride. Crowns cover her incisors, and she combs over the patch where her hair began to thin after menopause. But she's not happy about it. "The loss of my hair scares me. I'm not sure what the fear is—of becoming completely bald? Being unattractive? Getting old? These things are building blocks of who I am. Or building blocks of who I used to be."

The inescapable effects of aging—less-acute hearing, more crinkles around the eyes, diminished libido, more health complaints—may be especially hard to bear in a culture that prizes youthful energy and attractiveness, says Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, author of **When Bad Things Happen to Good People** and other books that deal with fear, loss and resilience. To "age well" requires not only physical self-care—a balanced diet, adequate exercise, attention to ongoing health conditions—but a willingness to accept the body's changes.

"If I have a dinner party and spend the whole day cleaning house and cooking, then the next day cleaning up, I'm wiped out, says Joe, the nurse who worries about memory loss. "I don't have the stamina I used to have." And Rupert, a 55-year-old graphic artist who has used a wheelchair since a 1996 car accident left him paraplegic, finds travel more depleting than it used to be. "I have less tolerance for being out of the comfort of my own home," which is equipped with extra-wide doorways, shower bars and a ramp that snakes from the front lawn around to the back door.

On a daily basis, Rupert says, he feels "the loss of being able to fit in" to the able-bodied world—for instance, at a friend's 50th birthday party, held in a restaurant's private room that was elevated by three or four steps from the main floor. Rupert had to wheel himself

out of the restaurant, around the block and in through a back door. "I find that I am in a constant state of biting the bullet, and I do find that a bit difficult."

Arthur Caplan, director of the **Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania**, says today's

baby boom generation may feel stunned, even betrayed, by the physical losses of midlife. "Baby boomers had a sense that if they ate the right things and exercised right, they wouldn't die. That if they had the right doctors, the right medicine, the right Botox treatment, they could fend off not only death, but aging. You can jog from here to Los Angeles and back, but you're not changing the rules about mortality."

Despite the gains of feminism, aging is still not an equal-opportunity journey, says Pepper Schwartz, a University of Washington professor of sociology and

author of **Prime: Adventures and Advice on Sex, Love, and the Sensual Years**. While a silver-haired, craggy-faced man may be considered "distinguished," a visibly older woman may struggle to maintain her sense of attractiveness. "Particularly for women who have been beautiful all their lives, it's a shock to be somewhat invisible or referred to as a 'handsome older woman.'"

"Being an old woman—the old maid—is one of the more devalued, dismissed roles," says Breitman, the psychotherapist. She finishes up her mid-day snack—apple wedges smeared with peanut butter—and swipes on a fresh coat of Merlot-colored lipstick. Silver earrings glint from a cascade of wavy, salt-and-pepper hair. "We're a youth-worshipping culture. But just as baby-boomers have created cultural transformation at every stage we move through en masse, I bet we will have an impact on how society views aging and older women."

"We're a youth-worshipping culture. But just as baby-boomers have created cultural transformation at every stage we move through en masse, I bet we will have an impact on how society views aging and older women."

At 50, Breitman says, her back began to hurt and she realized that “staying fit was not an option, it was a necessity.” She ramped up her regular fitness program, began a yoga practice and now, at 60, feels “more fit than I did at 30. I’m coming into my body as it’s aging.”

Joe, too, began a fitness program on the advice of his physician, who urged him to add some weight-bearing exercise to his aerobic routine in order to maintain muscle mass as he ages. And Suzanne, who has struggled for years with obesity and its consequences—diabetes, high blood pressure—recently decided to undergo bariatric bypass surgery. “It’s a conscious effort to improve my health,” she says. “A friend and I have been talking about trekking in the Himalayas.”

Sara J. Corse, a psychologist and author, often walks from her office to a nearby ice rink; she belongs to a synchronized-skating team whose members are mostly in their 50s. She likes to ask clients how old they feel: “How old does your mind feel? Your body? Your spirit? That’s where we’re throwing the whole notion of age on its head. I think there is a growing sense of timelessness as you get older—not in the sense that you have endless time but that time and age are irrelevant.”

Finding Your Way in a New World of Work and Technology

When Brian was laid off from his job in corporate communications—the company essentially dissolved that department—he had no idea what he would do next. “I’d left jobs, but I had never been cut loose before; I knew I would have to totally reinvent my career.” That proved challenging because the industry to which Brian had devoted his life’s work—journalism and publishing—was reeling, with newspapers offering buyouts to longtime employees and magazines shutting their doors.

Career and technological change is one more variety of midlife loss. A fast-paced global economy—with both

manufacturing and professional jobs often outsourced to other countries—has changed the landscape for workers who started their careers in a more stable era.

Here, Rabbi Kushner believes, the gender tables turn, and men suffer professional losses differently from women. Men are more invested in their earning power, he explains, and “if you lose your job, or you’re a salesman and you can’t sell as much, or get paid as much, you lose an essential part of yourself. The question is: Is that your whole self, or is there a core of identity those changes cannot affect?”

When Loss Comes Home to Roost

Meanwhile, the losses of midlife unfold on the home front as well. For parents, the nest quiets and empties as young-adult children go off to college and launch

new lives; for those who never had children, midlife can sharpen a sense of sadness and anxiety about the absent next generation.

“There’s a sense of finitude” in midlife, explains Breitman. “You can see that you’ve lived the majority of your life. If you haven’t had a happy marriage—well, it’s not that you couldn’t divorce and re-marry, but you’re not going to live a full life with someone” beginning in your 60s.

Anna, a private-investigator-turned-mental-health-advocate, spent her late 40s and early 50s in a whirlwind of expensive and exhausting fertility treatments. “I remember thinking, ‘My life is over. What’s the point of me going on? I’m just waiting to die. I don’t have any descendants; I don’t have anyone coming up behind me.’” She wondered if she could be taken seriously as a woman without experiencing pregnancy, birth and motherhood; she felt sorrowful that she’d never see her husband become a father.

Now, she said, there are occasional “sad moments” when she longs for the feel of an infant in her arms, but

“I think there is a growing sense of timelessness as you get older—not in the sense that you have endless time but that time and age are irrelevant.”

she's found new company with empty-nester friends who are no longer latched to their kids' daily needs.

Kay, an adoption services manager, spent 24 years as a single parent to four children after an unexpected divorce; her kids were 18, 16, 12 and 8 at the time. When the youngest graduated from high school, "it took me a while to get used to a dead house." But she gradually discovered new pleasures: playing tennis with a friend at 5:30 in the morning, making a spontaneous movie-date without fretting about teenagers being home alone. "I still worried about my kids, but I had a little more free time to explore and do what I wanted to do."

"For people who have had children, there's the loss [in midlife] of being a parent in a certain way," says Breitman. "But that also opens up the possibility, for women especially, to use a lot of the energy and creativity they poured into their children. It's an opportunity to invest in their own growth and development."

As parents reconfigure lives that once orbited around their children, they often find friendships and even their neighborhoods shifting as well: they no longer routinely see other parents while carpooling or at the soccer match; neighbors their age may decide to downsize and move to apartments or retirement communities.

In Lynne Iser's living-room-turned-office in north-west Philadelphia, a stack of books sits on the desk: *Audacious Aging*, *Creating Community Anywhere*, *The Creative Age*, *The Third Chapter*. Iser is a consultant, teacher and advocate of "elder communities" that allow people to engage with each other and with the larger world.

"As you get older, your social contacts typically decrease," she explains. "If you're not working, if you don't want to go out at night or if your kids move out," you have fewer opportunities for face-to-face encounters. Even the boons of e-mail, cellphones and texting,

which can allow people to be in immediate touch with a daughter in Thailand or a former college roommate in Poughkeepsie, can become an obstacle to real-time, in-person communication.

"If I'm keeping up with 100 people by e-mail and phone, I don't have as much time to talk to my neighbors," says Iser. Even the physical layout of many suburban homes, set back from the sidewalk with spacious lawns, long driveways and garages, creates isolation. In contrast, Iser remembers her childhood in 1950s Brooklyn, where row houses shared stoops, people did errands on foot and everyone knew their neighbors. "Our lives were slower. We walked places, we saw people, everybody didn't own a car." That tight-knit sense of community and the comfort it provided, Iser muses, is the price we've paid for increased mobility, privacy and space.

Naomi Nye, the poet, shares a sense of longing when confronted by the transformed—or vanished—landscapes of the past. In one prose-poem, she writes, "I have always felt out-of-step with my environment, disjointed in the modern world...I am angry over lost department stores, wistful for something I have never tasted or seen." Recently, she attended a re-

union with ten of her childhood friends in St. Louis, in part an attempt to reclaim "that beautiful, wistful, dreamy, crazy neighborhood we loved so much."

But for most people, that neighborhood is long gone. Rica, a business administrator in her early 60s who came to the United States from Peru when she was 19, knows that while you can go home again—and she does, visiting Peru with her husband about once a year—you can't expect to find it unchanged.

"Since Machu Picchu became a World Heritage Site, my hometown of Cuzco has become a big tourist industry. In my time, everybody knew each other. Now it's big. It has lost something." Rica still speaks with a Spanish accent but says she no longer thinks in her

"If you're not working, if you don't want to go out at night or if your kids move out," you have fewer opportunities for face-to-face encounters.

native language; she's lost grammar and vocabulary along with her homeland.

Yet she tries to hold onto emblems of her native country and culture: Rica keeps a large color photograph of Machu Picchu in her office and tucks her coins into a brightly woven Peruvian purse. On weekends, she cooks potatoes with spicy sauce for her 92-year-old mother, who likes the dish prepared in the traditional Peruvian way, "the lettuce like a rose with the potatoes piled on top, then the sauce so it looks like a broken flower."

Even without the dislocation of leaving one culture for another, midlife can bring sorrowful shifts in one's sense of home. Julie, 55, made numerous trips from Boston to western Massachusetts when her father was dying; about three months after his death, she found herself taking a lengthy leave of absence to care for her mother, who had fallen and broken her back. Together, they packed up the home in which Julie had spent her middle- and high-school years so her mother could move to a continuing-care community.

On a winter evening, Julie curled on the couch of her downtown condo, sewing a button on a red-and-black flannel shirt her mother had worn in high school, and talked about the months she spent as a full-time caregiver. During that time, she helped her mother sift through 45 years worth of possessions—Julie's father's books on film history, the twinkling "fairy lights" from the screened porch where her parents loved to sit and talk. All the while, the two cried, reminisced and decided what to keep and what to pack up for Goodwill.

At the same time, Julie was preparing to rent the city townhouse she'd lovingly renovated and lived in for fifteen years, in order to move into a high-rise condo she thought would be better suited for her as she grew older.

"All these changes and losses—my dad, my mom's broken back, me going home—resulted in me becoming chronically depressed. I moved all my stuff into here," she says, gesturing toward the condo's living room, "and for a year, I had 50 boxes piled up. I came home from work and did not have any oomph. I watched all

five seasons of 'Six Feet Under,' for months on end."

Gradually, with the support of therapy, anti-depressants and renewed attendance at Al-Anon meetings (Julie had gone previously, when involved with a partner who was an alcoholic), she regained her bearings and a sense of being "more eager to live my life." As a sign of her fresh outlook, she gave away about twenty boxes of books she'd been toting around since college. She made farewell videos on her cellphone of both the townhouse and her parents' home. And she has big plans for her new apartment. "It's my intention to have the second bedroom be a studio, a place to support creativity," she says.

"You hear the word 'loss,' and people think it's a negative thing. But you can only hold so much in your hands. Loss is what shakes me up enough to re-examine my habits and routines." That jolt, Julie explained, can lead to an embrace of new outlooks or opportunities; losing her father, for instance, opened the door toward a closer and more intimate relationship with her mother. "It may not be true for others, but I've learned the hard way that it's true for me: loss is good, sometimes."

The Deepest Sorrow: Losing Those You Love

For most people, other losses of midlife pale next to the most heartbreaking challenge—coping with the illness, frailty and ultimate deaths of those you love and, with each of those deaths, hearing a whisper of your own mortality.

"We are at ages where everyone feels more fragile, reading the obituaries with a worried eye," says Nye, the writer who gathered poems about loss for an anthology. A friend of hers—also 57, an upbeat professor of art history with "no bad habits"—died recently, drumming home that sense of vulnerability. "The thought that so many bad things happen in the world is ever-present and hangs over your psyche in a different way as you get older."

Joe, the nurse who worries about memory loss, endured a first, unexpected wave of loss in his thirties, at the peak of the AIDS epidemic, when his partner and numerous friends died of the disease. That wrenching

time prepared him for a more recent spate of losses, as both his parents, two aunts and two uncles died over a seven-year period.

“Having gone through three or four hellish years during the AIDS crisis taught me that loss is part of life, and I think it’s part of what makes life precious.” Still, the deaths of his parents and older relatives felt jarring in a different way. “You realize nothing stands between you and eternity. At my aunt’s funeral, one of my cousins said, ‘we’re next in line.’”

When you lose siblings or longtime friends, you lose swatches of your shared past—inside jokes, anecdotes that send you into spasms of laughter, the memories of your younger, wilder self. Suzanne, who has struggled to make peace with thinning hair and other signs of her own aging, recalls that after her brothers died she felt nearly paralyzed with denial. “You can’t lose your brother! Your brother can’t die!” she kept thinking. “Because if your brother can die, so can you.”

Psychologists say there is no evading that shock and sorrow; in fact, they say, people who heal most effectively from loss are the ones who are willing to tread into the dark landscape of deep grief.

Corse, the psychologist who has written a memoir of her own mother’s decline and death from cancer, advises clients to “embrace loss” rather than running from it. “That means you allow yourself to be aware of the gray, flat, ‘nothing’ terrain that is the feeling of having lost. People shy away from those periods of sadness; we feel we always have to be cheerful and coping. Or we’re afraid that if we enter that zone, we’ll be lost in it until the end of time, instead of going through it and coming out again.”

