

FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS 2006

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[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2006

1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR JANUARY
2. READER FEEDBACK: CUT QUANTITY AND KEEP RICHNESS
3. CHOOSING HAPPINESS: LIFE & SOUL ESSENTIALS
4. THE SCIENCE OF POSITIVE FEELINGS
5. BUILD THIRD AGE COACHING INTO YOUR BUSINESS
6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS

=====

JANUARY'S QUOTE – MARJORIE WILLIAM'S "THE VELVETEEN RABBIT"

Becoming real "...doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges or who have to be kept carefully. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand..."

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR JANUARY

The space between the ending of the old year and beginning of the new is a natural time for reflection, and that's how this I've spent much of the past week. A gift from my daughter, Susan, considerably deepened this process. It's a little book called "The Velveteen Principles" (see LINKS) that uses a beloved children's story to remind us of what's truly important – becoming real. This is especially relevant to this Third Age of ours.

One of my ways of reflecting is keeping a daily journal. I re-read some entries from a month ago, and they were filled with appreciation for the beautiful aspects of this life. That's how I'm feeling in 2005's fading twilight, and, while it may sound strange, I am most grateful for being able to feel such depths of gratitude. I wasn't always able to do this, but Third Age has opened doors that were closed to me earlier. During my recent reflections, a truth I realized years ago (at least intellectually) came back to me:

MY QUALITY OF LIFE AND HOW I FEEL ARE THE SAME.

It doesn't matter what the external circumstances are around me; all that matters is how I feel - my internal experience. From some perspectives, this can sound very selfish and might lead one into the error of hedonism. I confess I made that error for a while in the 70's when I used Janis Joplin's lyrics "Get it while you can" and "You know you've got it if it makes you feel good" as pleasure measurement criteria.

But at 67 I am a bit older and wiser. Those "Get it" and "got it" phrases focused me outward on the physical, sensual world, not on the internal possibilities. While that may be appropriate for Second Age's emphasis on tangible achievements, it's a passing thing (like puberty) we don't want to overdo. Now I understand my quality of life is about learning to choose how I feel - how to create my own world of feeling - no matter what seems to be happening on the physical plane around me. This, of course, is what the wise ones of all traditions (including Gandalf, Yoda and Dumbledore) have been offering for millennia, and I've known it intellectually for decades. But "talking the talk" and "walking the walk" are two vastly different things

Now I'm able to "walk the walk" with greater and greater frequency and consistency. That's because I've reached an age where the seductive sensuality of the physical (whether in the forms of sex, drugs and rock-and-roll or security, belonging and status) has become largely irrelevant. I recognize that many see the great sin of Third Age as being "inactivity." Not me. As I relax more and more into what I always considered "the ordinary," I find worlds I never knew existed.

What is this "relaxing into the ordinary" all about? What it's not about is SIGNIFICANCE, and that's what I've been addicted to seeking ever since I can remember. Whether it took the form of being fourth-grade class president or football star or the coolest teacher or the most sought-after consultant, etc., the addiction was always to the opinions and measures of the external world. What endless work that was! No matter how far along I got, there was always someone or something more SIGNIFICANT, and I had further to go. Even my attempts at escape from this trap were corrupted. If the attempt was meditation, I wanted to be the BEST meditator. If it was saving the world, I wanted to be the most SIGNIFICANT world-saver. If it was being spiritual, I wanted to be the MOST spiritual.

"Relaxing into the ordinary" simply doesn't care about being BEST, SIGNIFICANT or MOST anything. "Relaxing into the ordinary" means, as clearly as I can see it, knowing I am only a tiny, tiny element of this magnificent and incomprehensible universe - and reveling in the parts I get to touch. One of my images for this comes from The Godfather, Part 1. As the Don, Marlon Brando has been painfully addicted to SIGNIFICANCE for way too long. When he finally escapes, it is as an old man who has withdrawn from the world of power. We see him sitting in his tomato garden watching his grandson delight in running among the plants. There is no other scene in the movie where he is as happy and fulfilled - and, at that moment, he is not at all SIGNIFICANT in Second Age terms.

I hope these musings are of help to you as you find your way in this mysterious Third Age terrain. If you have experiences you'd like to share, please send them to FatherWilliam@ThirdAgeCenter.com.

For additional thoughts of mine on making this shift from outer to inner:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/J03%20Outer%20to%20Inner.pdf>

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR FEBRUARY**
- 2. "THE DWINDLES" – A POEM OF THIRD AGE TRANSFORMATION**
- 3. "TEND AND BEFRIEND" INSTEAD OF "FIGHT OR FLIGHT"**
- 4. THE ADULT IS NOT THE HIGHEST STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT**
- 5. "WHAT'S NEXT" AS YOU ANTICIPATE RETIREMENT?**
- 6. SPECIAL APPEAL TO CPSI FOLKS FROM DORIE SHALLCROSS**
- 7. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

=====

FEBRUARY'S QUOTE – ALAN KEIGHTLEY

Once in a while it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way they have been told to.

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR FEBRUARY

Last month's musings on the "Joys of Being Ordinary" brought reader feedback that's highlighted another primary paradox of Third Age:

ENGAGEMENT IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD
VS.
DETACHMENT FROM THE PHYSICAL WORLD

One wise woman friend (who also sent in the "Tend & Befriend" info in #3) wrote: "As women, we are hardwired to give and serve and tend to others. It's in our DNA... it is unconscionable to me that I could be any other way... Besides, if elder years are not about service and serving, what are they about? What else is more important than that?"

Another wise woman friend shared her poem, "The Dwindles" (#2 below). It's a profound reflection on the transformation from engagement in "action/activism/and activity" to the detachment of "nature's garden and the small" in the Third Age of life.

Clearly some of us move toward greater detachment and "the small" in Third Age, and others move toward greater engagement with others. Either can be a form of profound service, but that service can often be harder to see in detachment than engagement. How do we honor these different paths with such opposite outward manifestations?

For me, there are two parts to achieving this mutual regard. The first is to recognize the enormous imbalance toward the masculine that has been made "normal" in western culture. Matthew Fox captured this powerfully in a simple question and answer:

Q: "What do the Enron Corporation, the Catholic Church and the Bush Administration all have in common?"

