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### THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2007

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### THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – WOODY ALLEN

"Students achieving Oneness will move on to Twoness."

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### 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

It's the last day of 2006, and I feel over one of the humps in my transformation into this new stage of being called Third Age. I am finding meaning and joy in the "chop wood, carry water" elements of daily life, and, as a result, I'm truly in the present moment a good deal of the time.

Actually that may be a bit of an exaggeration since my "monkey-mind" is always going on about something or other. But I'm experiencing a consistent delineation between that on-going babble and who I really am. It's an evolving dis-identification that seems to have reached a point of stability and perhaps even permanence. I am not my mind. I am something more peaceful and continuing, something that can observe my mind and everything else with detachment and compassion. I'm having the experience of being the Observer I've been reading and teaching about for years - it's a great beginning to the New Year!

I used P. D. Ouspensky's quote to open the November newsletter:

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

I used it because I knew it was important and true for me and others. Two months later I understand it at a much deeper level of meaning. Let's see if I can explain how coherently.

Even though I'm being present to and enjoying my cleaning, mowing, shopping, etc., I'm still regularly plagued by the feeling I ought to be doing something more "significant" (like writing or teaching or influencing some world or other). Whenever these old unconscious imprintings take over, I'm no longer in the present moment. My "chop wood, carry water" completeness evaporates into thin air.

But I can now remember (most of the time) that one thing only seems more "significant" than another because I think there's somewhere more important to be than where I am. This notion of needing to get to "somewhere else" is just as deeply destructive as the notion I'm a corrupt being who needs saving from himself. These two life-killing frames are inextricably linked. It is precisely the belief that I'm not okay that drives me to be somewhere else, and it is the illusion of being able to go somewhere else that keeps me from recognizing "this moment in time" is all I've got and everything I need.

What a huge shift in belief systems this is for me! From earliest childhood I have revered advancement and worshiped progress for myself and my world. It's only within the last few decades (as we've had to face up to the toxic by-products of unbalanced expansion) I've begun to question the simplistic religion of one-directional growth at all.

"Bigger is Better!"

"New and Improved!"

"Progress is our most important product."

And on and on. All simplistically one-directional. No paradoxical complexity here. Growth is progress (good). Remaining constant is stagnation (bad). Shrinking is dying (terrible). These are the mantra of my lifetime, and how disastrously incomplete they are.

Of course progress can be good - sometimes. Of course stagnation can be bad - sometimes. Of course shrinking can be terrible - sometimes. And they can all be the opposite and neither, too. How many times do I have to hear some version of Ecclesiastes before it sinks in?

...To everything, turn, turn, turn,  
There is a season, turn, turn, turn,  
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down  
A time to dance, a time to mourn  
A time to cast away stones  
A time to gather stones together...

So Woody's quote, "Students achieving Oneness will move on to Twoness," not only makes me laugh, but captures what I'm learning in eight words. For thirty years this student thought he was achieving Oneness by discovering and living a "right way" called Growth. Now he has ended up moving on to Twoness by relaxing into the present and enjoying whatever he finds there. Sometimes it's expansion; sometimes it's contraction. Like breathing.

I've created a daily meditative practice from many different traditions. At its center are these four lines I learned from friend and teacher, Atum O'Kane:

There's no place to go,  
There's no thing to do,  
Be here now,  
It's all here for you.

Now I understand what Osho meant by:

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

Or, as John Lennon, put it:

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

I hope your holidays have had as delightful a ratio of expansion and contraction for you as mine have for me. The creation of this newsletter was part of that ease. The letter from Glenda Bissex (#2), the excerpt from Einstein (#3) and the reviews of "Aged By Culture" (#4) appeared as if by magic and together offer a range of New Year's perspectives on the possibilities of Third Age. Happy 2007, Dear Friends!

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2007**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

"To be, or not to be: that is the question..."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Now that I've passed through First and Second Ages where I was focused on living up to external expectations (of parents, teachers, clerics, peers, bosses, institutions, gurus and marketing campaigns), what's next?

Jung wrote, "We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning; for what in the morning was true will in evening become a lie." What might Jung mean by the program of "life's afternoon"? It seems Shakespeare knew (even if Hamlet didn't\*), and it's more the work of "being" than "doing."