Individuals tend to blame themselves for their losses—if only we’d gotten Mom to the emergency room sooner—what if I’d insisted my brother get a second

doctor’s opinion? —even when the circumstances are well out of their control. “You torment yourself with things you should have done differently,” Rabbi Kushner says, a self-castigation that is both unrealistic and unhelpful. Even when he visited victims of Hurricane Katrina, Kushner says, he had to reassure them that this devastating act of nature was not their fault.

Psychotherapist Breitman agrees that the most important—and transformative—lesson for someone in grief is that “while loss can only be experienced personally, and the pain is awful, loss is a universal human experience. When people are resilient, they don’t ask, ‘Why me?’ because they know they are not being singled out for suffering. Knowing that loss happens to everyone enables people to feel compassion not only for themselves, but for others. It enables people to move on with life.”

When Nye’s father died, one friend said, “Now you’re joining the club nobody wants to join.” Other friends plied her with books of poetry and essays about the experience of grief. “I remember thinking, on the day my father died: I now belong to the family of everyone who’s lost a parent. Suddenly there was this sense of camaraderie in a new way.”

Therapists say the rituals of grief and mourning, which exist across all cultures, do help people to cope. These time-tested acts—wearing a black ribbon, attending a wake, lighting a memorial candle—can provide structure and the comfort of tradition in the midst of emotional confusion and nudge the mourner into connection with others at a time she might feel most alone.

Rituals may be private—writing an annual letter to a beloved, long-gone grandmother; bringing a bouquet of yellow roses to the cemetery—or communal, such as creating a scholarship in the name of a loved one or installing a park bench with a memorial plaque. “Those

The most important—and transformative—lesson for someone in grief is that “while loss can only be experienced personally, and the pain is awful, loss is a universal human experience.”

actions transcend loss and take it into the realm of the community and the world,” says Corse.

A month after Barbara Breitman’s mother died, she invited women friends to join her to mark the end of shloshim—the traditional Jewish 30-day period of intense mourning after a death—by bringing stories, poems or pictures about mothers and daughters. “I wanted to celebrate that bond,” she says. “Rituals help us name what’s happening, let go of what needs to be let go and begin to take on a new identity. We gather a community around to serve as witnesses and celebrants.”

Breitman has seen clients and friends mark not only death and mourning, but other occasions, with creative and powerful rituals: a visit with friends to the mikveh—the ritual Jewish bath—by a woman about to undergo a mastectomy, or a periodic gathering of colleagues to hear about the evolving goals of a friend who has recently retired. “I think people are doing more marking of significant birthdays—50, 60, 70—pausing to reflect on their significance: What does it mean to be 50 or 60 in one’s own life?”

As her own 50th birthday approached, Kay, the divorced woman with four children, knew she wanted to have a party, but had little money for extravagances. “I made a simple dinner. I didn’t want presents; I just wanted to have people with me. I was really pleased that I had done it. Fifty was important to me,” says Kay, and the party was a way of affirming, “I’m going to have fun in my life.”

Kay, now 76, looks to older women as her guideposts for living a vibrant life in the midst of losses. “A friend of mine is 95; physically, she’s somewhat limited, but she’s vital, involved. She’s in a book group with me. Her daughter takes her traveling all over the world. She’s alive, interested in her surroundings.”

Rica’s aunt, who died recently at the age of 90, offered another model of zestful, independent living. “At her 90th birthday party in Lima, Peru, I left at midnight, but she danced until dawn. She made her own breakfast every morning...in my culture, you’re not dead until

you’re dead. Here, it seems like people stop living. I don’t want that to happen to me.”

When Grief Inches Toward Growth

The losses that inevitably come with midlife can be a catalyst for clarity, a spur toward growth. They can sharpen appreciation of the present moment and deepen one’s gratitude for the relationships that remain.

In psychologist Sara J. Corse’s memoir, **Cradled All the While: The Unexpected Gifts of a Mother’s Death**, she writes about rekindling her sense of spirituality and inner strength while caring for her terminally-ill mother. “In embracing my mother’s dying, I opened myself to the love and healing that accompanied us,” she writes. “My mother and I found the calm at the center as we became fully present to caring and to dying. And we were not alone.”

Joe, sobered by the losses of AIDS in his 30s and the more recent deaths of older relatives, says he cherishes each day more now. “I’m keenly aware of the preciousness of relationships, of how important love is in my life. I’m more appreciative of my work.”

After losing his corporate communications job and re-inventing himself as a freelance book editor in a shaky industry, Brian now sees a lesson in that upheaval. “Loss gives you a certain amount of perspective. It tells you that there’s no way to expect what’s going to happen, and therefore you can’t spend your time worrying about it. You can’t let it paralyze you.”

And for Suzanne, who has lost siblings, watched friends fall ill and struggled with her own health, sustenance comes from connection, acceptance and faith—not necessarily in a transcendent power, but in people. “What sustains me? Part of it is a belief in myself and my ability to overcome hard things. I have an acceptance of life: This is it, this is how it is. You can enjoy what you are given. You can have compassion. I believe that I haven’t seen it all, I don’t know what’s going to happen, and there are people working on making this world better. You can go on because the world goes on.”

Glossary: Chapter 5

Center for Bioethics—based at Pennsylvania University, the Center performs bioethics research and promotes scholarly and public understanding of the ethical, legal, social, and public policy implications of advances in the fields of life science and medicine.

Cradled All the While— Corse, Sara J. Cradled All the While: The Unexpected Gifts of a Mother's Death. Augsburg Books, 2004.

Prime— Schwartz, Pepper, Ph.D. Prime: Adventures and Advice on Sex, Love, and the Sensual Years. HarperCollins, 2007.

What Have You Lost?— Nye, Naomi Shihab. What Have You Lost? Greenwillow Books, 1999.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People— Kushner, Harold S. When Bad Things Happen to Good People. Anchor Books, 1981.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 5: The Many Faces of Loss

1. Think about a loss that occurred when you were young—the death of a grandparent, a parent's job, a parent's divorce. What did you learn about understanding and coping with loss?
2. For you, what are the physical changes that have come with mid-life? Are there ways you have altered your appearance, activity level, self-care, diet, or habits to address these changes? Have you made peace with these changes? How?
3. Is there someone older whose attitude toward life and loss inspires you? Who is that person, and what can you learn from him or her?
4. Has there been a time in your life when a loss turned out to be a source of renewal or growth? Has there been a time when you were unable to make peace with a loss? What were the circumstances?
5. What are the losses that you most fear? How do you envision coping with those losses once they occur?
6. Rupert, the graphic artist who uses a wheelchair, says he wants his epitaph to be, "He took nothing for granted." If you could write your own epitaph, what would it be? What words reflect your own attitude toward life and loss?



What's Love Got To Do With It?

By Gloria and Anndee Hochman

The summer before Liz's younger child packed his bags for college, Liz spent an afternoon paddling around the lagoon behind her Aunt Nona's house on Long Beach Island, in New Jersey. "So, Jesse's leaving home in the fall," her aunt said as the two lounged in inner tubes.

"Yes."

"So, it's just going to be you and Steve."

"Um—yes," Liz answered.

"Do you like him?"

Liz nodded. "Good," said her aunt. "Because this is when you're going to find out."

For baby boomer couples like Liz and Steve, both 59, who wed in their Madison, Wisconsin apartment 34 years ago, midlife presents a tricky juncture in the marital road. The kids are grown, careers may be solid, the house may be paid off. And the promise of "I do" may turn into the question: "But do I...still?" The early decades of marriage "are extremely stressful and busy," says Terri Orbuch, a psychologist and research scientist at the University of Michigan who specializes in the study of marriage and divorce. "Then one wakes up in midlife and says, 'Okay, things have settled down.' They take the relationship off the back burner and think, 'Is this someone I want to be with for the next X number of years?'"

Some couples find that a midlife period of reckoning ultimately strengthens their bond. For others, it can be a moment of truth that severs a long-troubled relationship.

Midlife men and women may find themselves single for the first time in decades, due to separation, divorce or the death of a spouse. Some acknowledge that they are gay or lesbian after years of suppressing their desire and trying to live a "straight" life.

A significant number of adults has never married, while others may find love for the first, second or third time in midlife and opt to marry again or simply live together. And as they climb into their late 50s and 60s, more and more people find themselves caring for—or being tended by—a spouse, living out their long-ago vow to remain loyal "in sickness and in health."

For the baby boom generation, marriage and intimate relationships are "coming of age" in a more flexible, option-filled world, with greater acceptance of divorce, homosexuality and cohabitation, more economic independence for women and reduced stigma about being single. Wherever the marital journey leads, says Steve Brody, a California psychotherapist and co-author, along with his wife Cathy, of **Renew Your Marriage at Midlife**, the questions are the same: "What do I need? What can I settle for? What now?"

Midlife Marriage: The Long and Short of It

For Liz and Steve, midlife marriage called for a literal change of scene. For more than a quarter-century, they'd lived in a twin house in a suburb, where they

raised Erica, now 30, and Jesse, 27.

“I realized I wanted this next stage of life to look different. A lot of people remodel their houses when their kids leave, but I needed to walk outside and feel like it was a different life,” Liz said.

Steve fantasized about buying a farm in an outlying county; they considered a move to Cape Cod. Finally they settled on a condo in a gentrified section of downtown San Francisco. “I think the move marked a positive change in our relationship,” said Steve. “It energized things. There’s been a resurgence in the last few years of our connection to each other.”

Marriage counselors say rekindling that connection is key to a thriving midlife marriage. “It’s the C-word: communication,” says psychotherapist Brody. “You have to listen to your partner’s dreams, trying to really hear and respect that. It can raise a lot of anxiety: ‘You want to do what? You can’t do that...’”

Terri Orbuch notes that small changes in routine—taking a salsa dance class together, joining a book or hiking club, playing hooky from work to catch a matinee—can refresh midlife marriage. “Happy couples in my long-term studies have also taken time to give consistent, daily affirmations to each other and have asked meaningful questions of one another over time. They haven’t just maintained the household.”

Even during the busy child-rearing years, Liz and Steve always bought a subscription to a downtown theater; they went away for occasional weekends, leaving the kids with their grandparents. More recently, caring for ill parents—and grieving their deaths—both challenged and affirmed their partnership. At one point, Liz’s mother was dying from lymphoma while Steve’s mother was recovering from a lengthy hospital stay. “We were fighting about who was suffering more,” Liz said. “We realized that if we didn’t find ways to be kind to each other, we would both drown.”

“Losing a parent is a developmental issue with big significance in terms of the relationship,” says Brody. “It might make people cling a little more to the partner they have. Or they might start thinking, ‘I don’t necessarily have forever; is this the person I really want to be with?’”

When couples answer “yes” to that question, the payoff can be an ever-deepening bond. Long-term couples “have a sense of loyalty and mutual dependence that grows over the years,” Brody says. “They know they can rely on each other.”

Lamont and Dorothy have been relying on one another for more than 44 years; they first met in junior high school and married when he was 20, she was 19 and their first child, a boy, was three months old.

Now, after three children, six grandchildren, a 27-year career in the police department for Lamont and a late-in-life career shift for Dorothy—she got a master’s degree in special education five years ago and began teaching elementary school—the two say the key to their thriving midlife marriage is a relaxed acceptance of their differences.

Lamont is a history buff, a neatnik around the house and a strictly meat-and-potatoes guy; Dorothy prefers lighthearted entertainment, is a self-described “clutter bug” and a more adventurous eater. “I can be very touchy and moody,” she said. “I’ve learned to say, ‘Okay, hon.’”

Lamont, too, has changed his approach to conflict. “I’ve learned to let it dissipate. Now, we have a flare-up”—say, about whether an empty chicken container will draw bugs to the outdoor garbage can—“and then it’s done. As you get older, you see your [partner] for who they really are. And you either like them, at the core, or you don’t.”

Even for couples without a lengthy history, midlife marriage can be mellowing. Nyeemah, 55, has been married three or four times, depending on how you count (she was wed and divorced twice to the same man), but this one—her marriage to the religiously devout home inspector she used to call “the church man”—feels different.

She recalls the “pantyhose moment” that clinched her faith that this marriage would endure. Last winter, she suffered a severe allergic reaction to antibiotics; for several weeks, she could barely drag herself out of bed. Her husband washed dishes, bought the groceries, poured the coffee. “He did everything, including put-

ting my pantyhose on because I couldn't pull them up. I thought: That's true love," Nyeemah says. "In these ten years we have seen each other mature and understand that this is it; we are what each other has, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, in health."

California marriage counselor Brody likes to joke that "I'm on my seventh marriage to my first wife." Liz and Steve laugh when they hear that; their marriage, too, is not the same one they envisioned on the day of their "hippie" ceremony in 1976.

What endures, for both of them, is a commitment to equality and a genuine enjoyment of each other—as well as the examples of both their parents' long-term partnerships. "We both had the model of marriage as a place where you can have a life, where everybody's a person," Liz says. "I remember my mother saying, once the kids were out, 'We've reached the sweet part.' That's where we are at this point: we have good history, and we like each other."

Going Solo: Single by Circumstance or Choice

When she was in high school, Paula had her life mapped out: she would earn a Ph.D. in math, get married at 27 and have her first child at 30.

Today, she is 58: a fiscal manager, desktop publisher, artist, homeowner and part of a growing cohort of ever-single adults. In 2006, nearly 30 percent of men over age 18, and 22 percent of women, had never married; in 1950, the numbers were 25 percent for men and 18.5 percent for women.

Paula was engaged once, in her thirties, but felt uncertain about the relationship. Since age 38, "I really have not hooked up with anyone in an intimate relationship. That bothered me for a long time. 'Okay, it hasn't happened. It would be lovely if it did, but...'"

Ruthy Kaiser, a therapist with **Philadelphia's Council for Relationships**, frequently counsels wom-

en in Paula's position—those who are divorced, widowed or never-married—and who cope with that status in a variety of ways. Some women who have never married "feel that they've missed out on something. On the other hand, I know a single executive in the fashion business who has friends all over the world and who feels she's had a rich life—just in a different way."