A: "An excess of patriarchy."

"An excess of patriarchy" means any form of culture – family, school, religion, business, state, nation or association - that is unbalanced toward the Masculine (not the same as male) and thereby short-changes the Feminine (not the same as female).

While male and female refer to whether we're biologically men or women, Masculine and Feminine refer to traits and behaviors historically associated with men and women, but in fact available to us all. (For more on Feminine and Masculine, see link at end).

It's my belief (as well as that of many other thoughtful men and women) that the pendulum has swung too far towards the Masculine for too many centuries, and it's now time to help the Feminine in all of us come to the fore. While "Tend & Befriend" is an important part of this, there are many other ways of expressing our Feminine as well, and not all require the kind of engagement that comes so naturally to my wise woman friend. Being led by the goddess into her mysteries is one. Collecting, organizing and making available the wisdom of the ancestors is another. Fully participating in the waiting for the birth of the new life is still another.

It is expressions like these my natural Feminine leads me toward, and less so engagement with the outer world. I'm grateful there are others whose journeys lead them to active service, and I honor and support their service.

So embracing the paradox of ENGAGEMENT/DETACHMENT requires first that our expressions of both rise from individually healthy, rather than culturally conditioned, balances of Feminine and Masculine. The second requirement is to make the service in detachment clearer to those committed to engagement. If we don't, we can expect our turning away from the world to be seen at best as withdrawal and at worst as selfishness. This is no easy thing, but I'll give it a small try here.

I'm very fortunate to have a colleague and mentor who has 2+ decades more life experience than I do. Here's part of our recent exchange on the value we find in detachment:

From: Father William

To: Elder Ed

I'm now regularly seeing alternative realities I can choose at any time to replace the one I have thought is so real on this plane. This is important to me because I am so easily influenced by my surroundings. If I put myself in a crazy environment and stay there for any length of time, what was obviously crazy when I entered will become "normal" to me. I saw this clearly when I went through Marine basic training. One of the many great things about my Third Age is being much more detached from the world around me than I was when I was younger...

From: Elder Ed
To: Father William

I think you're right about what's "normal." For me, when a situation or place or set of characters normalizes, I begin to forget the possibilities for alternatives... I'm finding my personality gets in the way, sometimes, of making breakthroughs to a higher level of understanding. Yet that's obviously why we are here, isn't it?

From: Father William
To: Elder Ed

I like very much the way you say "when a situation or place or set of characters normalizes, I begin to forget the possibilities for alternatives." That defines "normal" very deeply for me - a state we believe to be more usual than other states and therefore expect to happen more frequently and (this is the more dangerous part) to be more real. At this moment I feel able to entertain hundreds, thousands, millions of possibilities for realities, none of which is "normal." This is because I've just done a very deep meditation. As I get caught up in the day, those possibilities will recede to the point of invisibility. I am gaining some confidence that I can bring them back by returning to my center, and I'm starting to believe that Third Age, for me, is learning to live in that center most of the time. It is a place of great detachment and very, very different from the life of engagement I've lived previously...

Obviously this is a huge subject we've opened up, and these musings barely scratch the surface. If you'd like to follow the continuing dialogue with Elder Ed, you can find it at:

<http://blogs.salon.com/0004489/>

For more on Feminine & Masculine including a simple self-assessment tool, see:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/LTF-00%20XS%20of%20Patriarchy%20Intro.pdf>

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2006

1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR MARCH

- 2. FROM "THE DWINDLES" TO "BARE TREES"**
- 3. ELDER WISDOM CIRCLE: YOUR EXPERIENCE IS VALUABLE**
- 4. THE GUEST HOUSE**
- 5. JUNG, INDIVIDUATION & THIRD AGE**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

=====

MARCH'S QUOTE – ELBERT HUBBARD

"Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive."

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR MARCH

The older I get the more sense Elbert Hubbard's advice makes. By Third Age it's gotten very clear, at least to me, none of us are going to get out of this life alive, so having a sense of humor and perspective about it seems like the way to go.

In my continuing email dialogue with Elder Ed, I get a lot of support for humor and perspective. He calls it "relaxing into participation."

I'm pretty sure I know what Ed means by "relaxing into participation," but I'm not much good at doing it with consistency yet. We moved house this month, and as my son Scott says, "Remember, Dad, you do not transition well." And I don't. But this was a very easy local move that was complete in two days with all boxes unpacked. Not a big deal. I even played golf on the first of the two days. But son Scott was right - I do not transition well.

When the disorientation and depression hit, I consulted Ed. I hope this part of our exchange might be as helpful to you as it has been to me...

To: Elder Ed
From: Father William
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2006
Subject: "Relaxing Into Participation" – More, Please

No matter how well I think I've done moving, it definitely takes its toll on me. I'm ready to hear more about what you mean by "relaxing into participation"...

To: Father William

From: Elder Ed

Sent: Saturday, February 25, 2006

Subject: RE: "Relaxing Into Participation" – More, Please

Evidently it was a shocker, this move? Did it wipe out a lot of the serendipity that you had previously felt confident in? Anyway, let's get down to the "relaxing into participation" thing immediately.

First, remembering the relaxation aspect....when you've just experienced a change which roughs you up somewhat, what's the first thing one usually does? Look for a means of sedation, no? A way of withdrawing from the tension you just went through. What do you usually do?

(...I USUALLY HAVE A MARTINI OR THREE...)

Second, finding your bearings. Getting into participation your own way. It'll be different from mine. So let's review first what participation means.....it means finding a "fit" of some sort, maybe some fellow travelers, a synergistic framework in which you can comfortably operate, some place which fits your own bent and companions who at least respect your take on things. How that works out in practice for you will inevitably be different from the way it would be for me because of all the facets in each other's lives which make us into different personalities with special baggage!

(... MY PRIMARY FORM OF "PARTICIPATION" THESE DAYS IS
CREATIVE SOLITUDE, LIKE DOING THESE MUSINGS...)