If I've done First and Second Ages reasonably well, I'm no longer much interested in living up to anyone else's expectations. Now I'm truly curious about who I am and how I might fully become that unique being. I'm also drawn to experience my relationship to The Larger (The Universe, The Oneness, God, The Great Randomness, whatever it suits me to call It). Becoming my Self and feeling a true connection between that Self and The Larger is the business of "life's afternoon."

Thinking we should stay "Forever Young" will not help us get on with it. (Take note AARP).

This is not new stuff. Countless others have offered the same perspective:

"As life goes on it becomes tiring to keep up the character you invented for yourself, and so you relapse into individuality and become more like yourself every day. This is sometimes disconcerting for those around you, but a great relief to the person concerned."

-- Agatha Christie

I am exactly what I am

And not the way you'd like to see me be

I look outside long as I can

Then I close my eyes and watch my world unfold before me

-- Linda Ronstadt

"There is no freedom like seeing myself as I am and not losing heart."

-- Elizabeth J. Canham

"We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about."

-- Joseph Campbell

This newsletter fell into place without much conscious direction on my part. Glenda Bissex takes us into Jung's notion of Individuation with a profound elaboration of last month's Musings (#2). This naturally leads to looking more closely at Jung's concept of Individuation (#3). Louise Sheehy describes a bit of her own Individuation process in notes on an experience that made her "livid" (#4).

There's a lot of meat in the next three sections, so HEARD IN 1955 (#5) inserts some lightness for those of us who were around back then. Enjoy...

More Father William at [www.FatherWilliam.org](http://www.FatherWilliam.org)

\*Of course Hamlet, being barely into his Second Age, meant something very different by the "To be" speech than we do in Third Age. "To be" for that young man meant "to do" ("to take arms against a sea of troubles") and "not to be" meant "not to do" ("to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"). In Second Age it's hard to conceive of anything not involving "doing."

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – MARCH 2007**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – BENJAMIN DISRAELI**

"Life is too short to be little."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

A few days ago I received this from dear friend, Frieda Holt, describing a bit of her Third Age:

"I went down to Virginia Beach for the weekend of my birthday--celebrated Christmas with HJ and Joyce on Thursday, did 20 hours of square dancing at the Sweetheart Convention on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, then birthday dinner with HJ, Joyce and Joyce's parents Sunday night--home on Monday in time to go square dancing Monday night.

"On March 1st I'm going down to Atlanta to watch my grandson play in a hockey tournament at Birmingham AL on the weekend, then I'll spend the week at a time share in Nashville where I can square dance every night, and watch David in another hockey tournament that weekend in Nashville, then a couple of days in Atlanta and back to Alexandria VA for another square dance convention for the weekend--home on Monday in time for our square dance class. I normally dance every Monday, once a month on Tues, every Wednesday and drive to Altoona every Thursday for advanced lessons. I've already signed up for the Tumbling Leaves convention in Bennington VT in October!!"

The energy of this much activity compacted into so little time seemed unthinkable to me, and I wrote back:

"How much fun we are both having in our Third Age - and such different lives! You are glorying in the activities of square dancing, traveling and attending to family whereas I am delighting in daily solitude, writing and puttering about the house and yard. Your life would overwhelm me, and mine would probably be too empty for you."

I'm very grateful to Frieda for her email. It's become a real wake-up call for me to remember what lies at the heart of Third Age individuation, and that, of course, is the infinite diversity of life. Having lived a very active, public and relationship-filled life earlier, my individuation is taking the form of withdrawal into solitude and my inner world. This feels very right and good for me, but clearly would not be for Frieda.

I may have overemphasized my form of individuation earlier in these newsletters, and I want to use this one to honor the diversity of Third Age paths being traveled. The three pieces that follow make a good start in that direction.

First is a poem by David Whyte, "Sweet Darkness" from his amazing 2-CD set, "Mid-Life & the Great Unknown." David, and particularly this collection, have been primary companions on my journey into Third Age. This poem presents the very personal essence of individuation:

"...to learn  
  
anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive  
  
is too small for you."

The second piece is by Frieda and elaborates her current choice of life and philosophy. While it is not my personal form of individuation, I was inspired and delighted by the joy she is so obviously finding in her Third Age.

The third piece is from Bill Sadler's book, "The Third Age." It is another example of how uniquely personal the path of individuation is for each of us in Third Age.

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## **THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2007**

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### **THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – DIETRICH BONHOEFFER**

The mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as do solitude and community. One does not exist without the other. Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech.