Holidays and life-cycle occasions—Valentine's Day, engagement parties, golden anniversaries—can be painful times for those who are single. Paula has taken the initiative to create social occasions. For a while,

she held monthly potluck suppers after Sunday services. And when she bought her house, she hosted a housewarming party, complete with an idiosyncratic "registry" of items she wanted: a wok, guest towels, wind chimes, a barbecue. Her church "functions a lot as a family for me," Paula says. "And friendships are where I get most of my intimacy."

Kaiser and other therapists note that the ever-single life is easier now than it used to be, for both men and women. The sense of stigma is greatly reduced, she says, and social possibilities abound: online dating, "game nights" at local cafes, travel clubs, church or synagogue singles groups.

For some—especially those who were in unhappy marriages—being single may come as a relief, says Constance Ahrons, California psychologist and author of **The Good Divorce**. While "well over 50% of men remarry within one year after divorce, more and more women are saying, 'I don't even want to remarry. I'm really pleased to have this place to myself, to get my life back.'"

When Winnie's husband died suddenly eight years ago, she felt both shock and relief. After more than three decades of marriage, the two had been separated for about a year, slowly driven apart because of cultural differences (she is African-American and he is Latino), pro-

Holidays and life-cycle occasions—Valentine's Day, engagement parties, golden anniversaries—can be painful times for those who are single.

fessional jealousy and differing communication styles.

Now 63, Winnie realizes that she'd never lived alone, never even bought a major appliance. "Now that I'm a widow, I see how much I'm not a domestic creature. I'm finding out more about my quirks, my strengths and my weaknesses. I'm messy with papers. I can cook, but I don't really like to." And while she retains responsibility for their adult son, who struggles with mental illness, Winnie said she feels truly free for the first time in her life. "My life feels spacious, and there's a challenge to remake it now."

Recently Winnie agreed to join some women friends who call themselves the Spa Divas on their annual trip to Mexico; she is putting the finishing touches on a long-in-progress novel. "My sense of adventure is returning, that yearning to live...I have had successful hip replacement surgery. I can walk, I can run, I can dance. I'm grateful to be here. I have much more space, more friendships, less sense of being limited and contained. My life just feels much larger now."

A Parting of the Ways

Fred and Julie were almost ready to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary when Julie suggested they see a marriage counselor. Fred couldn't understand why. He loved his wife, a successful computer programmer, adored their two daughters, and was happy with their comfortable lifestyle in suburban Chicago.

Now Fred admits there is another side to the looking glass. Julie traveled at least half the year for her work and was "a very social person. She thought nothing of walking into a room full of strangers and joining a conversation immediately," he says. Julie was close to her family and could have spent seven days a week visiting with them. Fred's first reaction was always, "Do we have to go?"

"We started growing apart," he says. "We weren't exactly leading separate lives, but instead of dragging me if we were invited to a dinner party, she would go on her own. I was passive-aggressive about it. I'd say, 'Go,' then put up a stink."

Marital counseling didn't help, and in January 2009, the couple separated. "I've taken care of you guys (Fred and their two daughters, Molly, 14, and Tracy, 20) most of my life," Julie told her husband and children. "Now I want to take care of myself."

As in Julie and Fred's case, women are more likely than men to initiate divorce, says Constance Ahrons, "Women come into their own in midlife. They have increased earning power so financial dependence no

longer keeps them locked in unfulfilling marriages. Men are often shocked by the whole thing."

Fred and Julie are, of course far from alone in parting ways after decades of marriage: according to the National Center for Health Statistics, divorce among couples married more than 30 years rose 16 percent between 1981 and 1991, even as the overall divorce rate was declining.

There are several reasons, says Ahrons. Some unhappily married couples opt to delay divorce until their children have graduated from

high school or college. "And the norms have changed," she says. "It's more acceptable to get a divorce."

In addition, she notes, the developmental bumps of midlife may precipitate a split. The death of a parent or close friend, or a personal health crisis, is often a wake-up call.

That was the case for Amy, an office manager who, at 27, married a man she'd known since college. He was a hippie, a nature-lover and a lawbreaker—he smuggled marijuana—whose rebellious streak thrilled her and ran counterpoint to the rigid expectations of her 1950s childhood.

"Women come into their own in midlife. They have increased earning power so financial dependence no longer keeps them locked in unfulfilling marriages. Men are often shocked by the whole thing."

“But once we started having kids, the outlaw nature of our life became less appealing,” she says. “It took me quite a long time to arrive at needing to get out. We had three kids. It never seemed like the right time to make any big moves. There was never ugly violence; it was just numb and sad and disappointing. When our youngest son got out of high school, that’s when I said, ‘I’m out of here.’”

Once on her own, Amy, who is now 59, focused on financial stability, slowly erasing her debt and building up retirement funds. “I like having my own space and my own rhythm.”

At the same time, says Amy, she misses the shared history and emotional connection with her husband. “There’s no right answer: being alone or making compromises in order not to be alone. We’re friends again,” Amy says. “The story ain’t over.”

Ahrons says it’s common for the relationship between ex-spouses to soften after several years. “If there was a good friendship base in the marriage, they may be able to continue that friendship.” Another key to achieving a “good divorce” in midlife, Ahrons points out, is the ability to grieve what’s lost.

Marcy, a reading specialist at an urban charter school, is still grieving, trying to absorb the demise of her 23-year relationship with Theresa. Together, they’d raised Theresa’s children, who were nine and seven when Theresa left her husband and moved into Marcy’s home. A year ago, they opened a café, banking on Marcy’s inheritance and Theresa’s catering experience to yield small-business success.

Marcy was shocked when, a month after opening the café, Theresa announced, “I think I want to be with men.” Six months later, they’d closed the café, but continue to share a house (though not a bedroom); they eat dinner together most nights and watch DVD episodes of “Weeds.” And Marcy finds herself wondering, at 62, what her future holds.

When Theresa does move out, Marcy knows she’ll miss the daily intimacies.

At the same time, she says, she can envision life as a single woman: relishing her retirement in a few years,

perhaps moving to the west coast. She’d like to learn blacksmithing, how to turn wood on a lathe, how to make handcrafted furniture. “I see a whole other world for people my age. Theresa doing this opens up other possibilities for me.”

Finding Love Late in Life

Jennifer and Bill had both been divorced for nearly three years when they were introduced by a mutual friend. Bill knew immediately that this was not just another date; Jennifer thought he was fun and energetic, but she wasn’t focusing on a long-term relationship. Before long, however, they began to see each other every weekend.

When they met, Jennifer, now 59, was the successful executive director of a big-city social services agency; Bill, a year older, was a pharmacist who owned his own drug store. Both were impressed that the other did not seem needy and were willing to accept each other’s adult children as part of the relationship package.

“When I met Bill, I was coming from a position of strength,” Jennifer says. “I had a good job and I was happy being single. I thought to myself, ‘Let’s see if this man adds to my life.’”

He did. She loved Bill’s sense of humor, his thoughtfulness and his willingness to talk about anything. “I didn’t keep problems with my children a secret from him,” she says, “but I didn’t want them to interfere with our relationship.”

For his part, Bill acknowledges he wanted to find love again. They dated for five years before moving in together. Bill’s rented house was near his pharmacy, so it made sense for him to continue living there for a while. Jennifer’s home, which she owned, would need renovations if Bill were to move in. “I didn’t want to share my closets, so we had to build new ones. He needed a quiet place where he could work or just hang out alone so we created a space for him on my lower level. Our biggest decision was whether he could bring his blue La-Z-Boy.” He did.

Living together has improved their relationship,

both say. They have fun cooking meals and enjoy experimenting with new recipes. They travel, giving Jennifer the chance to practice photography, her new passion. They agree that this is the best time in their lives.

Is marriage in their future? They're not sure. "If we decide to get married, that would be fine," Jennifer says. "The only awkward thing about our current arrangement is the language. Who am I? His girlfriend? His partner? There aren't good terms for people in our situation."

Terri Orbuch, who consults for Senior People Meet, an online dating service, says she often hears couples who have met in midlife wondering whether it makes sense to give their relationship the stamp of legality. "People have developed habits and ways that work for them. Even living with someone and merging households becomes an issue."

Laurie, a 59-year-old interior designer, hadn't lived with a lover since she was in college. Her relationships with men she describes as "bad boys" tended to flare and then fizzle. Then a family friend re-introduced her to Andrew; their families had known each other for years, and at one point, as children, they had even shared a playhouse.

Laurie was struck by their differences: she is frank, extroverted and spontaneous, while Andrew is thoughtful, reserved and devoted to his work as a research physician. After several years of on-again, off-again dating, Andrew proposed. Laurie surprised herself by saying yes.

The two were married—she was 55 and he was 61—in the backyard of Laurie's parents' home, under the Jewish wedding canopy her parents had used for their own wedding 60 years earlier.

"I didn't really care about getting married. But I decided to say yes, and I'm glad I did. I thought, 'This is going to make my mother so happy.' And there is something nice about saying 'my husband.'"

Still, Laurie said, leaving her house for Andrew's mountain-view condo was not easy. Initially, they tangled about money, about household clutter, about Andrew's workaholicism. They agreed to maintain separate bank accounts; Laurie doesn't have to account for the money she spends on top-drawer appliances or designer clothes, and Andrew need not justify the \$1,000 monthly maintenance on his sailboat.

Andrew still works some 14-hour days, but Laurie has discovered she enjoys the time to read, see friends or be alone. What surprised her most was how much she likes being married. "I feel much more secure: the

idea of coming home to someone who is in your corner, who you can sort things through with. I also feel more vulnerable, because I feel how precious it all is."

"People have developed habits and ways that work for them. Even living with someone and merging households becomes an issue."

Out of the Closet: Claiming a New Sexual Orientation

Michael, a 58-year-old attorney in Virginia, remembers uttering a silent prayer on his wedding day.

He was marrying a woman he'd met while both were graduate students; she was smart, pretty and Catholic, and she wanted kids.

"I can still remember standing there at the altar and thinking: God, you're going to have to help me do this—not only getting married but keep playing the role."

It took nearly 25 years for Michael to claim his orientation as a gay man, and he believes it might never have happened except for one "unplanned encounter" at an out-of-town legal convention. Still, it took him two more years to come out to his entire family. "Our marriage was difficult because I was at war with myself. I refer to it as the 'glass wall' you keep between you and everyone. There's always a bit of a barrier you maintain to protect your secret."

For men or women, coming out at age 55 or 60 is quite different from bursting giddily out of the closet in one's early twenties. "When women come out in

midlife, they don't tend to wave a flag about it as much as someone who is young," says Lisa Diamond, associate professor of psychology at the University who specializes in the study of same sex sexuality. "It's a more complicated process."

Joanne Fleisher, a Philadelphia-area therapist and author of *Living Two Lives*, a guide for married women who discover their attraction to other women, says midlife women who come out must wrestle between the pull of their hearts and the powerful tug of convention, history and family.

Michael knew he was putting his career—he was a partner in a law firm—at risk by coming out; moreover, he knew his kids might be targets of teasing by classmates. And he felt uncertain about emerging so late into a gay community that seemed to prize youthfulness.

Still, despite an acrimonious divorce and a tumultuous few years with his children—the oldest and youngest, both girls, are now on good terms with their father, while his middle child, a son, remains angry and distant because he resents his father for breaking up their family—Michael does not regret his late-in-life upheaval.

"When you finally come out," Michael says, "it's like this unbelievable weight has been taken off you. You're totally liberated and, at the same time, you're terrified: It was like starting all over again...but I would do it again. Just being able to be me—there's not a price you can put on that."

In Sickness and In Health: The Challenge of Caregiving

Brooks was 53, a former lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and a captain with American Airlines, an avid tennis player and skier. He and Teena had married seven years earlier, with six kids from former marriages between them.

One night, after an evening out with dear friends, Brooks suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, the opening incident in what his wife now calls "a story of midlife reinvention.

"My first reaction was shock," Teena says. Later,

when it became clear that Brooks would be permanently disabled, "I was numb. But my choice was to be as straightforward with him as possible, with hope. I decided to see what was right with him, not what was wrong, and to build on his strengths."

Teena and Brooks, faced with a sudden and severe disability, may be an extreme example of a scenario many couples confront in their middle years, as they find themselves living out the vow to remain steadfast "in sickness and in health."

"All of us enter our relationships with some dream of what's going to unfold over time," says Barry Jacobs, a clinical psychologist who wrote *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers*. "Especially as people reach midlife, they have ideas of how they're going to retire, travel and enjoy their golden years together. With illness, those dreams are shattered."

Gradually, Brooks and Teena cobbled their lives back together, determined to act as "care-partners," as Teena put it. If her husband no longer has the organizational acumen to pay household bills, he can still talk with her about big-picture financial matters. He can audit classes in Civil War history at a local college. He can remind Teena to take her vitamins.

In 1999, he and Teena bought an extended-family home with their daughter and son-in-law; they live there with their grandkids, aged 15, 12 and 4. Teena plays tennis six times a week. And during one of her many trips around the world to speak about spousal caregiving, her husband learned to bake pies.

"Caregiving isn't sexy, but I want people to understand that you can not only survive, but have a great life. My husband and I get to share real, everyday moments. We get to keep going forward and having more of our life together rather than letting all this overcome us."

For Dave, 60, a professor of accounting, and Duane, 51, an artist and interior designer, equality was a key value in their relationship; indeed, it was part of the attraction when the men first spotted each other at a gay/lesbian square dance.

That prized equity was threatened in 1995, when

Duane was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Four years ago, he began to walk with a cane, then crutches, then a walker. Now he uses a motorized scooter. He can no longer drive, cook, or write a check.

“I never worried that Dave would leave” because of the diagnosis, Duane says. “Dave would rather stick through things; he’d rather work it out. But I do think, ‘If Dave is not here, what will I do? Who will take care of me? Where will I go?’”