The really important notion here is the relaxing part in which we drop the frameworks of control that we formerly operated under--and I think the latter is the hard part, the hard work, involved in relaxing into participation from being in charge like maybe we once were.....it's a whole different kind of game now. Still a game, but this one allows us to have equals who push back when we try to do the same to them! There are no General MacArthur's in this company - we all smoke corncob pipes. And we can swear at each other with impunity, which we find we must do from time to time.

(... ALONG WITH ED'S HUMILITY, I LOVE HIS HONESTY. I LEARN SO MUCH FROM HIM BECAUSE HE DOES NOT PRETEND TO BE FARTHER ALONG THAN HE IS...)

To: Father William

From: Elder Ed

Sent: Monday, February 27, 2006

Subject: More on "Control"

I had a "funny" experience today: I lost control over something that you would think I'd be glad to lose control! I've been doing my own income taxes for years, and I guess I was rather proud of my ability to do so.....well, now that Marge and I have been married for a year, plus the fact that my daughter is an accountant with income tax experience, I suddenly find that I'm no longer in charge of that. You know what.....I suddenly became very chagrined that I was no longer making the decisions which depended (in previous years) on my own knowledge of the best way to handle things! Talk about a sore loser! Of course after an hour of internal pouting (I didn't tell Marge, of course) I calmed down enough to accept the inevitable. But this points to the disparity between reality and our own cherished perceptions of things--my god, I never would have thought I'd be capable of such a reaction!

Control's frameworks manage to "frame" us every time, it appears. We take control for granted until we lose it --then we spite ourselves in trying to regain it. What a lesson...

Isn't Ed a model for all of us? "Giving up control" is such a lovely notion, and how hard to do! I've had the concept for at least 35 years in various forms ("Let It Be," "Be Here Now," "Let It Flow," etc.*) I'm grateful to Ed for many things, and one is helping me see that Third Age is for "relaxing into participation" -- and that I have until 90 to do it! That's the kind of support I need...

If you'd like to follow our on-going dialogue on "relaxing into participation", you can find us at:

<http://blogs.salon.com/0004489/>

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. INTERVIEW WITH BILL SADLER, AUTHOR OF "THE THIRD AGE"**
- 3. A SPIRAL EXPLORATION FOR "WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE"**
- 4. CHANGING LIFE OPTIONS: THE RICHES OF THIRD AGE**
- 5. EXCERPTS FROM FATHER WILLIAM'S RADIO SHOWS**

6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS

=====

APRIL'S QUOTE – ALVIN TOFFLER

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS FOR APRIL

It must've been over 35 years ago when I first read Alvin Toffler's quote above, and I remember thinking, "Well, of course! So who doesn't know that?" I was in graduate school as the 70's began, and, even though I was already over 30 (and therefore untrustworthy), I became part of the Boomer generation that was already changing the world. How exhilarating it was to be part of that righteous wave!

Being young and arrogant, I assumed Toffler's wisdom applied to everybody but me and began teaching others how to cope with change. Once again my arrogance has caught up with me, and I know I'm not alone.

As I embark on this Third Age of mine, I'm finding it very difficult to "unlearn" four decades of indoctrination. Second Age made very clear that the point of life is ACHIEVEMENT and the method of accomplishment is DOING. Failure to endlessly achieve or, God forbid, to be eternally active signaled the onset of decline and decrepitude.

As Bill Sadler's research shows, full maturity requires leaving behind the EITHER/OR world of Second Age and moving forward into the BOTH/AND world of Third Age. In Toffler's words, we have to "unlearn" decades of singular focus on measurable ACHIEVEMENT and DOING so we can relearn the new possibilities of paradox, especially those of intangible FULFILLMENT and BEING. I've found this to be a very difficult transformation, and I get almost no help from the culture around me, particularly those organizations that are supposed to be supporting my development. Think about the ads you've seen specifically directed at Third Agers. Don't almost all show "active people" DOING and ACHIEVING important things? Isn't the message that, with their product's help, you, too, can stay "forever young"? Where are the balancing images of contemplation, solitude, inactivity - and BEING?

To "unlearn" an established pattern of living, we need a powerful new vision to pull us forward into our next stage of life. We had these previously. We wanted to "grow up" because the culture presented enticing and seductive visions of the futures to come. As Third Age begins, we experience just the reverse. Cultural visions now encourage us to "stay young" and "remain active." There is enormous pressure to hold on to what we've been and almost no impetus to move forward into our Elderhood. No wonder so many of us feel stuck.

But I'm finding a delightful way through this desert. With the help of my colleagues at the Center, I've managed to create a powerful vision for my Third Age despite what the culture bombards me with. Yes, it's taken five years, and, yes, I've had to do most of it on my own, and, yes, I've had to filter and screen cultural influences carefully (living in New Zealand and Vermont without TV helps greatly).

Once I got some of the Second Age limitations out of my way, I could experience myself as I am becoming and not as I had been. Solitude and contemplation are much more natural to me now than earlier in life. I love my empty days of reading, musing and working in the yard. I still enjoy DOING and ACHIEVING (like creating this newsletter, my blog and radio shows), but I also delight in the inactivity of BEING and FULFILLMENT. When my days have enough space and solitude, I don't fill them completely with the distractions of my ADD mind, and I occasionally am able to be empty. It is in that emptiness that I become receptive, and the surprises of Third Age come most easily.

My transformation has been a conscious, five year process. Many others, like Jung, have needed similar lengths of time for their own individuation. Of course, I had no idea it would take so long when I began in 2001, and it's clearly far from over. But I'm over some kind of hump and feeling very positive about moving into my eighth and ninth decades (okay, I'm only 67 but that's almost the end of my seventh decade).

Now I recommend this journey highly, but I wasn't always such a believer. When the group that formed the Center did our first retreat together, Jimmy read Browning's poem "Rabbi Ben Ezrs" which begins:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made...

Gil (a tennis player whose knees were going) and I (the eternal youth) weren't buying it. "Maybe 'the last of life' can be good, but 'the best'? No way!"

I'm a believer now and want to share my experience with others caught like I was. My hope is that my musings, blog and radio show excerpts help you on your unique journey of unlearning the EITHER/OR of Second Age and relearning the BOTH/AND of Third Age. If I can be of personal help, you can write me at: FatherWilliam@ThirdAgeCenter.com.