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### **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

The focus for this month's newsletter was triggered by Sue Ronnenkamp. Sue runs a fascinating business that helps Third Agers downsize from their Second Age surroundings and possessions (I wish I'd had her available when it was time for my father to move in with me). She sent the article "The Value of Community" (#2).

After reading Sue's article, I found myself focusing on how important solitude has become for me in these last few years. During my First and Second Ages I had very little tolerance for being alone; after the briefest periods of solitude I would literally crave engagement again. Now it's just the opposite. After short bursts of interaction with others, I crave my solitude and am delighted it is so easily available. Perhaps I'll feel greater need for community after enough withdrawal from the world.

What really struck me once again was how uniquely we do our Third Ages - and how differently we seek solitude and community during this time. I imagine some of you might also be exploring your personal balances between connection and detachment, so this newsletter is designed to help in those explorations.

John Burroughs' essay on "Solitude" (#3) speaks to me, especially his emphasis on living quietly close to nature. I think he had us Third Agers in mind when he wrote, "How beautiful the leaves grow old. How full of light and color are their last days."

But there are forms of both community and solitude that are not chosen, and they can be hard because of being forced upon us. One of the most difficult is the unexpected loss of a life partner. This has happened to very close friends, and it is to them I dedicate the excerpt from Joan Didion's "The Year of Magical Thinking" (#4).

If you'd like to go further, the "Society, Solitude and Community" site (#5) at Lynchburg College offers a rich range of topics and readings.

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – REINHOLD NIEBUHR, AA & OTHERS**

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

The theme of this month's newsletter is wisdom, and three writers highlight different facets of this "jewel of maturity." In the first, Mary Catherine Bateson makes a powerful plea for this generation of elders "to achieve a new kind of consciousness and to free their imaginations for the future." Next, excerpts from the preface to "The God Theory" by Bernard Haisch offer his views on how the most rational of us can synthesize the traditions of both science and spirituality. Thirdly, Stephanie Dowrick's Interfaith Talk of March 18th is an example of how such spirituality can be beautifully phrased across the many forms of religious practice.

I know religion is one of the two topics no sane person ever brings up, so I'm probably due for a sanity check. But when these perspectives all showed up on my doorstep in the same month, I just couldn't resist "rushing in where angels fear to tread." Here's why.

Bill Sadler's research identified a major task in Third Age Transformation to be creating a new identity that embraces and thrives in paradox. In other words, one of the things Third Age is about is moving beyond the simplistic right-wrong certainty of EITHER-OR thinking into the subtle grays and complex ambiguity of BOTH-AND thinking - and being comfortable there! No longer can we be a EITHER realistic OR optimistic; we must be BOTH. Having EITHER intimacy OR freedom is not satisfactory; we want BOTH. Caring for EITHER ourselves OR others is now unacceptable; we want to be good to and for BOTH.

One of my primary paradoxes of Third Age is that of Science and Spirit. I'm a very rational person who longs for more than my mind alone offers. The enormous amount of wisdom offered through the Scientific and Spiritual traditions has helped me create a deeper meaning for this time of my life, and I am grateful for BOTH.

BOTH Science AND Spirituality are essential to my Third Age development, especially as my mortality becomes a more present companion, and I'm finding ways that work for me to have the value of the BOTH-AND. I hope these Musings and the following articles may be of help to you in this regard is well...

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – ITZHAK PERLMAN**

"You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Well, here it is the first of June and in three days Father William begins his 70th year. Sons Scott and Matt complete their 40th/25th years in 2007 so the male Idols are all crossing symbolic thresholds. A good time for a little reflection on the trajectory of life. Let's start with this beautiful story sent by dear friends Ellen and Jim Frerotte.

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A STORY ABOUT ITZHAK PERLMAN

On Nov. 18, 1995, Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, came on stage to give a concert at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. If you have ever been to a Perlman concert, you know that getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with polio as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches. To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is an awesome sight.

He walks painfully, yet majestically, until he reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly, puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and proceeds to play.

By now, the audience is used to this ritual. They sit quietly while he makes his way across the stage to his chair. They remain reverently silent while he undoes the clasps on his legs. They wait until he is ready to play.

But this time, something went wrong. Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap - it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant. There was no mistaking what he had to do. We figured that he would have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage - to either find another violin or else find another string for this one. But he didn't. Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to begin again.