For Dave, the recent, rapid progression of Duane’s MS has been sobering. “Back then [when Dave was diagnosed], I thought, Oh, that’s long into the future. Now, the future’s here.”

Duane leans on his walker, moving slowly to the back door, where both men show off their lavish garden. Laughing, they recall the many arguments they had about building their screened-in porch; Duane wanted high-end design while Dave would have been content with something from Home Depot. Illness—and time—have put perspective on those fights. “All those compromises of the early years,” Dave says, “we’re past all that now.”

Illness or disability can take a toll on a couple’s financial life, their emotional bond and their sexual connection. Even healthy aging has an impact on sexual vitality and performance, says Pepper Schwartz, a University of Washington professor of sociology who is also a relationship expert for the AARP. “There are losses of some of your sexual powers—erection, lubrication, intense orgasm, your own sense of beauty.”

Because many medications also interfere with sex-

ual functioning, “the question becomes, how do you maintain physical affection?” notes clinical psychologist Jacobs. “Sex life can wither very quickly. Part of my work with spouses is to find some means of maintaining the physical connection.”

Maintaining physical connection has not been easy for Marlene and David. Four years into their relationship, David, then 53, was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He underwent nerve-sparing surgery that meant it was likely he would still be able to get an erection. Unfortunately, that’s not the way it worked out. “I’m alive, but the results were very disappointing,” says David. “I was left impotent and incontinent. I wondered whether Marlene would still want to marry me.”

She did. “We had a lot of love, playfulness and openness, and I didn’t consider the sex to be that important,” she said. “The tenderness and affection that were the hallmarks of our relationship felt more valuable.” They married 18 months later.

In retrospect, Marlene realizes she was naïve about the toll this challenge would take on both of them. Both missed the spontaneity of their lovemaking. “I feel like damaged goods,” David admits. “I keep imagining that one day she’ll say, ‘I’ve had enough of this lack of sexuality, and I’m out of here.’”

Marlene insists that will not happen. “At this stage of our lives—we’ve been together for 18 years—we have a shared history, and the essence of what motivated me to go into the marriage is still there. We’re together for the long haul.”

Glossary: Chapter 6

Living Two Lives— Fleisher, Joanne. *Living Two Lives: Married to a Man and In Love with a Woman*. Alyson Books, 2005.

Philadelphia's Council for Relationships—founded in 1932 as the Philadelphia Marriage Council, this independent, nonprofit organization provide clinical care, education, research, and training with the aim of improving the quality of personal relationships.

Renew Your Marriage at Midlife— Brody, Cathy, and Steve Brody. *Renew Your Marriage at Midlife: A Guide to Growing Together in Love*. The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1999.

The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers— Jacobs, Barry J. *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers: Looking After Yourself and Your Family While Caring for an Aging Parent*. The Guildford Press, 2006.

The Good Divorce— Ahrons, Constance. *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together When Your Marriage Comes Apart*. HarperPerennial, 1994.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 6: What's Love Got to Do with It?

1. How has your marriage or long-term relationship changed over the years? What has caused those changes?
2. If you could go back and advise your just-married self about what makes a healthy long-term relationship, what would you say?
3. If you have divorced either before or during your mid-life years, what you have learned from that experience?
4. For those who are single, what are some of the challenges of being single? Are there times when you're glad to be single? Are there strengths you have gained?
5. If you are considering a marriage or re-marriage during this time of life, what issues need to be considered—your children and their reaction, finances, independence, health?
6. What are your feelings about the issues facing gay men and lesbians when they “come out” in later life? Do you think it is different than if they had “come out” earlier?
7. If you are a well spouse caring for an ill or disabled partner, or vice-versa, what are some of the most stressful or challenging aspects of that care? What are some of the gifts or rewards of care-giving/receiving care?



The Power of Friendship

By SaraKay Smullens

“Friends, you and me...you brought another friend... and then there were three...we started our group...our circle of friends...and like that circle...there is no beginning or end.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

When my first husband and I separated after eleven years of marriage, I relied on a trusted network of friends. I had no relatives living near me, but my friends were my confidantes and my soul mates during the most difficult time of my life. They were the ones I called early in the morning when I was too gripped by fear to wake my young daughters, ages four and seven. My friends were the ones who took me to lunch, listened to stories of a needlessly protracted divorce, saved their children’s clothes for my children each season, and called me in the evenings after my children were asleep when my loneliness felt crippling. They were the ones that supported my choice to get a divorce and reassured me that I and my two young daughters would not only survive, but thrive and go on to enjoy rewarding and productive lives. I needed to believe them.

Now 34 years later and remarried to a loving husband for almost 30 years, my relationships with most of these friends have deepened despite life changes or moves to other cities. But not all. One passed away and I will mourn her death for the rest of my life. With some, the degree of intimacy has changed, but my

contact with them is still meaningful to me. In a few cases, we’ve just grown apart as years and events have tilted our lives.

This reflection has made me realize that the meaning of friends, our need for them and the kind of relationships we have with them are not static. By the time we have reached our 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond, we keep some friends, slip away from others, make new friends; and, as we move through the decades, we have different expectations of what friendship means. Sometimes a shared history is our major bond. Sometimes, that isn’t enough.

As a family therapist, I’ve heard my share of friendship stories. I’ll be sharing some with you. Others reflect my interviews with dozens of men and women who generously confided their experiences.

As you read you will see how friendships formed by baby boomers in their 20s and 30s hold up... or don’t... against the challenges of aging. We will examine the differences in the way men and women—gay men and lesbians, single people and those with partners—view friendships and why.

We simply outgrow some relationships; others are affected by distance, relocation, manipulative behavior, betrayal or death as well as by second marriages and newly formed families, and the struggle to go on the best way one can after traumatic loss. Friendships change when a spouse retires, and when someone experiences the stunning impact of living alone for the

first time in decades. Finally, you will learn about the necessity at this time for flexibility, creativity and the capacity to change one's expectations of what friendship means as we grow older.

If you ask a younger person to describe a best friend, you might hear:

- He'll pick you up at midnight when you're out on the highway and just totaled your car
- She'll be your cushion when you're feeling blue and your confidante when no one else understands
- She'll love you unconditionally even when you're acting stupid or doing something embarrassing
- She's the sister (or brother) you never had.

An older person may add:

- She'll invite me when she knows I'm alone
- He'll be good to my adult children after I've gone
- She won't judge me when I make decisions she thinks are ridiculous
- She won't tell me to act my age

By the time we approach this sixth decade of life, most of us will have come face-to-face with life's frailties and uncertainties. Few will have been untouched by deep losses as a result of death, illness, betrayal or dishonesty. Many of us will have faced our own or a loved one's grave illness. We will have learned that life surely is not fair, and will have seen clearly that it is not, of course, forever. We also will have seen firsthand how important it is for each of us to learn how to care for ourselves. For when hardship and loss come, we must each somehow pick up the pieces and find a way to move on. No one can do this for us.

Baby boomers, especially women, frequently had a best friend. It was part of the culture of nourishing each other as they were finding themselves. As they age, they may have been lucky enough to keep that friend. But life changes, and a best friend or two may morph into different friends for different reasons.

Friends for All Reasons

Just this week Sally, a happily married nurse approaching 60, made an appointment to see me because she was struggling with her friendships—those she had had earlier in life and those she had cultivated more recently. “In my 20s, 30s and even my 40s, I always had a best friend,” she told me. “The ‘click’ just happened.”

There was Carrie whom she had met in her freshman year of college. They connected instantly and Carrie became Sally's “best friend number one.” They trusted each other and could share their deepest thoughts and feelings. Their sister-like bond persisted through time—through their careers, through both of their marriages and through the years when they were raising young children. They even planned their lives so that they lived in the same neighborhood.

Then unexpectedly, Carrie's husband took a job in California and the family moved 3000 miles across the country. Both women were devastated, but stayed in touch through late night phone calls and annual visits.

“Best friend number two” was Louise, coincidentally the woman who, with her husband Andrew and two children, moved into Carrie's former house. The women and their husbands enjoyed each other and went out together on weekends. The four of them shared an interest in modern jazz, Indian food and Saturday flea markets. Even their children became buddies.

There were 20 wonderful years; then the unthinkable happened. Louise and Andrew were killed in a boating accident while they were visiting relatives in the Midwest.

That same year Carrie developed pancreatic cancer and died within two months. “My loss was indescribable, stunning,” Sally says. “I remained shell-shocked for a very long time, and then the mourning began.”

A year after this devastating double tragedy, Sally began groping for her next best friend. She was not able

“In my 20s, 30s and even my 40s, I always had a best friend. The ‘click’ just happened.”

to find one. Here she was, in my office, telling me about the comfort and security she felt for most of her life with her two best friends, and now struggling with an emptiness she couldn't shake.

By the time she consulted me, Sally had managed to develop a number of new friendships. She would go to the theatre with one friend, would shop with another and confided in still another when her adult son and daughter exasperated her. "Still," she said, "I miss the kind of all-in-one relationship I had in one best friend, one that at this time in my life I cannot seem to duplicate."

Actually, Sally's varied friendships at age 63 represent a healthy adaptation to aging, says Dr. David Leof, a San Francisco psychiatrist. "At this time, you may need to give up the expectation that there will be one person to satisfy almost all of your needs. You need to have different friends for different reasons."

"As women mature, they usually feel less of a need for 'twinship,' for the Best Female Friend who we believed mirrored us and confirmed that we were okay," says Dr. Faith Bethelard, Manhattan psychologist and co-author with Dr. Elisabeth Young Bruehl, of the book, *Cherishment*. "We become solid in ourselves and are able to seek out and enjoy the company of different kinds of people."

Dr. Geoffrey Greif, professor of social work at the University of Maryland, talks about categories of friendship. He calls them the must, trust, just and rust friends, explaining them this way: A must friend is the most intimate one to call with essential news. Trust friendships are a larger group; there is caring, but the intimacy is not as deep. Just friends are casual acquaintances, while rust friends have a long shared history and may drift in and out of each other's lives. I would suggest another category, "dust friends," those that drift away by design or default.

The "Dust" Friend: Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

As the years add up, we sometimes recognize that a friendship, no matter how far back it goes, is toxic for us. Time begins to feel more precious, and we may be-

come less tolerant of a friend who has been unkind, selfish, draining or just plain irritating. Layers of hurt and disappointment that have built through the years may finally demand that even a long-term friendship needs to end.

That's the way it was for Marilyn who says her decision to abandon her 40-year-long relationship with Debbie was painful but freeing.

Through the years, there were signs that Debbie was self-centered and perhaps not trustworthy. When Marilyn's sister died, Debbie "forgot" to send a card or in any way acknowledge Marilyn's grief. When Marilyn won first prize in an essay competition sponsored by a leading national magazine, Debbie didn't celebrate her achievement or even offer congratulations.

But it was the incident with their alma mater, where they had met as students, that was the last straw. After graduation, they married, but pursued different interests—Debbie went to work in her husband's lucrative real estate firm; Marilyn became a teacher and professional volunteer for her college. The women's friendship continued through their days as young mothers, and they usually had lunch together two or three times a month.

One of Marilyn's proudest moments occurred when she raised enough money to allow her college to establish a chair in community development. As a result, she was invited to become a college trustee.

A year later, knowing that Debbie too wanted to become a trustee, Marilyn introduced her to the college president. The following month Debbie pledged a huge financial contribution to the chair that Marilyn had created, ensuring her own trustee appointment as well. Marilyn understood that because of the size of Debbie's donation, the Chair would bear her name, but was stunned to learn that Debbie had requested that Marilyn's term as trustee not be renewed.

At the naming ceremony, Debbie did not even mention Marilyn's work in creating the Chair; when Marilyn told her she felt hurt about the omission, Debbie snapped that Marilyn was being "narcissistic and inappropriate." Following this exchange, Marilyn said, "in

that instant, a switch turned off.” All of the hurts and disappointments of the past came rushing back. She never called Debbie again.

Jan Yager, author of **When Friendship Hurts**, says that leaving a friendship can be particularly hard for women who have been taught from childhood to make and nurture relationships. “Women often believe that ending a friendship is tantamount to admitting that they have failed at a core task.” But a friend who sabotages your self-esteem can be lethal, she says and sometimes the most freeing thing you can do is to let it go.

This doesn’t mean that some friendships, even if they are less than perfect, are not worth salvaging. Even well-meaning, kind people sometimes do hurtful things, and forgiveness can often be a gift we give ourselves. But friends who sap the energy better spent on meeting life’s challenges are probably not worth saving. Painful as it may be, life’s realities sometimes necessitate that we extricate ourselves from unkind, manipulative relationships. Fill out the chart* below to find out which “friends” you may need to eliminate from your life.

Answer “frequently,” “sometimes” or “never” to these questions about each of your friends. Someone who scores “frequently” at least twice may not be a true friend. Spend your time and energy on those for whom the answers were “never.”

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	She/he does not find pleasure in my successes
<input type="checkbox"/>	She/he interrupts with a personal story when I am speaking
<input type="checkbox"/>	He/she lies to me
<input type="checkbox"/>	He/she inevitably arrives late or cancels dates at the last minute
<input type="checkbox"/>	He/she criticizes me to others
<input type="checkbox"/>	She/he betrays my confidences
<input type="checkbox"/>	He/she does not accept what I say about my feelings
<input type="checkbox"/>	She/he makes cutting remarks about my appearance or my feelings
<input type="checkbox"/>	He/She holds grudges and withholds contact for long periods
<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel that true self-expression on my part will end this friendship

*Chart adapted from SaraKay Smullens’ book, *Setting Yourself Free: Breaking the Cycle of Emotional Abuse in Family, Friendships, Work and Love*.