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - MAY 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. NOTES ON THE REST OF THIS NEWSLETTER**
- 3. EXCERPTS FROM "FREUD AND THE FUNDAMENTALIST URGE"**
- 4. EXCERPTS FROM "THE SELF: A UNIFYING CENTER"**
- 5. EXCERPTS FROM "THE ENNEAGRAM & SPIRITUALITY"**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

=====

MAY'S QUOTE – ALBERT EINSTEIN

"A human being is a part of a whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

I got an e-mail yesterday from one of my longest-standing and most thoughtfully engaging friends, Chris Rago. I first knew her as a student at The Francis Parker School in Chicago in the 60's, and now she's a literary agent, wife and mother of three daughters from 23 to 10 and a Third Ager. In

my humble opinion, her [Direction of Error](#) is definitely not toward selfishness; no one I know spends more energy and time being concerned for others than Chris. She wrote:

"I have this horrible voice in my head that thinks being selfish is the worst possible sin. I don't think it is. Wasting your life is worse. And not having any fun."

Chris's words really made me think for both of us. What came is how important it is to distinguish between "selfish" and "self-like." I know "self-like" is a new word, but what I'm talking about is just like the distinction between "childish" and "child-like" and even more important. Both "childish" and "child-like" describe qualities of children. But "childish" is a negative and dismissive judgment of immaturity ("She's so childish!") while "childlike" is a positive appreciation of purity, playfulness and spontaneity ("She has a childlike innocence"). While it's essential to grow out of our childishness, I never want to lose my childlikeness. If I did, I'd make the "worse mistake" of "wasting my life," and I sure wouldn't be "having any fun" while I was doing it!

The same is true on the larger level of the self. As infants, we do start out in total "selfish" mode because we can't do anything for ourselves. When we're uncomfortable (cold, hungry, frightened) we wail, and someone (usually mom) comes and fixes it for us. This is a powerful first learning, and it's hard to give up. I know people well into Third Age whose first response to any problem is to wail and wait for someone to fix it. Doesn't happen. What does happen is family and friends avoid the wailing and the person. Just like we had to leave the womb behind, we have to leave behind the infantile luxury of being the center of the universe. To have a life worth living, selfishness has to go. It's hard work, and none of us ever does it completely.

But because we give up being "selfish" doesn't mean we want to give up being "self-like" any more than we want to give up being "child-like." We want and need to be self-nurturing, self-respecting and self-loving. And giving up selfishness no more guarantees we'll keep our "self-likeness" than giving up "childishness" guarantees we'll keep our "child-likeness."

Most cultures recognize the need to root out "childishness" and "selfishness" and have evolved powerful taboos to make sure this happens. So most of us have learned it's VERY BAD to be either "childish" or "selfish." But there are no offsetting structures to make sure we keep and grow our "child-likeness" and "self-likeness." In this dreadful imbalance, how do we keep ourselves fully alive?

I'm finding this is one of the things Third Age is for. I no longer care very much what other people think about me. My primary relationships now are with myself, my family, a few very intimate friends and my personal version of Spirit. Both "child-likeness" and "self-likeness" are welcome and critical to all those relationships. Third Age is letting me blossom in ways I didn't do earlier, and it is so much

fun! If, like Chris, you ever hear a little voice in your head saying "being selfish is the worst possible sin," it might help to remember her response:

"I don't think it is. Wasting your life is worse. And not having any fun."

P.S. Isn't it amazing we have to invent the word "self-likeness"? If we aren't going to be like ourselves, who are we going to be like?

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - JUNE 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. NOTES ON THE REST OF THIS NEWSLETTER**
- 3. CONFESSIONS OF AN ELDERWOMAN**
- 4. THAT PRECIOUS, PATIENT MAN**
- 5. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

=====

JUNE'S QUOTE – "JANIE, I HARDLY KNEW YE..."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

Death is now an on-going part of my life. This is new for me. In the last year three very close friends have died, and on Memorial Day Weekend my sister, Janie, was killed in an auto accident. Her memorial service was held in Aspen, Colorado, on June 3, and that experience is the inspiration for this month's musings. I hope what I learned that day may prove as important to you as it has to me.

Janie and I weren't really close and didn't know a great deal about each other's lives. After I went away to college in 1956 we never lived in the same town again and only saw each other periodically. We had a disagreement and didn't communicate much during the second half of the 80's. Then we

reconnected and truly began to enjoy our monthly phone calls and emails. We were planning to get together while I was back in the states this summer, and she was going to visit us in New Zealand next year.

I knew Janie was a being of light and joy. A friend said of her: "One of the funniest women in this valley, and so smart. She's probably one of the most quick-witted people I've ever known. She was a delight. She always made everyone laugh."

What I didn't know about Janie was what a magnificent friend and leader she had been for so many. She worked as executive assistant to the general manager of The Little Nell Hotel in Aspen (the town where money has no meaning). This meant, of course, she was continually put in the position of trying to please people paying so much they felt entitled to Nirvana while at the same time keeping staff (who couldn't even afford to live in Aspen) happy and motivated. What a knife edge to walk! I could never manage such a balancing act.

Hundreds of people came to the service which was held on the deck of the Ajax Tavern at the foot of Aspen Mountain. It's impossible for me to fully describe the impact that day had on me. It began during the scheduled speakers (family, longtime friends and hotel management) and became overwhelming as past and present employees told story after story about how much Janie had meant to them. One person said, "She was the soul of The Little Nell." For the rest of the day I had people come up and tell me their personal stories of connection with Janie. Almost all spoke of her humor, outrageousness and profoundly deep caring.

And her own brother and didn't really know she was so incredibly loved.

This is three days later, and all I can think about is how much of her magnificence I missed. Part of the reason was we were busy and far away from one another. But I now think the real problem was that we both collaborated in maintaining a stereotype of the other that should have been discarded long ago. She was three years younger, and we always thought of each other as "Little Sister" and "Big Brother." We even signed our e-mails "LS" and "BB." It seemed affectionate and cute.

But now I know it also kept us locked in frames of perception that prevented us from seeing each other fully. As one of high school classmates said to me, "You and your friends were the cool guys we looked up to." While I hadn't thought of it previously, now I know something in me kept living up to being a "cool guy" with my only sister instead of showing her all of myself. I'm pretty sure she was doing her version of the same thing, and, as a result, we missed knowing huge parts of each other.