The orchestra began, and he played from where he had left off. And he played with such passion and such power and such purity as they had never heard before.

Of course, anyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. I know that, and you know that, but that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that. You could see him modulating, changing, re-composing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was de-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before. When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. There was an extraordinary outburst of applause from every corner of the auditorium. We were all on our feet, screaming and cheering, doing everything we could to show how much we appreciated what he had done.

He smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet us, and then he said - not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone - "You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

What a powerful line that is. It has stayed in my mind ever since I heard it. And who knows? Perhaps that is the definition of life - not just for artists but for all of us. Here is a man who has prepared all his life to make music on a violin of four strings, who, all of a sudden, in the middle of a concert, finds himself with only three strings; so he makes music with three strings, and the music he made that night with just three strings was more beautiful, more sacred, more memorable, than any that he had ever made before, when he had four strings.

So, perhaps our task in this shaky, fast-changing, bewildering world in which we live is to make music, at first with all that we have, and then, when that is no longer possible, to make music with what we have left.

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"... to make music with all that we have, and... with what we have left."

It seems these are the same to me. All that I have is what I have left, and vice versa – unless I imagine possibilities opening up in the future that are not available to me now. And that’s one of the great divides between Second Age and Third Age, isn’t it? In Second Age the culture helps us believe life is just opening up for us and that the future holds possibilities we can only glimpse as we dream. Then we cross the boundary into Third Age, and suddenly the culture tells us we’re “over the hill,” possibilities and potentials are things of the past and we will have to make do with what we have left.

I don’t mean to take away from Ishtak Perlman’s incredible three string performance nor from the profound meaning of his statement. But our culture’s distortion of aging might distort that meaning, and some might interpret his words as the tired utterance of an old man who overcame enormous obstacles to achieve a new level of greatness one last time.

That’s not what happened based on my own Third Age experience. I feel certain Perlman could never have completed the piece with only three strings back in his Second Age. I believe he drew on some element of his mystical maturity to replace the physical void of the fourth string and that he did so with great joy and playfulness. I can almost see the twinkle in his eye when he said:

“You know, sometimes it is the artist’s task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

There is an art to aging, and my last decade’s focus has been to learn what it means to be an artist of the Third Age. One of the things I’ve learned to do is open to whole new universes of potentials and possibilities that my serious Second Age had closed down. These lie in realms that age calls invisible, imaginary, mystical or even, god forbid, spiritual. They are non-material abilities, and they do enable one to play a violin with only three strings. While available to all ages, these potentials become more visible and usable as Second Age culture loses its sway over us. We are able to be more profoundly present as we become less distracted by the opinions of others, and our increased presence finds wonders in “what we have left” that far offset any physical diminishment. Think “Star Wars” Yoda or “The Karate Kid’s” Myagi.

I know I’m pretty far out there again, especially when I start talking about non-material possibilities being real. But I’m certainly not alone in this regard. Do you remember the “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus” editorial Francis P. Church of the Baltimore Sun wrote to eight year old Virginia O’Hanlon? A part of it went like this:

“Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men

can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world."

"You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, not even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding."

Like Perlman, Church was offering a glimpse beyond the veil Second Age brings down on our childhood and is reluctant to ever raise again. For old Father William, one of the great delights of Third Age is raising that veil again.

The rest of this month's newsletter offers more down-to-earth stuff – enjoy!

More Father William at [www.FatherWilliam.org](http://www.FatherWilliam.org)

For "Yes, Virginia": <http://www.newseum.org/yesvirginia/>

P.S. Thanks to Donna Idol and Ronn Williamson – these Musings would never be the same without their help...

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – FROM "SACRED CLOWNS" BY TONY HILLERMAN**

"Terrible drought, crops dead, sheep dying. Spring dried out. No water. The Hopi, or the Christian, maybe the Moslem, they pray for rain. The Navajo has the proper ceremony done to restore himself to harmony with the drought. You see what I mean. The system is designed to recognize what's beyond human power to change, and then to change the human's attitude to be content with the inevitable."

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## **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

The quote above describes the Navajo practice of "hozho" which Soni Pitts\* elaborates this way:

"Hozho cannot be adequately translated into a single English word. It is the essence of the Navaho way of being, a sense of elemental rightness that is core to their way of living - a way of being that we could do worse than to strive for in our own lives. Hozho is a word of depth and layers, meaning at once harmony and beauty, truth and balance. To be in hozho is to be at one with and a part of your environment and the world around you in such a way that the notes of your life complement and resonate with the symphony of life all around you. You neither pitch above nor below the thrumming chords of the Universe, but yet at the same time your melody stands on its own merits and is heard with utter clarity - pure in tone and pitch and strength, singular yet subsumed in the whole.