The Comfort of a Circle of Friends

Friends matter. “They help us live,” says minister Paul D. Daniel in a talk he gave at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester several years ago. “Without friends, we would suffocate. It matters that we matter and that we are not alone.” In fact, there has been much research indicating that having friendships promotes good physical and emotional health. A British study completed in 2007 revealed that 72% of depressed women who were assigned a “volunteer friend” experienced a remission in their symptoms as compared to only 45% in a control group without an assigned friend. A recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health of more than 2,800 women with breast cancer found that those without close friends were four times more likely to die than women with ten or more friends. And a Swedish study reports that for heart attack prevention, having friendships is second only to not smoking.

Most single women have learned to rely on friends to keep them sane and safe. They form a network through which they look out for each other, make travel plans together and provide support through life’s traumas and triumphs. In fact, in her book, **The New Single Woman**, author E. Kay Trimberger writes “marital status may not be as powerful a predictor of whether you will die alone as whether you have maintained a circle of friends.” Trimberger observes that the intensive, all-consuming coupling practiced by some married partners, which moves once-important relationships to the back burner, may be what leaves people particularly vulnerable. The same thing is true when a single person relies on one best friend, who eventually finds a partner. It is safest and most rewarding not to expect one relationship to meet every expectation.

How Gender Influences Friendship Differences Between Male and Female Friendships

Women typically describe their friendships in terms of closeness and emotional connection, the willingness to share meaningful thoughts and feelings. They use

words such as “accepting,” “intimate” or “self-revealing.” Women usually make a deep commitment to their female friends and celebrate their ties to each other. Most men don’t do it that way.

It is not that men don’t have friends. They just have them differently. They tend to gather around a common interest or activity—sports, cards or work. J.D. Block, in his book, **Friendship: How to Give It, How to Get It**, discusses “activity friends,” such as a weekly tennis partner or drinking buddies, “convenience friends” where the relationship is based on the exchange of favors or “mentor friends,” typically a relationship between a younger and older man. Meeting over lunch just to talk doesn’t come naturally to many men.

Nonetheless, there are some men who say that throughout their adult lives they have enjoyed close friendships with men where they share feelings about their marriages, their jobs, their parents and their children. Sean, now 62, even participated in consciousness-raising groups back in the 70s when he was in his early 30s.

“The civil rights movement, the gay movement and the feminist movement all affected how I and the men I knew defined ourselves,” Sean observes. “A professor at a southern university started our group, and we met regularly to talk about things like our feelings about sex, our conflicts at work, parenting young children and how our wives were changing. I remember that one man revealed that he had served time in jail and another shared that he came from a family of alcoholics. How much more revealing can you get?”

Today, Sean has two running buddies, and as they exercise they dissect their marriages, their careers and relationships with their adult children, “a world of personal and intimate topics.”

As men age, the need for friends often becomes urgent. In several cities, groups of men who call them-

selves ROMEOS (retired old men eating out) have been sprouting up, meeting every week over lunch. One Milwaukee group of seven, all in their 60s and early 70s, for decades, had seen each other every day at the major daily newspaper where they were writers and editors. When they retired, they realized they missed the camaraderie and each other.

“I was at sixes and sevens when I retired,” says 62-year-old Alan who has been contentedly married for more than 30 years. “But hanging around the house all day, when neither I nor my wife was used to it, was a drag for both of us. The ROMEO lunches have made so much difference. I look forward to going to them every week and having the chance to reconnect with the guys

I worked with for so many years. It feels like coming home.”

Recently, George, who belongs to a ROMEO group outside of Philadelphia, became ill following the death of his wife. It was the ROMEOS who helped his children find a long term setting for him, and they visit him regularly.

“To be honest,” says Alan, “we really don’t talk about the important stuff of life. We talk about what’s on the op ed page today, how the newspaper business has changed, and we reminisce about old times. We don’t even ask George how he really is. Men do not do that. Sometimes stuff may make us lonely, but most of us will not admit it. I think it makes us feel too vulnerable and in our eyes vulnerable means weak. We don’t like that feeling. Without the women in our lives who force us to talk about tough issues, we would sometimes forget that we are human.”

It is not that men don’t have friends. They have them differently. They tend to gather around a common interest or activity—sports, cards or work.

Opposite Gender Friendships

While friendships tend to be gender-based—women have female friends, men have male friends—many people, particularly as they grow older, may have close

friends of the opposite gender. Sometimes, they have met through business. Other times, they may have rekindled an old friendship. Some men, in a 1985 study by L.B. Rubin and described in her book, **Just Friends: the Role of Friendships in Our Lives**, say that friendship with a woman provides them with support and intimacy generally not available in their friendships with other men. If a man has a female friend to whom he is close, it is she to whom he may reveal emotions. “I don’t think another man would know how to respond if I presented him with a personal problem,” says Sy, a 61-year-old advertising executive. “If I had something on my mind, I would talk to my wife or my sister or a close woman friend.”

Experts agree, however, that when people are married, deep friendships with a member of the opposite sex can become complicated. Angie and Dick, for instance, are good friends with Violet and John and see them often. However, when Violet asked if she could stay overnight at Angie and Dick’s Manhattan apartment, where she knew Dick spent weeknights, both Dick and Angie were uncomfortable.

“Even though I knew that Violet’s reason was legitimate—she had an early morning meeting the next day—I did not like her request one bit,” says Angie, “But I wondered if I were being silly, dated and sexist by my reaction. After all, we are all good friends and are happily married. Why should I be uncomfortable if my friend wants to save money in a rotten economy?” She and Dick decided to welcome Violet to their apartment, but Dick decided on his own to spend the night in a hotel and tell Violet that he had been called out of town.

The following situation is more complex.

At her 35th high school reunion, Carol resurrected a friendship with Norman that had been dormant since their senior year when they had dated occasionally. They talked about old times, old friends and vowed that this time they would not let their friendship lapse. Both were married—Carol in a happy union, Norman in a rocky one.

A week later, Carol invited Norman and his wife

to her home for dinner. That was the beginning of an energetic second-time-around friendship. It has been three years now, and Carol and Norman see each other at least twice a month; they meet for lunch or dinner, take short drives together to visit Carol’s daughter, son-in-law and three-year-old grandson. Carol even invited Norman to spend a week with her in the family cottage on the Oregon coast. It made Carol’s husband feel edgy, but, after all, he told himself, his wife and Norman were old friends. And he was certain that there was no sex involved. Indeed, Norman, at just over 60, joked that his libido was in “underdrive.” Norman’s wife often traveled alone for month-long visits to her family in Texas and has never voiced reservations about the friendship between her husband and Carol.

“Friendship with someone from the opposite sex when you’re married (whether or not their spouses admit it) is always difficult,” says Dr. Mark Vernon, author of *The Philosophy of Friendship*. “Our culture makes this a very tense relationship even if there are not sexual feelings involved. There is always the belief that there is or can or will be sexual attraction to negotiate. It is very unsettling for all concerned.”

Friendships in the Gay Community

The strength and protection offered by close friendships are critical in the gay community. It can be traced back to a time, not long ago, when most of society, including family, rejected its gay members. “We had no choice but to bond with each other as a buffer against prejudice and estrangement,” says Lily, a lesbian marketing executive from Seattle, Washington. Lily has been in a committed relationship with her partner for nearly 25 years, but the need for close friends is still a priority in her life. “We celebrate each other’s birthdays, pick each other up at the airport and take care of each other’s children,” she says. Lily and her partner are in their mid-50s and expect that their current friendships, including those with many heterosexual friends, will endure and strengthen even when geography and career paths turn them in different directions. “We put

a lot of energy into our friendships because they are the fabric that gives us love and safety.”

Gay men frequently have strong friendships with heterosexual men and women. “It feels safer that way,” says Glenn, “because I have a partner, Neil, and I’m not looking for love or sex, just other people to enjoy and talk with and do things with.” Age and marital status of such friends are often non-issues. Glenn calls Amy, the receptionist at his law office, his best friend. Glenn is 56, Neil is 61, Amy is 72, and divorced. The trio travels together, barbecues together almost every weekend and gains comfort from discussing their problems with each other. “Because of her age and gender, Amy gives us a point of view we might not otherwise have,” says Glenn. “We count on her insight and experience, sort of what we would hope to get from an aunt or an older sister if either of us had one. And I think we give her energy, the opportunity for fun and a zest for new adventures.”

The Power of Friendship When You Are Suddenly Alone

A significant number of older men and women find themselves suddenly alone because their spouse has abandoned them for something or someone else. In addition to the stinging loss, the person left behind is tormented by anger, shock, bitterness and sometimes impenetrable sadness. Often it is the love and caring of friends who listen, commiserate, and offer a shoulder to cry on that will allow them, eventually, to renew their hope and spirit.

Millie, 58, thought she was in the middle of a nightmare when her husband, Michael, an electrician, announced that he wanted a divorce. He had been having an affair with one of his customers, he told Millie, and had fallen in love with her. Millie was devastated when

she learned that this affair was not his first. Where had she been? How could she not have known?

“In retrospect, I realized that throughout our marriage, although I pretended otherwise, I had been a lonely, empty woman,” Millie admits. She says that she needed every one of her friends, women she had met as young mothers (they called themselves the Baby Carriage Brigade) and with whom she had remained close, who helped her build strength and regain her confidence. She smiles as she remembers the night her friends trotted into her house with a blowup photo of Michael and several bottles of wine. Late into the evening and deep into the Pinot Grigio, Millie sauntered toward the photo and ripped it to shreds, to her friends’ applause. “It may seem silly,” she says, “but their caring, their spirit of friendship, our shared tears and laughter, as well as

letting loose with a few words not usually in my vocabulary, helped me to finally begin to really let go and move on.”

The reality is that many men and women end up living alone, sometimes after divorce, as in Millie’s case, often because their spouses have passed away after long and healthy marriages. As they struggle to cope with the fear and loneliness that often feels choking, friends can be their salvation.

I well remember the ripping pain I felt when my first marriage ended. At that time I had been in psychoanalysis for several years with the brilliant, compassionate and wise psychiatrist, Dr. Eli Marcovitz. I was trying to keep a doomed marriage from failure, struggling desperately to avoid this catastrophe for my children. One day I began sobbing as I told him: “I feel so alone. I am so alone.” His response propelled me to the true beginning of adulthood: “And so you are,” he told me gently. “And so adults all are.” What he meant, I think, is that it is up to each of us to make life work, to build connections, to face life’s

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people—men and women—find
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realities. It is up to all of us to find the companionship that is fulfilling and respectful. My failing was that I thought marriage could bring me safety. Eli Marcovitz was telling me that safety had to come from within.

Consider Larry and Meredith who met in the same class at law school. They were both brilliant; Meredith was first in their class, Larry was second. Their connection was instantaneous; they married a year later.

Shortly afterward, they opened the most successful law firm in their hometown, competing with firms that had existed for decades. They finished each other's sentences and each other's briefs.

But what they wanted most—a child—was not in their future. After ten years of infertility treatments, Meredith became pregnant and gave birth to a beautiful little girl, Brenda. Tragically, Brenda died several months later of a rare cardiac defect.

After a period of deep grieving, Larry and Meredith continued to expand their law practice and did pro-bono work for a children's health center.

When Meredith was 60, she died suddenly of a heart attack. Larry was numb with grief.

"We had lots of friends," he explained, "and we enjoyed them very much. But mostly we had wanted to be with each other. We would go to the movies and dinner with friends but we could not wait to come home to be alone together and really dissect the film we had seen. Now half of me has gone, and I want to be with her again. Only death can complete me."

It took two years of therapy to ease Larry out of his despair. He willed himself to join a discussion group, to take a trip sponsored by his college alma mater, and become a "Big Brother" to Jake, a nine-year-old child.

In time, the head of the Big Brothers agency, Myra, a woman in her sixties, became his friend and eventually his lover. Her friends became his friends. Larry continued working with Jake and is paying for his counseling and education in a special school.

"Meredith is and forever will remain the love of my life and my dearest friend," he says. "Though I will always miss her, I am now experiencing new dimensions in my world. There is love, friendship and mar-

velous experiences with a new collection of friends. Thankfully, life goes on."

Reaching Out

Nora, whose husband died suddenly of a heart attack one beautiful summer day at their country house, is still struggling to reach the peace that Larry has found. "When a spouse dies, you don't know what to expect," she says, her voice breaking. "When you finally catch your breath, it is like starting life over without a floor to stand on." Even though Nora has two children who visit often and invite her to their homes frequently, she admits that her friends have become her "floor."

"I don't want to impose on my children," she says. "They have their own lives. So I pace myself." Many of the couples with whom she and her husband were friendly have stayed in her life. One couple even invited her to join them on a camping trip. But she finds that nothing is more important to her at this time in life than her women friends who, like her, are on their own. Moreover, she is aggressive in pursuing new friendships. "I do not hesitate to call someone and ask if she would like to have a bite to eat or go to a movie or come to my house for a pot luck supper and a video. These friends, old and new, are the glue of my life," she says. "They keep me going."

That's the way it is, too, for Jeffrey, who is in his late sixties, and has an attitude and a style admired by his friends and family. When his wife Sheila, to whom he had been married for 42 years, passed away seven years ago, he was determined not to be "destroyed by her death. I decided to use the skills of networking I had learned in my work as a public relations consultant to keep from draining my children and feeling miserable myself.

"People see me as naturally gregarious," he says, "but underneath I have fought shyness all my life. The fight has been worth it."

Jeffrey has a coterie of friends ranging from 30 to 70 with whom he discusses politics, goes to concerts and lectures and plays poker. They seek him out as much as

he reaches out to them. “I miss my wife constantly,” he says, “but I am continuing to grow and enjoy life.”

“My prescription for golden aging,” confirms psychotherapist Faith Bethelard who applauds Jeffrey’s nest egg of friends, “is at least one younger friend a year. “The results,” she says, “are staying in touch with life and living with self-esteem, purpose and enthusiasm.”