I knew this insight was a final gift to me from Janie. That night I told my four kids I was not going to miss knowing another loved one. We talked about how hard it can be to see through long conditioned filters like "Big Brother / Little Sister" and "Parent / Child," and we pledged to interrupt such patterns when ever we noticed ourselves maintaining them. Thank you for this, Janie - I wish I had learned it in time for you.

One of the things I did know about Janie is that she wanted to be Irish. She made countless trips to Ireland and loved the land and the people. Many of her friends thought she actually was Irish. So I'll conclude this tribute with a sad line from an Irish song:

"Janie, I hardly knew ye..."

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[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - JULY 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
 - 2. A PARABLE OF PART AND WHOLE**
 - 3. WE'RE ALL PRODUCTS OF THE SAME ANCIENT FORCES**
 - 4. WONDER WOMEN – "A RIOTOUS MIX"**
 - 5. SEPT 30 EVENT: THE LEADER'S NEXT JOURNEY**
 - 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**
- =====

THIS MONTH'S QUOTE IS A RIDDLE...

"What is greater than God, more evil than the devil, the poor have it, the rich need it - and if you eat it, you'll die."

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- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

According to Paul Harvey, 80% of kindergarteners get the answer to the above riddle, while only 17% of Stanford University seniors do. If you want to try to figure it out, pause here before you scroll down and see the answer...

NOTHING.

NOTHING is greater than God, NOTHING is more evil than the devil, the poor have NOTHING, the rich need NOTHING and the if you eat NOTHING, you will die.

So, like the Seinfeld show, this month's musings are about NOTHING, which, in one form or another, now seems to be the answer to every riddle I have. What is it I need to do? NOTHING. Who is it I need to please? NO ONE. Where is it I need to go? NOWHERE. What do I need to be? NOTHING.

How can I need to be NOTHING?

That is an almost incomprehensible shift in perspective for me. I've ALWAYS believed I needed to be SOMETHING - the toughest kid, the best football player, the coolest stud, the greatest teacher, the unforgettable consultant and, in my current life, the wise and mellow elder. The pattern of "There's a right way to be and you need to be it" was imprinted way before I can remember.

I've known for some time that needing to be NOTHING was my next stage of development. My sister's death a month ago pushed my intellectual knowing over the hump into emotional and spiritual knowing - the kind of knowing that means CHANGING and GROWING. Growth always seems like such a great idea until I'm actually doing it.

Since Janie died, I've gone deeply internal. It's been learning, not brooding. I've communicated very little with the outside world. I haven't done my blog at all, and I've been short with good friends. If you're one of them, I apologize.

I'm disoriented in a way I didn't expect. I'm the only member of my family of origin left, and I feel my own and other's mortality as a very real presence. Suddenly I have so much more empathy for Paynie who wrote last month's peace titled, "THAT PATIENT, PRECIOUS MAN." Her partner, Pat, is gone, and she lives without his companionship. It's now real to me I could lose Donna and be on my own. Certainly one of us will live on without the other at some point. When that happens, where do we look for relationship? This may be the most profound of Third Age questions.

My answer is I have to learn to be in relationship with the whole of creation (variously called The Infinite, God, The Other, The Larger, Nature, etc.) This brings me back to the riddle's answer of NOTHING.

In relation to the Infinite, I am essentially NOTHING. No matter what my Ego has liked to think I've been, in reality I am only one of an infinite number of "unique identities." It's confusing, and focusing, to find something I've been playing with philosophically all these years suddenly become as basic as hot and cold.

If there truly is "nowhere to go, no thing to be," what's the point? The only point is to "Be Here Now." Ego is terribly uncomfortable with this. How will I know I am worthy? More importantly, how will I know I am "special"? That is what I have always tried to be – VERY, VERY SPECIAL...

Suddenly we (Ego and Self) are realizing not only are we not SPECIAL now, but that we never have been. It was all illusion made possible by very limited perspective. If Ego can't exist without being SPECIAL, how can Ego and Self go forward together into relationship with the Infinite?

This seems like the emerging paradox of my Third Age. Ego's very nature is about creating a unique identity, a persona that can be successful in the world and recognized for that success by others. How does Ego now submit to a Self that knows all such identity is illusion? How do Ego and Self come together around the great paradox of being BOTH A PART AND THE WHOLE?

Waves and the ocean can be a powerful metaphor for this paradox of PART (Ego) AND WHOLE (Self). Each wave can think it's a tiny, vulnerable and separate entity, alone and at risk in a hostile sea. Caught in this perspective, each wave knows it is fragile and very temporary; once it crests, life seems to be over.

I like thinking of waves (and myself) as expressions of the ocean's (and Spirit's) wholeness. Like waves, each Ego has a journey which includes rising to a physical crescendo, folding back into the Self, breaking on the shore and being reabsorbed into the great, eternal ocean. When we live in this perspective, we experience the joys of being BOTH PART AND WHOLE, and our lives are continually filled with meaning. In "Seasons Suite" John Denver sang it this way:

Riding on the tapestry of all there is to see
So many ways and oh so many things
Rejoicing in the differences, there's no one just like me
Yet as different as we are we're still the same

And oh I love the life within me
I feel a part of everything I see
And oh I love the life within me
A part of everything is here in me

Living and loving our paradox of Ego and Self seems to me the great challenge of Third Age. I hope sharing some of the bumps on my journey helps you with yours...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - AUGUST 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. WHY AM I DOING WHAT I'M DOING?**
- 3. THE LEADER'S NEXT JOURNEY**
- 4. CHOOSING CONSCIOUS ELDERHOOD**
- 5. SKOAL: THE BENEFITS OF DRINKING**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS:**

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – THOMAS A. EDISON

"Hell, there are no rules here-- we're trying to accomplish something."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

When I came across this quote of Edison's, I loved it on sight. It's been my attitude through much of life and has generally worked out pretty well. It was the meta-message of most of my teaching and corporate consulting. Now this "no rules here" wisdom is guiding me through Third Age.