Hozho is not the easiest word to explain, but its essential meaning can be intuited through experience. Think of those times when you felt as if you truly part of the creation around you, yet clearly a singular being, at once loved by and in love with all that was around you. Perfectly matched, perfectly balanced, perfectly in tune - walking with beauty and rightness and joy in every step and every breath. That is hozho, and I wish you the ability to find it and live it in your life."

In May I used the Serenity Prayer as a starting point for that month's Musings:

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference."

Hozho deepened my understanding of what "accepting the things I cannot change" asks of us, and I'm finding this particularly useful in my Third Age. This deeper understanding raises "chicken-and-egg" questions:

Is it serenity that produces acceptance?

Or is it acceptance that produces serenity?

Probably it's both, like the spiraling strands of our DNA, and once again we find our maturity has plunked us squarely in the non-rational reality of paradox and BOTH/AND. This can be very uncomfortable if my psyche needs a "right way" so it knows what to do. If your cultural conditioning is like mine, you'll try to escape the psychological tension of paradox and make one of the poles cause (more chicken) and the other effect (more egg). We're talking about achieving peace of mind here. Which of the questions above seems more chicken and which more egg to you?

My conditioning has led me to think the first (serenity produces acceptance) is the way this world works. If I can attain serenity (through meditation, drugs, prayer, ultra-running or whatever gives me a detachment high), then I'll be able to accept (cope with) any difficulties that come my way. This belief system (that serenity is the cause and acceptance the effect) means I've invested a great deal of energy and experience in trying to find serenity without paying that much attention to learning acceptance. I'm beginning to think I've been missing at least half, if not more, of the serenity-acceptance relationship.

But when the student is ready, the teacher appears. On my arrival back to Vermont from New Zealand, the lovely Nancy Wilson lent me her copy of "1000 Names for Joy: Learning to Love What Is " by Byron Katie with Stephen Mitchell, and voilà - my learning about how to make acceptance the chicken and serenity the egg leapt into gear. This is no easy thing for a 40's and 50's kid raised with the archetype of John Wayne as his model for being male.

As best I can remember, The Duke never accepted anything. He made his reality, and when it no longer suited him, he changed it. If he wanted peace of mind, he made peace of mind by kicking reality into the shape he thought it should be. As far as I could tell, acceptance and defeat were the same thing to him and all the others in his mold (which definitely included me for more years than I like to think about).

No more. Now I embrace the marvelous paradox of both masculine (make it happen) and feminine (let it happen). What the Navajo's hozho and Byron Katie have done is add a dimension to "let it happen" I've been missing:

The act of accepting can create the serenity  
that brings me into harmony with myself and the world.

That's called peace of mind, and it's a beautiful place to be. Okay, okay, I know some of you are having a bit of trouble with this. It seems too flaky, too New Age, too touchy-feely (as we used to

say in the old days). Maybe I'll lose my macho credentials. So be it. Third Age is about opening to paradox, and the more I do it, the better my life gets. Making "let it happen" happen may be one of the greatest paradoxes I've encountered to date. If you'd like to give it a try, the next piece introduces Katie and will take you to her web site.

Piece #3 is for those of you who are struggling with sleep. This is not a problem for me personally, but I have dear friends for whom it is. There may be some help available in this new technology.

Piece #4 is for fun. Enjoy and have a great July...

\*For more on Soni Pitts, go to:

<http://gettingthingsdone.wordpress.com/about/>

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### **THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – ALFRED D'SOUZA**

"For a long time it seemed to me that life was about to begin - real life - but there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life."

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### **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Old FW is taking a summer break to enjoy "these obstacles of my life." Hope you have relaxed time for yourself, too. Enjoy the rest of the newsletter, and we'll see you back here next month...

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2007**

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. HOW TO DEAL WITH THE DEATH OF AN EX-SPOUSE**
- 3. EXCERPTS FROM "CIRCLING MY MOTHER"**
- 4. WARNING: WHEN I AM AN OLD WOMAN I SHALL WEAR PURPLE**
- 5. COACHNG FOR THIRD AGE FULFILLMENT™ TELECLASS**
- 6. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – ED PAUL**

"Is a deeper self now asking if you also know the larger human...  
the 'higher' human which wants also to be known by you in a fuller way?"