Younger friends, she maintains, can energize and sustain us, introducing us to fresh ideas and challenging our thinking. They see us differently from the way we see ourselves. To them, we are not a mother or a father, but a more seasoned companion that gives their lives texture and offers viewpoints different from those of their same-age friends.

Tyrone, now 61, remembers Aretha, an older friend of his family, with whom he maintained a friendship from age 25 until Aretha died six years ago. It was to Aretha that he first confided, long before he shared his secret with his parents, that he had been sexually abused by a teacher. Along the way, Tyrone and Aretha shared many stimulating conversations about each of their interests—tennis, woodworking, jewelry making, child-rearing, African culture... and they did so as intergenerational peers, learning from each other.

New friendships, too, add to our happiness and well-being. Those of us who are comfortable only with old friends limit our growth opportunities and miss out on the stimulation we can get from the thoughts and experiences of new people in our lives.

Glenn and Neil, the gay couple, have a circle of new and old friends, both gay and heterosexual.

“What we know is that the need for friends and the pleasure we give each other sustains our lives,” says Glenn. “We expect our friendships to carry us into old age, providing the bonds and giving us the sustenance we’ll need to accommodate the changes that come with growing older.”

The five members of the Sewing Circle, a collection of women who have met weekly for more than 50 years, are an extraordinary example. Author **Anndee Hochman** describes a conversation with them in her book, **Everyday Acts and Small Subversions**. At the time, Hochman wrote, Sanjie was 89; Ruth, 87; Dorothy, 90; Rose 88, and Sarah, the matriarch, 91. Only one of their husbands was alive. This is what they said:

Sarah: “We’re unusual in that we’ve stayed together so long.”

Dot: “We never had unpleasant words. We could discuss things.”

Sarah: “Whether it was a death, a joy, or whatever...”

Ruth: “One of the reasons none of us is in a retirement home is that we take care of each other. If we hear one of our friends is alone on a Saturday night, we will invite her in. We’ll say, ‘Do you want to go to dinner with us?’ We don’t like to leave each other stranded.”

Dot: “Looking out for the other one’s comfort and happiness.”

Sarah: “That’s the friendship behind the whole thing.”

“We expect our friendships to carry us into old age, providing the bonds and giving us the sustenance we’ll need to accommodate the changes that come with growing older.”

Glossary: Chapter 7

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Discussion Questions

Chapter 7: The Power of Friendship

1. Has there been a loss in your life when friends have made all the difference in your coping and survival? Please describe that experience.
2. What about extricating yourself from a demanding and depleting friendship...if you have experienced this, what was the process like and how did you feel after you did it?
3. Have you had issues in a relationship that were resolved and brought you closer? Can you describe what that was like?
4. Has your sense of what friendship is changed over the past five years? How do you feel about the categorization of “must, trust, rust, just, dust” friendships?
5. Do you think that the description of male/female friendship differences – women having close, emotional connections and men gathering around common interests and activities—is true to your experience?
6. What do you think about married men or women having deep relationships with the opposite sex? Is there always a sexual undercurrent?
7. If you are gay man or a lesbian or know people who are, what are your observations about the difference in their friendships from those who are heterosexuals? Are there differences?



Making Up: Ending the Pain of Troubled Relationships

By Gloria Hochman

When my cousin Irene and I were little girls, we looked forward to playing together, taking a walk on the main street in Kansas City after holiday dinners and having summer picnics together. We were sure that we would be close friends when we grew up. But when we were teenagers, her mother and mine had a serious disagreement, and each demanded “loyalty” from her children. Because the parents stopped talking to each other, it was expected that the cousins would also. As a result, my sister and I had nothing to do with our cousins (Irene has two sisters and two brothers) for more than 15 years.

A few years after Irene’s mother passed away, my sister and I convinced our mom that it was time for a thaw. Slowly, timidly, we made our reconciliation moves—a telephone call, a note, a suggestion that we meet for coffee. As it turned out, our cousins felt the same losses we did because of the long estrangement. None of us could even remember clearly what our parents’ disagreement was about. We knew only that because we were caught up in it we had been deprived of each other’s companionship and love for too long. All but one of us wanted to change that.

Our situation was not unusual. Every time I go to a party or gather in a group, I am likely to hear about

a brother and sister who no longer speak, best friends who had an argument and turned their backs on each other, mothers and daughters whose relationships have gone sour, employer and trusted employee who once saw each other every day and now can’t be in the same room together, brothers struggling over control of the family business.

Often the rupture stems from unresolved sibling rivalry that goes far back in time. An attorney who represented a brother in a prosperous family business that was about to be sold, once told me, “This fight between the brothers has nothing to do with money. There’s plenty of money to go around. It has to do with who didn’t get the red wagon when he was five years old.”

Sometimes, the break comes when a parent dies and one sister insists that mom’s gold pendant is hers, promised to her when mom was alive.

Or it happens when a new daughter-in-law resents everyone in her husband’s life who pre-dates her.

Sometimes, a family distances itself from a son who marries outside his race or religion. Or has decided not to marry at all because he is gay.

Or best friends may become estranged when one has an affair with the other’s boyfriend.

A Price To Pay

In any case, there is a hefty price to pay when primary, once important relationships rupture. The toll may be emotional or even physical. Medical research reveals that even if we are not aware of it, estrangement from those once close to us may result not only in inner agony, but also in symptoms such as high blood pressure, headaches, even an increase in such maladies as heart attacks and cancer. Dr. Katherine M. Piderman, staff chaplain at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, says, “Evidence is mounting that holding onto grudges and bitterness results in long-term health problems. Forgiveness, on the other hand, offers numerous benefits including lower heart rate, lower risk of alcohol or substance abuse, reduction in chronic pain and fewer depression symptoms.”

Grudges we can't let go of take root as we replay in our minds the hurtful situation or event and may seep into other relationships throughout our lives “Our lives may be so wrapped up in the wrongs of the past that we can't enjoy the present,” says Dr. Piderman.

As we move through our fifties, sixties and beyond, perhaps the time has come when we would best serve ourselves by reaching out to these once-significant people in our lives to reconcile our differences. Or, on the other hand, should we at this age be making peace with relationships we must acknowledge are not worth salvaging? In either case, how do we decide and where do we begin?

There is no clear-cut answer, but mental health experts say there is a path to repairing or at least making peace with those ruptured relationships. Sometimes, it involves going back to the source of the problem, rehashing what went wrong and why, perhaps with the help of a skilled therapist. In other cases, prolonged

focus on issues that are long past isn't necessary and may even be destructive. Avoiding minefields and moving forward with maturity and humility may work better. Sometimes, all that is needed is recognition on both sides that they want to regain what has been lost: a simple “I'm sorry” or “I apologize” or “We both could have handled it differently” may open the door.

When Sisters Move Apart

Consider Mina and Naomi, sisters just two years apart who had had a close, caring relationship ever since both of them could remember. “We would have killed for each other,” says Mina, the younger sister. When the women were 46 and 48, their mother passed away, and their relationship died with her.

After the funeral, Mina began to withdraw from her sister and started telling friends that her mother had always favored Naomi. She was, she says, “tired of taking a back seat to her sister.” Naomi was startled. She had never suspected her sister's feelings.

Later, friends of Mina told Naomi that they had known it all along. Naomi had become a successful and well-known attorney while Mina moved from one disappointing job path to another. “Underneath all that closeness,” said a family friend, “was a fierce sibling rivalry. It was all exacerbated when their mother died and Mina felt safe in unwrapping her feelings.”

The drought lasted ten years—through the graduations and marriages of nieces and nephews, Naomi's automobile accident, Mina's separation from her husband of 20 years and her move to a new city.

In 2005 when the sisters were 56 and 58, Naomi received a poignant letter from Mina. She revealed that she was re-marrying and hoped Naomi would come to her wedding. “When I look into the audience, I will

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ache to see your face,” she wrote.

For a week, Naomi dug in her heels. Then she thought, “I have only one sister. I should be there for her.”

That was the first uneasy step. Gradually, over the next months, the thaw continued. The sisters began to make the occasional phone call. They met for coffee once and admitted that they missed the closeness they had once had. Naomi wanted to talk about the rift and what had precipitated it. Her sister did not, urging that they just “move on from here.”

“Making peace with my sister was my goal,” says Naomi. “I hope someday she’ll be able to talk about what happened between us. Right now, I’m just happy to have a sister again.”

Mothers and Daughters

In her compelling book, *I Thought We’d Never Speak Again*, Laura Davis, who had suffered a long estrangement from her mother, writes, “It is no coincidence that people often experience lengthy estrangements before coming to terms with relationships that have troubled them for years. Time usually has to pass before most people are able—or willing—to reconsider a relationship that was so painful it had to end. As psychologist Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt once said, ‘Aging is the best therapist.’”

As people age and recognize that there are fewer years ahead of them than behind them, they often begin to rearrange their priorities including thoughts about reconciling with loved ones with whom they were once close. Moreover, at this time of life, people may become more religious or at least more spiritual and more open to messages about the power and benefits of forgiveness.

“They often become more conscious of the passing of time and what they are missing...which are personal connections,” says Rabbi Linda Holtzman of Mishkan Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia. “Even people who have not been particularly spiritual often seek ways to connect with a whole other part of them-

selves. They find themselves studying traditional texts or poetry that speaks to their hearts, not their minds.” They think, too, about the signals they are sending to their children and grandchildren. No longer drowning in the laundry of raising children or working two jobs, they have the luxury of time and energy to put into relationships, including those that have been strained or disrupted.

“The older we get, we inevitably lose relationships,” says Everett Worthington, professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University. “People move. They die. They go to Florida. This impoverishes our network and makes the relationships that are possible more meaningful.”

“In the name of recognizing how short life is,” says Susan Stiffelman, a west coast marriage and family therapist, “you want as many caring, loving relationships as you can get.”

Michael, for instance, is an older baby boomer (he turned 62 last year) who bought into the culture of moving where your job took you—he is a carpenter—and creating a family of friends that would be closer and more meaningful than your birth family. After all, you were choosing them.

Michael and his younger brother Ben had been engaged in a power struggle ever since Michael could remember; their parents, Michael was certain, preferred Ben over him. When after years of practice and study, Ben at age 45, became an accomplished and well-known musician, Michael couldn’t tolerate his success. They just drifted apart. Michael’s twin sisters lived in Hawaii, were both interior designers, and he didn’t feel much rapport with them. Their parents had both died.

Michael’s circle of friends sustained him for 30 years. They were the ones with whom he and his family—wife Sharon and twin girls, Lola and Sandy—shared vacations and Sunday brunches, dissected books by John Grisham and television shows like *Monk*. He didn’t think much about his family of origin.

Then, almost overnight, Michael’s world changed. The year he turned 65, his best friend, Marvin, had a heart attack and died. Millie and Peter, other friends,

after 34 years of marriage, divorced and both moved back to the cities where they had grown up. Audrey, another member of Michael's family of friends, who had been in a lesbian relationship with Rebecca for 20 years, met a man with whom she fell in love and embarked on a new life. Last July 4 when Michael, his wife and children traditionally hosted a party to welcome summer, he had no one to invite.

"I do think age gives us a longer-term perspective," says Helen Fisher, a research professor in Rutgers University's department of anthropology. "This is a time when those relationships that have gone wrong may be worth reassessing, especially when they involve relatives. If you can put aside anger and guilt, you'll feel healthier and be healthier. Dispensing with emotional baggage is good for you, and the benefits may be a great deal bigger than you anticipate."

It is a matter of biology, Fisher says. That's why reconciliation should begin with relatives. "We are emotionally connected to our relatives because we are biologically connected," says Fisher. "So we feel more guilty when we're estranged from them and we feel more angry when they disappoint us. You share your DNA with relatives, and the brain is built for nepotism, for helping your relatives survive. From a Darwinian perspective, it is to our reproductive advantage to support our relatives even if we don't like them because they pass our DNA onto tomorrow."

Parents and Children

Gregg, 64, admits that although he is ashamed of his feelings, he never really liked his son Adam. Even as a child, Adam was moody, irritable and lacked ambition. "I understood what it meant to love someone without liking him," he says. "I felt guilty about it so I

overcompensated by lavishing attention on him and going easy on him when he neglected his schoolwork.

When Adam was 23, he married a woman who his father says was as moody and boring as he was. The marriage lasted only two years.

Meanwhile, Gregg and his wife were divorced, and he married his childhood sweetheart. From that time on, the relationship with his son deteriorated dramatically. "When I told him I was getting married, he just got quiet, didn't wish me a good life or say he hoped I would be happy," Gregg remembers. "He did indicate that he wasn't pleased with whom I had chosen to be my wife."

Since Adam, who later remarried, and his family including two stepchildren, lived 1200 miles away in St. Louis, Gregg didn't see them often. When he did, visits were strained and awkward. Last summer on their vacation, his son, daughter-in-law and their children, whom Adam had adopted, came to Cape Cod—where Gregg lives—to visit with Gregg's ex-wife. Adam didn't call

him until the last day of his vacation to see if he could drop by for a brief visit. Gregg responded that he was too busy. His son hung up on him.

"I try not to think about Adam," says his father, "and most of the time I succeed. Still, when I see fathers and sons who do things and go places together, I wish I had that kind of relationship with Adam."

Family therapist Susan Stiffelman says, "My belief is that a parent is always the parent and it is always on us to reach toward our children for connecting and healing." Dad needs to be a grown-up and stop playing this game.

You have a very special relationship with your children and no matter what they do, you rise above it," concurs Helen Fisher.

Family therapists call situations such as the one between Adam and his father "emotional cutoff." Two

"From a Darwinian perspective, it is to our reproductive advantage to support our relatives even if we don't like them because they pass our DNA onto tomorrow."

people in a troubled relationship may reach a point when one or both says, “I’ve had it. I can’t deal with it anymore.”

“Most of the time,” says Professor Worthington, “that attitude ends up being a problem.” Worthington has studied forgiveness since 1990 and has been employing it therapeutically for 30 years. “You can say you won’t deal with it, but for it not to matter doesn’t happen. All it does is put the persons out of contact with each other so nothing can be done to make things better. It doesn’t keep them from ruminating about the situation. It is healthier physically and emotionally to begin talking.”