That's because Third Age is a new frontier where the old rules don't apply. Pioneering generations like ours create new homes and lives in unknown territory. We have to discover what works in the new world and let go of what doesn't. The letting go is more difficult than the discovering in my experience. Old habits, perspectives and beliefs die hard - especially those continually and powerfully reinforced by surrounding cultural institutions.

Our Second Age obsession with achievement, status and wealth is a collection of such habitual beliefs, and is very difficult to release without deep reflection usually initiated by a life-changing experience. This month's second piece, "WHY AM I DOING WHAT I'M DOING?" is a real wake-up call for all of us. It introduces CEO Eugene O'Kelly's personal experience with this phenomenon and the post-humorous book that resulted from it, "Chasing Daylight."

This month's third and fourth pieces offer gentler ways to give yourself a Third Age wake-up call. "THE LEADER'S NEXT JOURNEY" focuses on making the difficult transformation from organizational position, status and achievement to personal fulfillment. "CHOOSING CONSCIOUS ELDERHOOD" puts this work in the context of ancient tribal tradition.

There are many "no rules here" environments that can help you on your journey into Third Age and to becoming fully who you are. I encourage you to avail yourself of such support because it's almost impossible to make this transformation immersed in Second Age society.

There's one more source of support I highly recommend. Even though Third Age is a new frontier for many, there are those who have done much pioneering already. The territory is unknown to us not because it's virgin, but because we, and many of our forebears, haven't experienced it. This can make the journey seem scary and even overwhelming.

Our Second Age egos would like to think we're the first to take on such a frightening challenge (this is why Lewis and Clark's expedition still gets so much press). Such arrogance is a mistake. Without Sacagawea and others like her, Lewis and Clark might still be this side of the Rockies.

One of my most important supports in my own Third Age transformation is my own version of Sacagawea. I call him Elder Ed. We met three years ago in a Third Age retreat and have stayed in almost daily e-mail contact since. His patience, understanding and wisdom have been a continuing beacon for me, and especially in the difficult times. I was lucky to find Ed because my family has no tradition of elders and guidance across generations. If your family does, you are very fortunate. If you're

generationally adrift like me, I can't recommend strongly enough that you find your own version of Sacagawea or Elder Ed or Miyagi or Yoda or Gandalf...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. BUILD A LIFE PORTFOLIO**
- 3. WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE**
- 4. WHO AM I ANYWAY? AM I MY RÉSUMÉ?**
- 5. HOW NOT TO FAIL RETIREMENT**
- 6. EGO, ESSENCE & THIRD AGE**
- 7. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – LAO TZU

"A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

At the end of this month Center colleagues will gather in Vermont to enjoy and learn from one another. As part of this reunion, some of us will offer our newest thinking as part of "THE LEADER'S NEXT JOURNEY" (see #7), so it seems appropriate these musings should be about leadership. I'll begin with a story from 1985...

THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP – M.B.M

I'd been invited to Oslo, Norway, to present our "Visions & Systems" Leadership Program for a select group of European executives. These were world-class leaders who had enormous experience, intel-

ligence and authority. They were used to leading, not being led. Even though I was a young punk in my forties back then, I knew enough not to think I was their teacher. Instead I had them open the program by each giving a talk to the group. The topic was: "What Is the Essence of Leadership?"

All the talks were good, but one stood out and I remember it to this day. Ingrid was a vice president for a major airline. She began by saying:

"For me, the essence of leadership is M.B.M."

"M. B. M.," I remember thinking, "what the hell is that?"

"M. B. M. stands for "Managing By Mothering," she said, "because it was in raising my children I learned most of what has made me successful in my leadership, and I feel sorry for the men around me who haven't raised children because they're at such a disadvantage. They make their leadership difficult in ways no experienced mother would dream of."

As you might imagine, this raised a few male hackles around the room, including my own. But Ingrid went right on and within minutes had at least all of us who were fathers eating right out of her hand.

"For example," she said, "if you've raised a four-year-old you know you never ask the question, 'What do you want for dinner?' because the answer is likely to be 'Ice cream and cake' or some other nonsense you're not about to do. What you say is, 'Do you want a ham or tuna fish sandwich for dinner?'"

"In other words, you give choice among options you're willing to live with. This is the essence of participatory leadership. For years I've watched the men around me ask, 'What do you think we should do here?' and then have to spend enormous energy dealing with inappropriate requests that should never have been on the table. Of course there are times when you want out-of-the-box, off-the-wall thinking, but not when the point is to get dinner made. When you want creativity, you structure productive brainstorming sessions; when you want day-to-day efficiency, you structure simple, practical choices. Any mother knows this, but not enough fathers do."

But this was not Ingrid's most powerful lesson for me. She went on to give another example of how not to do things with people, young or old:

"The most frequent and costly error I see the men around me make," she said, "is resisting energy instead of guiding it. If you've managed a two-year-old boy, you know you only resist the direction of his energy as a last resort. If he's doing something you don't want, you don't block that energy - you

guide it into a more productive channel. In other words, you give him something more interesting to do. With two-year-olds, if you make them stop you get tantrums.”

I knew what Ingrid was talking about before she finished this example. Matt had just turned three in 1985, and I’d created more tantrums in the previous twelve months than I could count. For whatever reasons, I, like a lot of men, react very poorly to having our authority challenged. When Matt was doing something I didn't like, I would tell him to stop. He would keep doing it. I’d tell him to stop again, adding a threat of banishment to his room. He'd keep on doing. In no time I’d have escalated us to nuclear confrontation, picked him up by his little arms, carried him to his room, plopped him solidly on his bed and said, "And you'll stay here until you learn to do as you're told!" The result of my actions was to make us both unhappy and negatively charge the entire atmosphere of our home. Not what I’d call inspired leadership by a long shot.

As Ingrid spoke, I remembered how differently Matt's mom, Nancy, handled these same situations. When Matt was doing something she didn't like, she would pick up some interesting object and say, "Oh, Matt, look at that this! Isn't this amazing? Look how it..." and Matt would come over to her, get fascinated with this new possibility and the difficulty would be resolved with no escalation or crisis at all. It wasn't until I heard Ingrid tell this story that I understood how off-base I’d been. I always thought Nancy was "weak" because she let her authority be challenged. Now, instead of thinking Nancy was a weak and I was strong, I understood Nancy was smart and I was stupid.