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

My August newsletter began, "Old FW is taking a summer break to enjoy 'these obstacles of my life.'" That was code for, "I had a stroke." On July 22 I woke up and couldn't talk correctly. Part of what I said was garbled, but, more interestingly, part was crystal clear but reversed. On one occasion I introduced myself as, "Hi, I'm Katie's mom." Many chuckles. This went on for two days and stopped. I had no other physical symptoms. I played golf and beat the other young punks. I knew what I meant to say clearly in my head and then would hear it come out quite differently, sometimes hysterically differently.

Monday afternoon a CAT scan made it clear I'd had a stroke. This is a new world for me. I've been blessed with virtually perfect health for 69 years and suddenly I'm one of millions who knows he's mortal and is going to die. This means, at deeper levels than ego, I am ordinary. As are we all. Earlier in life, this would have been very disturbing news. Now, after five weeks of integration and of assimilation, I more often think, "Well, of course."

But I'm clearly still in radically changed territory, so this newsletter reflects some of the disturbing changes that come with Third Age. Louise Sheehy sent a poignant and powerful piece about dealing with the death of an ex-spouse (#2); many families, including ours, will cope with this reality. By coincidence, I picked up "Circling My Mother" by Mary Gordon and have been deeply moved. Our family has two parents in different assisted-living homes, and Mary's description (#3) of her own mother's decline is our story as well. But while there can be great challenges as we age, there are also great possibilities, too. To remind us all of this balance, piece #4 is Jenny Joseph's wonderful, "Warning: When I Am Old I Shall Wear Purple."

As for my journey, it's clear I am much too inexperienced in this new life territory to reach any conclusions so soon. What I offer in the rest of these Musings are some thoughts from my journal over these past five weeks in the hope they may be useful to you...

"...getting a glimpse of some of the changes I'm going through. Even though there were virtually no physical symptoms during my stroke (except two days of talking funny), a lot has been shifting down at the tectonic plate level of my psyche...

..I'm still pretty sure the stroke didn't do anything to me of physical significance, but the medicines certainly are. I get short of breath after climbing the 52 stairs up to our parking lot or doing a minimal workout on strength training machines at the Sports Center. I'm also tired and sleeping 9-12 hours a day. This is my first experience of feeling real encroachment (that supposedly will last forever) of physical limitation on the ease with which I have lived my life. Body-wise, I have been charmed to the extent of always being thought to be at least a decade younger than I am. And not only have I looked good, I've felt good until the last two weeks. Isn't it amazing to live 69 years with hardly ever having a physical hardship one can remember?

"...I am different inside. I doubt many see any difference. But I sure do. I'm focused on feeling safer, and that's a whole new universe for me. Well, maybe not so new in the sense I've always wanted to be comfortable, but that's different than seeking safety. For example, it's never occurred to me before I should live with someone so, if I became incapacitated, there would be help available. I cannot imagine a greater gift than living with my daughter Susan and her family (which will happen next year), and I am very, very grateful. But the point is I'm thinking about how to be safe and se-

cure. What a change in perspective this is for a younger guy who always saw himself as an adventurous seeker!

"...I have no idea what my next stage of life might look like! When I'm up, it's fascinating! When I'm down, which has been quite a lot these last weeks, I understand how people think their lives are over and hunker down to protect themselves from pain. I have moments where I think like that. And I realize I am like my parents in ways I never wanted to admit.

"...It does me so much good to write. I'm finally accepting I've been affected and changed by what we've been calling 'my stroke.' Had no idea how locked up in denial I've been..."

And then my friend and mentor, Elder Ed, sent me this:

"Your references to things like weariness that extends itself beyond what you have always considered the norm for your virile self--is this part of the realization of a deeper self that is now demanding your attention? I'm asking, not telling. You already know what your past is...so is there a spirit within you that is asking if you also know the larger human, the 'higher' human which wants also to be known by you in a fuller way?

"Your body is still there--it is in healing from a trauma, and that is where your energy is going. But in addition to energy there is a pulsation striking you which is, in essence, the light and the fuller love that is within you--that's what wants your attention! While the healing is taking place why not give the essence the attention it wants? When else to better do it?"