On the other hand, parents often are fiercely loyal to their children. When someone—a relative or friend—hurts their son or daughter, their relationship with that person may be destroyed. Consider Doris and Vicki.

Doris is an only child, and was thrilled when in her late twenties she met Vicki, another only child. The two became “sisters,” raising their four children in tandem, confiding secrets to each other, and taking family vacations together. Their husbands, Bob and Jason, became close too, and it was, Doris says, “the family I always dreamed of.”

Their relationship deepened over the years. When Doris’s daughter Naomi was 25 and an honors graduate at a West Coast business school, it seemed only natural that she would take a job in “Uncle Bob’s” thriving accounting firm. This business relationship lasted for seven years until the firm merged with another company that did not want Naomi on its staff. She was the only employee out of 20 who was let go.

Bob insisted it was out of his control. Doris and her husband didn’t believe him. They knew only that their daughter was out of a job on which her family depended, felt that her dismissal was arbitrary and could have been avoided had Bob advocated for her. The cou-

Parents often are fiercely loyal to their children. When someone—a relative or friend—hurts their son or daughter, their relationship with that person may rupture

ples stopped communicating, not even acknowledging birthdays and holidays which they had traditionally spent together with a card or a telephone call.

Now, four years later, the women are civil to each other, will even have lunch together in a group, but their relationship, says Doris, will never be the same. She misses the “sister” she once had, but the blow to her daughter still stings, and she says she can’t put it behind her.

“When you believe that someone has hurt your child, it is so inflammatory, almost unbearable,” says Stiffelman. “In this case, each woman has to weigh what the estrangement is costing her. Each of them has lost out. And how is the daughter benefiting from this estrangement?”

“In the name of loving your child, it may be that the damage is too big to remedy,” Stiffelman concedes. “But it is at least worthy of a conversation where each side can be heard. When you view it from the other side of the street, it is funny how what feels like insurmountable issues can be softened and resolved.”

Relationships That Can’t Be Mended

Sometimes, there are no “insurmountable issues.” A relationship may just wear itself out. That’s what happened to Ginny and Nancy.

Ginny, 64, remembers how thrilled she was when Nancy, who had been her best friend during the early years of their marriages returned to live in Ginny’s East Coast city. Nancy and her husband had been in Minneapolis for 25 years; now they were 62 and decided to retire back to Boston where they had spent many happy years. Ginny and her partner, Barbara, helped Nancy and her husband find a small house a couple of miles from them, and introduced them to the neighborhood.

Their comfort and joy at reconnecting was undeni-

able...but it lasted less than nine months. There were no arguments, no disagreements, no angry words. It just became apparent that their lives had taken different turns and they no longer had much in common. Ginny couldn't handle Nancy's relentless focus on her health, even when nothing serious was wrong; Barbara, Ginny's partner, said dinners together felt like excursions into a critical care unit. Ginny said she hadn't realized that Jim, Nancy's husband, was so "terminally narcissistic." Ginny decided that this relationship had not weathered the trial of time. Her solution was that she would invite Nancy and her husband to a group party once in a while, and call her perhaps once every six or eight weeks, but not struggle to recapture their earlier closeness.

Mental health experts would agree with Ginny's decision. "Not every relationship is destined to be a permanent one," says Susan Stiffelman. "As we age, we weed out what no longer works for us. And that's a healthy thing to do." Ruthy Kaiser, senior staff therapist at **Philadelphia's Council for Relationships**, describes Cathy, a 60-year-old woman who has been in a painful relationship with her younger brother for more than 20 years. The major problem has been that Cathy has wanted to be close to him. She envisioned sharing holiday dinners, going out together every month or so and hearing his voice on the phone a couple of times a week. Her brother wanted their relationship to be more superficial, protesting that he and his family were too busy to do it Cathy's way.

Cathy says she has tried not to feel hurt or rejected, has swallowed hard every time her brother makes other plans for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Each time she has made a gesture, she has been rebuffed, she says, and the hurts have become intolerable. In spite of her highly productive life as a nurse and a happy marriage to a chef, she is upset that she has not succeeded in her overtures toward her brother.

For her own survival, Cathy has decided to distance herself. She will discuss important family issues with her brother, such as how to plan for their mother's care should she become ill, but in terms of trying to arrange

family get-togethers or catch up on family news, she says she is done.

"Cutoff is never ideal, but there are times when healing isn't possible," says Kaiser. "Protecting oneself from further pain is all that can be hoped for."

Sometimes a friend or relative may cut off a relationship without explanation. When your efforts to learn why you are ignored and your overtures to reconnect are rejected, you may have to let go and accept that the relationship is over. "The closer and more important the relationship, the longer it takes to give up hope that things might change someday," says author Laura Davis. "Letting go means doing all you can from your end...then gradually accepting the reality."

What about relationships where there have been major transgressions—perhaps a stepfather who was sexually abusive, a brother who was a drug addict and stole your daughter's first-year college tuition? It may not be safe or healthy to welcome that person back into your life, but you may be able to forgive him in your heart, Stiffelman believes. "Carrying the bitterness and the blame," she says, "can hurt you more than it does them."

Mental health practitioners agree that the first choice is almost always to get people to talk to each other. But that requires that they have effective, healthy communications skills...which are elusive. It means making statements such as "I was hurt when you forgot my birthday" instead of "You are so self-centered. You forgot my birthday again!"

The ability to tolerate differences is crucial. If you and your cousin are not on the same page, so what? In what way is that a problem? Talking it out can diminish the tension.

The picture of someone that you have in your mind, which Stiffelman calls the "snapshot person," is part of what causes all the trouble, she says. "We are holding in our right hand a snapshot of how that person—our mother, our sister, our child—could be. For instance, 'my sister could have taken care of my mother when she was sick.' 'It wouldn't hurt my son if he called me once a week.' But in front of us is the real person; the

upset comes because of the mismatch between the real person and the snapshot person. So we send nasty e-mails. We make testy phone calls. We scream. Sometimes we cut off.

“I recommend that you just experience the loss and disappointment,” Stiffelman says. “And approach your relative from a place of honesty. You might say, ‘I was really sad when I didn’t get a call from you.’ Or, ‘It made me angry that you didn’t take care of mom when she was sick.’ That might open the door to a productive dialogue.”

Sometimes a third party—a therapist ideally—can help orchestrate a safe conversation, one in which each person is assured he or she will be heard and be safe. It isn’t so much about getting your relative or friend to agree with you. It is just that for a few minutes you want her to step into your skin and feel what it is like to you. You could say, “I don’t remember it happening that way. It must have felt awful to you.”

“You’re not giving up anything,” says Stiffelman. “You’re not giving in. Listening is a generous act of love.”

The tragedy of splits, say many experts, is that there aren’t many people in anyone’s life that have an intimate knowledge of who they are, who they were and what they’ve been through. In spite of the ways in which we may have been hurt, it is for our own sense of wholeness that we need to reach out, and hope that our sister or our son or our aunt will want to reach back. “But no matter your intentions, you can’t tango alone,” acknowledges Stiffelman. “I would, however, never stop taking the temperature of the relationship. Put aside your pride and ego. When you are feeling a sense of loneliness or longing for that other person, pick up the phone and call.”

Just below the surface of almost every injured relationship is a tangle of high emotion—grief, sadness, jealousy, anger, fear and bitterness. Stepping back and sorting through it is not easy. Sometimes, suggests

Davis, clarity comes with making lists. The first list might be all of the complaints you have about the other person: My daughter doesn’t let her ten-year-old son have his own relationship with me. When I talk to her, I feel as though I’m walking on eggshells. When I call her, it’s always the wrong time. She never calls just to see how I’m feeling.

The next list might enumerate your regrets: I wish I had spent more time with her when she was growing up. I’m sorry I didn’t invite her to have dinner with me regularly when I was younger. If I had to do it over, I’d have been more empathetic when her father-in-law died. I wish I hadn’t criticized her husband so much when we first met. Your third list might include ways in which you feel your strained or shattered relationship is hurting you: I wake up in the morning with a knot in my stomach. I can’t stop thinking about other people who seem to have a good relationship with their children. I want to send her a gift for her birthday, but I’m afraid she’ll send it back like she did last year.

This exercise allows you to see your own role instead of placing all the blame on the other person.

How do you begin the journey to healing? “In the same way porcupines stay warm in the winter—very carefully,” says Worthington. “If you’ve had the prickles and thorns, you can’t rush up and give a big, warm hug without feeling quills. People have to have tentative talks and measure whether it is important to both of them to make amends”

“Anger is always covering hurt,” reminds Stiffelman. “If you can cast aside your anger and acknowledge the hurt and sadness you feel, the more likely it is that you can reconcile.

“Yes, you can hold on to your pride and ego,” Worthington says. “You can win the power struggle. But look at what you’ve lost. There will always be this empty, lonely place where that other person once was.”

The clock is ticking, and you never get a re-do.

Glossary: Chapter 8

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Philadelphia's Council for Relationships—founded in 1932 as the Philadelphia Marriage Council, this independent, nonprofit organization provide clinical care, education, research, and training with the aim of improving the quality of personal relationships.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 8: Making Up: Ending the Pain of Troubled Relationships

1. Has reading this chapter made you think about healing your own estranged relationships? Do the methods suggested by Laura Davis make sense to you?
2. In the situation with Irene and her cousins, what could the cousins have done to prevent an estrangement that lasted for 15 years? Once they reconciled, could their relationship ever be the same?
3. How can the death of a parent affect the relationship among siblings?
4. How do you think sibling rivalry plays out as people age?
5. What message about forgiveness do you want to give your children?
6. Do you agree that the responsibility in mending child/parent relationships rests with the parent? Why or why not?
7. Which relationships did you once have that you are willing to let lapse? Why?



Creating Community: A New Challenge

By Tim Harper

Margaret retired early because...well, because she could. She had worked hard on Wall Street for years, saved her money and made safe investments. In 1994, while still in her early fifties, she retired from her job at an investment bank and announced to friends that she was moving to Phoenix. It might seem odd to some that a 50+ single woman would move across the country to a city where she knew few other people, but Margaret was yearning for big changes.

She wanted nice weather. She wanted to meet new people. She wanted to try new things. Leaving behind her old communities – her neighborhood on New York’s Upper West Side, her colleagues at Goldman Sachs, and her various circles of friends for dinner, shopping, parties, theater, traveling and working out, she began looking in Arizona for new communities where she could live, work and play.

“I’m retired,” Margaret told friends. “But my brain isn’t.”

She moved into a condominium complex on a golf course and made friends with her neighbors. She took up golf and joined in the clubhouse social activities. She had always been a credible amateur photographer, so she joined a photography group and signed up for classes. Soon she became a regular at art shows and exhibits and connected with a gallery where she started

to show and sell her photos.

A year later, Margaret met Ian, also retired, at a photography class. They connected right away, spent more and more time together, and eventually got married. Ian introduced Margaret to the world of RVs—recreational vehicles—and she found herself intrigued with this new interest. Now, they spend summers on the road in their own rig, often meeting and communicating with others in the RV community.

Margaret and Ian now have what she sometimes calls a “schizophrenic” life, divided between the Phoenix arts community half the year and the nomadic RV community the other half. Each community brings with it a different lifestyle and a different set of friends. As a result, Margaret may have thought more about the concept of community than most of us. She sees her story as a classic example of the way people in their fifties and sixties are facing the challenge of changing communities—sometimes because, like her, they have sought change and sometimes because change has tapped them on the shoulder and nudged them into a new world.

Defining New Communities

Like most of us, Margaret’s community had been de-

fined by where she lived and by her job. “That’s where you meet people, plus through your kids,” she says. “When I suddenly didn’t have a job,” says Margaret, “I felt like I was a bit adrift.” It’s a common feeling, she believes, among baby boomers who find themselves cut off from their former communities when they divorce or a spouse dies, when they retire or are laid off from a longtime job, when they downsize out of their familiar neighborhoods or when their children grow up and move out.

As they leave those longtime communities behind, some are discovering unprecedented opportunities to find, choose, join and even create new communities for themselves. Many of those who do say that their quality of life has improved and that they feel an enhanced sense of physical, mental and emotional well-being.

My personal communities, for instance, are based on activities that I do with other people: my jogging buddies, my poker pals, my journalist friends who get together once in a while for dinner, and the people I’ve met at the social services nonprofit where I volunteer. My wife’s communities spring from her gardening club and her exercise group, and we have friends whose communities include amateur magicians or rugby coaches or 1960s rock’n’roll guitarists.

“We grew up seeing life as an adventure,” says Leonard Steinhorn, an American University professor and author of **The Greater Generation: In Defense of the Baby Boom Legacy**. “Most of us (Steinhorn was born in 1956) grew up amid a sense of community in neighborhood and then found new communities at college. We found community through social causes and later through parenting. So there’s that sense of wanting to belong, to be part of something that is big and relevant and consequential.”

People in their late fifties and early sixties today are

less likely than previous generations to feel as though they have to conform to anyone else’s ideas of what it means to be old, Steinhorn says. “The last thing we want to do is throw up our hands and surrender to aging.”

Pablo is an example. After a long career as a teacher, followed by a shorter one in the antiques business, he and his wife moved to a Houston suburb—and soon realized it wasn’t for them. They decided to re-invent themselves, and create a new community more compatible with their image of the persons they wanted to be, both personally and professionally. Pablo, they determined, would concentrate on his fledgling career as an artist – painting, drawing and sculpting; his wife would promote his work.

They sold everything they owned, bought a landmark 1856 ranch just outside Austin and began restoring it. Today, in their sixties, with a booming international art business and various accolades for their environmental stewardship, they don’t need to spend a lot of time with their neighbors on nearby ranches to feel part of the community. Pablo says community is as much about

shared spirit, values and goals as where they live. “For me,” he muses, “community provides friendship, help when needed, creative input, a sense of security.”