For almost twenty-one years I've told this story to remind myself that guiding energy works so much better than resisting it, and I still too often confront rather than collaborate. Again, having the concept doesn't make up for missing the experience. I often wonder if those men now lucky enough to be raising their children are developing leadership capacities that are second nature to most mothers.

The best part of Ingrid’s talk was her closing line:

“If you've been a mother, you already have the essence of great leadership within you. All you have to do is remember that five-year-olds come in all ages.”

I knew she was right in 1985, and I know she's still right in 2006. There are times each day when one of my "hot buttons" gets pushed, and I am at best five years old. After 68 years of watching people closely, I know this is true for all of us. The major difference between Ingrid and I (and maybe many women and men) is that she sees these regressions as obvious and normal whereas I still think of them as inexcusable personal failures in both myself and others. How much better my life and leadership would be if I could respond to the adult five-year-olds in my life as a loving mother responds to a child in distress!

So what does Ingrid's story have to do with helping leaders make a personal transformation into Third Age? A great deal, I think. Just as many of us never considered "mothering" skills relevant to Second Age leadership, we may also be missing the shift in leadership required to be a Third Age Elder. For an approximation, try describing the difference in attitudes and behaviors between being a great parent and a great grandparent (or between being Princess Leia and Yoda or between Aragorn and Gandalf).

Today's world is desperately seeking mature Elders. If we are to answer that call, we need to open ourselves to the possibilities of Third Age Identity. This is a profoundly different and deeper process than extending Second Age by denying who we've become and clinging to the trappings of youth.

While you may not be able to make it to "THE LEADER'S NEXT JOURNEY" on September 30th, I hope the following workshop descriptions (#2-#6) will aid your thinking about this "different and deeper process" of creating your personal Third Age Identity. The world needs you...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - OCTOBER 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. PARADOX, CONTEMPLATION & BEING**
- 3. A CAR SALESMAN YOU CAN TRUST**
- 4. ENTERING OUR THIRD AGE**
- 5. LIVE LONG? DIE YOUNG? ANSWER ISN'T JUST IN GENES**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS:**

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – BEV STANFORD, CLASS OF 1956

"These are the mellow years, thank goodness."

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- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Two weeks ago I went to my 50th high school reunion and came away with gifts of new and deeper relationships than I ever imagined would occur. The quote above is from one of my classmates, and I think she got it exactly right: "These are the mellow years, thank goodness." Connections are possible now that were never possible then.

Even though we were small class, like all adolescent groups, we had our cliques. I was so determined to be part of what I considered the "in-group" that I literally couldn't see the riches many others had to offer. This isn't true 50 years later, and what helped me know it was this piece Carol Scholz Gambino wrote in advance:

"First a disclaimer:

"We've all attended events covered by the press, and I suspect in reading the paper the next day, we've all wondered if the press attended the same event we did.

"So, I'd venture, it would be with any description of our years at Burroughs. Each of us might wonder if we were at the same place at the same time. Were we to take a vote, how many would say, 'the best of times?' How many 'the worst?' I'd be willing to wager 'the worsts' have it. But it was a vastly different experience for all.

"I've thought a bit about why I'm coming to this reunion and what I really want/need to accomplish. First, of course, I want to see my old friends. But it's much more than that. I'd like to have a chance to talk to those of you I never really knew, mainly to learn new things. Not to go home with regret, but to go home with 'value added.' Ultimately I'd like to remember the children we were -- and we were children -- and rejoice in our adulthood 50 years later. Too, for those who have become too adult and entirely too proper, I hope we all can go home with just a little of that spark of rebellion that got us through the Class of 1956 at John Burroughs School."

These thoughts of Carol's helped me approach and connect with old and new friends much differently than I had done in the past. In e-mails since, classmates and have said things like:

"What a reunion! Felt like graduation, saying good bye...You all feel like cousins, and I take family pride in how well everyone is doing and how great everyone looks."

"I loved the 50th. Thank you all for being who you are, and for having been a part of my life.

"A final thought. Knowing that in high school I was sometimes unkind to others, I hope a kind of blanket "amends" will be acceptable if my antics ever hurt or offended any of you. If they did, please let me know so that I can make my apology a more personal one."

"It was the best! ... and we certainly improved with age. Yes, mellow, I suppose."

So what does our 50th high school reunion offer to the rest of you out there? Maybe a bit of motivation to reconnect with someone in your past who, like you, has grown into "the mellow years." For me, experiencing how wonderful these old acquaintances have become was liberating. It was like being surrounded by mirrors reflecting my own growth back to me. If they've evolved and matured so much, then probably I have, too.

The same goes for all of us in Third Age. I encourage you to find some old mirrors reflect your emerging beauty back to you...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. LEARNING TO OPEN UP LIFE IN THE SECOND HALF**
- 3. DON'T MESS WITH GRANDMA!**
- 4. OLD BUT NOT FRAIL: A MATTER OF HEART AND HEAD**
- 5. RETHINKING RETIREMENT: MORE BOOMERS CHOOSING TO WORK**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS:**

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – P.D. OSPENSKY

"It is only when we realize that life is taking us nowhere that it begins to have meaning."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

On September 30 The Center held a day of workshops for Third Age leaders in Montpelier, Vermont (see #2 below). A few days later I received this from an old friend who'd been in attendance:

"There was certainly, by my take, a different ring to your presentation than that of the others...I sense you stand a bit off to the side of the group of The Third Age Center, not only in your own perception but in their eyes as well...."

My friend's perception is spot on. In a recent exchange with a Center colleague who's very committed to our work and to helping others find their passion in Third Age, I said, "I'm no longer looking for passion - it's serenity that calls me now."

Not that I haven't loved the passions of my life! How wonderful they were, and how ecstatically I immersed myself in them. And I imagine I will have a few more such encounters before this life is up. But these days I consistently choose to relax into acceptance of what is and the peace that comes with that opening. My friend Elder Ed calls it "relaxing into participation" with the Oneness, and this makes more and more sense to me.