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Growing Older in Place: The Village Concept

Not everyone, however, wants to make as dramatic a shift as did Pablo and his wife. In fact a number of studies, including one by AARP in 1998, show that more than 80 percent of those surveyed prefer to stay where they are. Margaret Dyer-Chamberlain, senior research scholar at the **Stanford University Center on Longevity**, says that she and other experts in aging are closely watching the growth of the “village” concept

where people continue to live in their own homes but rely on each other and a network of volunteers or employees who perform needed tasks and are available for emergencies. Examples include **Beacon Hill Village** in Boston; the **60-Plus Club** in Noblesville, Indiana; **Avenidas Village** in Palo Alto, California; **Front Desk** in Florence, Oregon, and **Washington Park Cares** in Denver.

One of the first such villages in this country was **Supporting Active Independent Lives (SAIL)** in Madison, Wisconsin. The heart of SAIL and other similar villages is its network of volunteers who drive members to medical appointments, shovel snow, return library books, flip mattresses, make wakeup calls and do errands. For \$330 a year, members 55 and older have access to SAIL's roster of pre-screened and approved vendors: for instance, a member may ask for a chimney sweep and SAIL will refer someone who is reliable and will do the job for a reasonable fee. Often volunteers are members of the community. A retired nurse makes unofficial rounds, offering advice and administering eye drops. A retired realtor counsels on buying or selling homes; a former chef leads cooking classes. Those who can drive offer rides to those who can't.

"The best thing is the networking that members do with other members," says Ann Albert, SAIL's executive director. "It's really significant because it keeps people mentally engaged, and cognitively engaged. In the old days we called it socialization." For example, a group of SAIL members has started a memoir group; its members get together with recording equipment and interview each other to create oral histories that they put on CDs for their children and grandchildren.

Tom, a SAIL member in his late sixties, pays his \$330 a year not because he needs help right now – but because he probably will someday, and he wants to contribute to the community until then. In the meantime,

he works part-time, travels, is active in his church and has joined a theater group. Appearing in plays for the first time since high school is sometimes "terrifying," he says. "But that's part of what is fun about this time of life. Do what scares you. Follow your passions."

One of the best things about the theater group, Tom says, is working with the younger actors, a few of them in their twenties and thirties. "That's really cool," he says, noting that he and the younger actors often compare notes about what they know—and don't know. "It's never uncomfortable," Tom says. "There's a lot of life and lot of liveliness." When he does slow down, Tom says, it's reassuring to know that SAIL will be there for him. "I don't want to be isolated," he says.

"It'll provide that community."

"We continue to be interested in community infrastructure and integration of services," says Stanford University's Dyer-Chamberlain. Her center is studying not only how people can remain in their own homes but also how they can re-settle in new inter-generational housing with a mix of young families and couples who have not yet had children.

"The 'play it forward' attitude is a key to aging in place, says SAIL's Albert. "It's going to be part of what gets us through the aging tsunami," she says.

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The Appeal of Ethnic Communities

As they age, members of ethnic and immigrant communities have long relied on informal networks of mutual support that are in many ways an extension of their strong notions of family and an antipathy to retirement communities. Such groups may not embrace the mainstream concepts of "volunteering" or community service, but that is exactly what many of their older members are doing within their immediate and extended families and in the broader community. A study of 99 ethnically diverse elders in Philadelphia, Atlanta

and Orange County by **Temple University's Project SHINE** found that the older generation often provides many informal services, especially family caregiving, to the rest of the community. But the older generation also has a special place in terms of respect, power, authority and wisdom. They are the ones who pass along the community's culture, which often includes the duty to take care of others. Despite limited English skills or professional experience, they often recognize their responsibility to serve as leaders.

"Cultural values and practices...in native countries influence why and how older immigrants become engaged in their communities," the Project SHINE study reveals. Trusted ethnic-based organizations and religious institutions, immediate and extended family units and informal social groups become civic connectors that facilitate elder engagement and can also serve as access points for more formal opportunities.

Gay Men and Lesbians Lead the Way

In many ways, gay men and lesbians are taking the lead in creating new ways for people to live together as they grow older. "Actually, banding together for mutual support from everything from health emergencies to everyday chores, is something that comes naturally to us," says Gina Razete, a Florida real estate developer and contractor. "So many gays and lesbians, especially older ones, found that we didn't fit into the straight world's typical support networks such as churches and civic associations," she says. "In addition, we were frequently estranged from our families because of our lifestyle, and many of us do not have children ourselves. We just don't have the family unit the way straight people would, so you're going to gravitate even more toward the community.

"Always through my lifetime, we were asking the question among ourselves: what are we going to do when we get older?" says Gina, who was born in 1955. "We could all envision going to a nursing home together. But we kind of forgot about that period in between, when we're getting old but not really old yet."

Gina teamed up with her life and business partner, Cathy, to do something about it. They bought 50 acres near Fort Myers, Florida, and began developing a community for aging lesbians. They started selling lots in 1997 and had sold all 278 home sites within four years. She and Cathy moved from Florida to Boone, North Carolina, where they launched another development, Carefree Cove, with one-acre lots for log homes in a wooded mountain setting. There are no deed restrictions, but Gina imagines that Carefree Cove will be inhabited mainly by gay men and lesbians. She's building a clubhouse that will be the center of the community, but said the people, mostly couples, in the first 25 homes have already shown commitments to each other. When one elderly woman fell ill, the others quickly signed up to look after her, prepare her meals and drive her three hours each way for special medical treatments in Raleigh.

Gina and Cathy are planning future senior gay and lesbian communities in Charleston, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and Jacksonville, Florida. "Living in a place like this has transcended our former life," Gina says. "It's such a deep part of our lives to be part of such a community where everyone is like ourselves. It's liberating."

Back to College

When Art Caplan, head of bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, looks ahead, he considers the lure of settling near a college campus where there is a tight community and the easy availability of cultural events in an academic environment. Caplan has a lot of company. Increasing numbers of baby boomers consider returning to their college towns or relocating to one of the many stimulating academic campuses across the country.

Herb and Nancy, for instance, had intense conversations about where to live in retirement. He had a long and successful career as a CEO for several companies, and they had moved 17 times during their marriage. Their four children were grown and settled in different

parts of the country. They had no real ties to the Pennsylvania towns where they had grown up.

The one constant during their years together had been Penn State University. That's where they met as students, and where they often returned to visit friends and cheer at football games. In 1999, they moved back to State College, Pennsylvania, where they had last lived as students half a century earlier.

Herb and Nancy are spending their retirement years rubbing shoulders with alumni and retired professors who want to remain active and involved for as long as they can. Herb volunteers as a guest lecturer at business and engineering classes, and Nancy acts as an advisor to the College of Health and Human Development.

A couple of times a week, sometimes more, they go to talks, lectures, sports activities, art shows and performances of theater, music or dance. Sometimes they drive the short distance to events on campus, and sometimes they take a taxi or the shuttle bus that stops near their home.

They like being around so many young people—sitting near them in restaurants or at performances, watching them run or bike past, or just seeing them out on the streets or in the quads. But they don't actually rub shoulders with students very often, except perhaps when they get into conversations while tailgating at football games. Instead, they spend a lot of time socializing with friends and neighbors—mostly fellow alumni and retired professors—who live nearby. "They're all people who loved Penn State, and still love the atmosphere here," Herb says. "Discussions are intelligent and often controversial. It's stimulating."

Spiritual Communities Beckon

Many baby boomers turn to religious and spiritual communities for comfort and new experiences. In Morton, Illinois, Jim, a retired engineer, and his wife Carol, a retired high school French teacher, both in their early sixties, made a conscious decision to devote themselves to the things that mattered to them the most: their family, their church and their itchy feet. They now spend

about half the year traveling, ricocheting among their three children's families, including 10 grandchildren, and going on missions through their evangelical church or the website finishers.org, which matches Christian volunteers with opportunities.

Their first mission came when they heard that a young missionary couple in Albania was worried about educating its children. They packed their bags and headed to Albania to home-school the missionaries' children for a month. They also babysat and did minor home repairs and chores such as splitting firewood.

Jim says that while he and Carol had visited many other European countries during two separate corporate overseas postings, Albania was an eye-opening experience. And that was just what they wanted — to help and to keep learning. "We've combined our love for travel with the desire to service missionaries," he said as he and Carol were packing for another trip a few weeks later, this one to spend a month visiting a son working on his doctorate in Australia. "We are still feeling our way, but plan to dedicate time and money each year to doing something meaningful to us."

Religion has been a big part of Chris 50-something upheaval. Growing up in the Twin Cities, she was never comfortable in her parents' Lutheran church. She told people she was intrigued with Judaism, and people would typically respond, "That's weird."

After she married, she converted to her husband's religion, Catholicism, and raised their two children in Roman Catholic schools. "Religion is one of the communities you build when you have children," she says. "It's comfortable and comforting in your role as a parent."

As the children grew up and moved out, however, and as her marriage disintegrated, Chris drifted away from the church. When she and her husband split up, she found herself on the fringes of her old communities without having created any new ones. She figured her new single life would center around her work as a graphic designer, and maybe she'd join a book club.

Then she heard from an old friend from college who was also in the middle of a divorce. He lived in New York. He was Jewish. They started seeing each

other, flying back and forth from St. Paul. She began attending services at a local synagogue, and taking instructions to convert. She found herself welcomed into the Jewish community in general, and into the community of converts in particular. “We don’t think it’s weird at all,” they told her. The following year, Chris found a job in New York and moved to Manhattan to be with her new man and to finish converting. “New city, new job, new relationship, new friends, new religion,” she says. “I feel like I’m 21 again.”

That said, she isn’t totally abandoning her old communities of friends and colleagues in the Midwest. “Oh yeah,” she says, laughing. “Facebook.”

The Internet: A New Approach to Community

Long gone, thanks to the Internet, are the days when the only way to meet someone was face to face. While some people still fret about whether a “Facebook friend” is really a friend, increasing numbers of people are finding sustenance in their online friends. They say that their virtual communities can be just as fulfilling as any group of folks with whom they can shake hands.

For many, online social networking does not extend much beyond forwarding e-mail jokes or checking Facebook once in a while. But for others, online forums can provide critical information and support, whether they’re looking for information about a medical condition and want to correspond with other sufferers or connecting with others concerned about public issues anywhere on the political spectrum. Deby, a 65-year-old woman from central Jersey who suffers from fibromyalgia, a condition often dismissed by medical experts who don’t think the condition exists, says that her major source of support and information comes from her online group with whom she communicates daily. “It is so difficult to find a doctor who understands what I go through every day,” says Deby, “... the constant pain

and aches and unbearable fatigue. I began to think there was something wrong with me mentally until I found a fibromyalgia site on line. There I connected with people just like me. We shared names of empathetic doctors, treatments that worked for some of us and a community of people who talk the same language. It has saved my sanity.”

“One of the reasons online support groups work is that everyone has a way of finding a connection, being heard and feeling needed by others by offering tips or suggestions,” says Natalie Caine, the founder of Empty Nest Support Services, an online resource for parents dealing with their children leaving home.

Margaret, the woman who retired from her job as a Wall Street banker and moved to Phoenix to make a new beginning, has found that Facebook and Twitter are ideal ways to keep in touch with all her communities, from her high school friends to those in the RV community whom she hasn’t yet met in person. She and other RVers, as they call themselves, share information on the best route to Santa Fe, and what to do and see when they get there. They tip each other off about where to park in a certain RV camp, where to get water in another or about a good roadside diner on the highway. Sometimes they remain virtual friends. Others have met and become close friends in real life. Like myself, they find that shared interests can lead to communities that are nurturing and enjoyable.

No matter how it is created and sustained, it is clear that the concept of community is necessary, healthy and productive...and can be fun. Community is not always what we expect it to be. It is not always where we expect to find it or with the people we expect to be part of it. But that is part of its attraction. For the “young old,” the rule of community is that there are no rules.

And as is their custom, baby boomers are making their own rules.

Glossary: Chapter 9

60-Plus Club— community-based nonprofit organization in Hamilton County, Indiana, which helps provide members (60-plus) with low-cost home services and health care.

Avenidas Village— community-based nonprofit organization which provides aging-in-place services to older adults in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Beacon Hill Village— fee-based membership organization, founded in Boston in 2001, which provides older adults an alternative to moving from their homes to retirement or assisted-living communities and provides a variety of services.

Center on Longevity— based at Stanford University, the Center studies the nature and development of the entire human life span and aims to use science and technology to address the issues faced by people over 50.

fnishers.org— nonprofit providing Christian adults support in discovering and processing opportunities in missions.

Front Desk— call center in Florence, Oregon, connecting older adult subscribers with community services.

Project SHINE— program based at the Temple University's Intergenerational Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which connects older immigrant adults with local college students to support literacy, health literacy, and workplace skills.

Supporting Active Independent Lives (SAIL)— nonprofit membership organization which connects people over 55 in the Madison, Wisconsin area with resources and services to support aging in place.

The Greater Generation— Steinhorn, Leonard. The Greater Generation: In Defense of the Baby Boom Legacy. Thomas Dunne Books, 2006.

Washington Park Cares— nonprofit in Denver, Colorado which provides older adult members with services such as transportation, yard work, and minor home repair.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 9: Creating Community: A New Challenge

1. How do you feel about what Margaret Wright did in her 50s? Could you see yourself doing something like that?
2. How have you been involved in various communities in your life? How do you see this changing as you are getting older? Why? How?
3. In your sense of community based on family changes in your life... your children leaving home... your spouse dies... you've moved... you've gotten divorced? What are the implications for you?
4. Would you consider living a college town or planned community? Why or why not?
5. Is the creation of community different for people from different educational, ethnic, or economic backgrounds? How?
6. What can we learn from gay men and lesbians about developing community?
7. How important is your spiritual community as you grow older?