Put another way, I'm finding my Third Age is primarily about moving into and experiencing realms called, for lack of better terms, "spiritual" and "mystical." This is the difference my friend noticed a month ago, and it's this difference that makes Ospensky's quote above so profound to me. When I thought life was taking me somewhere, the point was to get there, not to be present in this here and now. Here's how Andrew Harvey uses a few more words to put this same idea:

"All major mystical traditions have recognized that there is a paradox at the heart of the journey of return to Origin. ...Put simply, this is that we are already what we seek, and that what we are looking for on the Path with such an intensity of striving and passion and discipline is already within and around us at all moments. The journey and all its different ordeals are all emanations of the One Spirit that is manifesting everything in all dimensions; every rung of the ladder we climb toward final awareness is made of the divine stuff of awareness itself; Divine Consciousness is at once creating and manifesting all things and acting in and as all things in various states of self-disguise throughout all the different levels and dimensions of the universe."

So the possibility I glimpse for this Third Age of mine is, as Elder Ed puts it, to "relax into participation" with the Wholeness that is the Oneness. I'm sure this sounds a little bizarre to many of you; it certainly would've sounded more than little bizarre to me most of my life. But it's what makes sense to me now. In James Carse's terms, it's time for me to experience the difference between [Finite and Infinite Games](#). And you know what? I don't have a lot of company in the human sense (that's why I value my communication Elder Ed and a few others so much). This really is an internal journey, and one's traveling companions come from many different planes. Sometimes I think I'm in the space bar in Star Wars, and it's beginning to feel as homey as Cheers...

Okay, okay, I've gotten pretty far out there this time, and it's where I am. As always I want the BOTH/AND. I want to be "relaxing into participation" and still in touch with life and people I care about. So far I don't think I'm "laying my religion on my friends," as Joni Mitchell sang, and I certainly don't want to. I truly admire the different passions and paths of my colleagues; without them there wouldn't be a Center for Third Age Leadership!

And it is very difficult to describe, much less share, the intangible realities of those "spiritual" and "mystical" realms. Over the years music has consistently helped me experience phenomena that lay beyond my rational grasp, especially the lyrics of Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, Kris Kristofferson and John Denver to mention a few. These words from Denver's "Season's Suite" capture amazingly well the feeling of my current path...

Do you care what's happening around you
Do your senses know the changes when they come
Can you see yourself reflected in the seasons
Can you understand the need to carry on

Riding on the tapestry of all there is to see
So many ways and oh so many things
Rejoicing in the differences, there's no one just like me
Yet as different as we are we're still the same

And oh I love the life within me
I feel a part of everything I see
And oh I love the life within me
A part of everything is here in me
A part of everything is here in me
A part of everything is here in me

P.S. Father William hasn't gone off the deep end entirely; the rest of the newsletter is focused on the more tangible issues of Third Age. Enjoy...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)

=====

THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2006

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. "COACHING FOR THIRD AGE FULFILLMENT™" TELECLASS**
- 3. VIDEO GAME THAT TEACHES MATURITY INSTEAD OF VIOLENCE**
- 4. NINTENDO COURTS THE GRAYER GAMER AT AARP**
- 5. ELDERS USE REALITY TV TO IMPROVE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS:**

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – LILY TOMLIN

"The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

In last month's Musings I wrote:

"I'm no longer looking for passion - it's serenity that calls me now. Not that I haven't loved the passions of my life! How wonderful they were, and how ecstatically I immersed myself in them. And I imagine I will have a few more such encounters before this life is up. But these days I consistently choose to relax into acceptance of what is and the peace that comes with that opening. My friend Elder Ed calls it relaxing into participation with the Oneness, and this makes more and more sense to me."

Elder Ed sent this in response:

"I want to comment on your remarks about passion or serenity. When an engine is not capable of functioning it is generally regarded as junk--when humans are incapable of functioning we often ask why that is so....is it because of lack of passion?"

"In this elder community I can watch old persons like myself "performing" under many different circumstances...it's interesting to observe the differences among the residents (we have about 800 total now that the new building has been completed--some of the newer ones are only about your age.) How does it look to me? Is there any "passion" among them? I guess it all depends on what you mean by having passion (just as it could be asked about whether a person exudes "serenity") I'd sum it up as being more important, possibly, to ask whether or not a certain resident here is "genu-

ine" about what he or she is feeling and/or doing. To act with passion is, after all, a relative thing--the same being true for serenity. And so, in general, the older population appears to be neither passion-filled nor serene. (Of course I'm wondering how I appear to others!)

"If I'm right that genuineness takes precedence over all other considerations, then the question is refocused to examine the authenticity with which one lives--something which seems more significant than whether one does or doesn't have a residue of passion or serenity left in this world! I think that the authentic individual has an inner structure which guides him and maintains a purpose (to which he alone may be privy--if he is even conscious of same). That very authenticity gives him all the essential passion and serenity that he needs.

"How does the resident population here stack up in the authenticity department? I'd say that it is widely divergent, but that individuals who seem authentic appear to be as rare here as in the larger community around us..."

And I wrote this back to Elder Ed:

"Thank you for opening this clarity for me. Of course it's about authenticity - not passion or serenity!

"Throughout my earlier life I've been a very passionate person (on more levels than I want to talk about), and that passion got in my way of authenticity a great deal of the time. I imagine it may have been the reverse for you, and that your "observer" was an obstacle to your behaving authentically with others. I'm finding a great deal of authenticity in my serenity, but that certainly doesn't mean that's the path for anyone else. When we get excited about what's turning up on our path, it's hard to talk about it without implying it's somehow a "better" path. And you caught me at it once again. Thank you."

I'm continually amazed at how I can turn virtually anything into a form of competition - into a rat race! Of course it's not better to be serene than passionate or old than young. I want to be authentic, I want to be the author of my own life, and I imagine the same is true for all of us. How wonderful it is to have friends like Elder Ed who lovingly remind us of the deeper truths.

I love this time of year. No matter what tradition you follow, it seems the people who began it were committed to living authentically. Perhaps we could let the spirit of the season remind us to live this part of our lives more authentically, too. Could there be anything more foundational to a truly fulfilling Third Age?

Happy Holidays from Father William...

[BACK TO FATHER WILLIAM'S HOME PAGE](#)