And I wrote back:

Thanks so much for this guidance, Ed. I'm certainly paying more attention as I digest my recent experience. I almost feel as though I'm in some sort of "pause" state, waiting for the "pulsation striking you which is, in essence, the light and the fuller love that is within you" to trigger me into life; this feels something akin to the prince's kiss waking Snow White. It seems a stroke should be enough to wake me. I'll take your words to heart and see if I can't feel the pulsation coming from within...

So that's the way it is for FW on September 3, 2007. How it will be in thirty days, I've no idea. But, despite the moments of fear or limitation, I am feeling a new awakening to the profoundly beautiful and simple life around me. The link below communicates this feeling far better than words...

<http://www.gratefulness.org/brotherdavid/a-good-day.htm>

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER 2007**

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING**
- 3. SAL PARADISE AT 50**
- 4. A DEEPER WORK: SPIRITUALITY & SERVICE IN THE 3RD AGE**
- 5. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – ANONYMOUS**

"Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
But sloppy punctuation can do worse..."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

I began my career as an English teacher, and when the following e-mail showed up in my inbox, I was intrigued...

PUNCTUATION IS EVERYTHING

Students were asked to punctuate the following correctly:

"A woman without her man is nothing"

All of the males in the class wrote:

"A woman, without her man, is nothing."

All the females in the class wrote:

"A woman: without her, man is nothing."

Clearly punctuation can be everything, at least sometimes. Now I don't mean to get off on the gender wars. As far as I'm concerned, we are all glorious beings, and I'm as proud of my feminine aspects as I am of my masculine. It takes both "let it happen" and "make it happen" to live a life that interests me.

But I got thinking about "the punctuation of life" and how important that is to each of us. I can hear you groaning. "Not another drill on punctuation!" Well, you might find this one more interesting.

How do we punctuate our lives? Where do we put our exclamation points to make things dramatic? Where do we create pauses with semicolons, colons and paragraphs? Where do we capitalize for emphasis? Where do we use commas to set one thing off from another? When do we use quotes to imply we're not responsible for what we're saying and doing? Now aren't those interesting questions?

Driving to Boston last week, my lovely, middle-aged daughter, Susan, told me about an e-mail that meant a lot to her. (See #2. ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING.) Susan doesn't have a lot of time for psycho-babble, but this connected. What struck her was the notion that we always have a choice about how we experience our lives. Susan worked as a caretaker for a beautiful woman in our community who was in an advanced stage of MS for years. Louise was an amazing being, and she inspired all with her choice to be consistently positive in very difficult and on-going circumstances. This experience helped Susan appreciate the power of choice in our lives.

WE CAN CHOOSE THE WORDS THAT DEFINE OUR LIVES...

How many times a day do you hear people saying, "I can't" or "I have to"? Both of those phrasings tell us we're powerless, and 99% of the time they're just plain wrong. But the cumulative affect is to reinforce impotence. The next time you hear "I can't make it for lunch" or "I have to go to work", check out whether those are even close to true statements. (If Paul McCartney was the guest, I'd find a way to make it for lunch and rearrange work.)

For social reasons it can be important to use phrases like "I can't" and "I have to" so we don't offend others, but we don't want to deceive ourselves into believing we really "can't". Here's a way to correct that. Every time you notice yourself saying "I can't" or "I have to" out loud, change them to "I won't" and "I choose to" inside. This way you'll still get along with others and also know you always have the power to choose.

AND THE EMOTIONS THAT PUNCTUATE THEM...

Word choice is only half of phrasing. Clearly the way we punctuate our language and our lives is just as important to the meaning we create for ourselves. The opening man-woman example above show how a choice of punctuation dramatically changes the meaning of words.

But what about the way we emotionally punctuate our lives? Where do we put our exclamation points, parentheses, paragraph breaks? What do we decide will be a dramatic event? An observer's comment? A new topic? These choices are at least as important as the content of our words.

So how do we get better at punctuating our lives so we enjoy them more? This is a huge question therapeutic and spiritual traditions have been trying to answer for millennia.

In words the basic steps are simple to say:

Recognize when emotion occurs and step back;  
Get centered and observe all that's happening;  
Stay centered until you know what you truly want;  
Choose an emotion that supports what you want;  
Punctuate (spice up) your life with that emotion.

Easy to say, but very, very difficult to do - especially when the emotion is powerful. This, of course, is why there've been so many variations of these simple steps; saying and doing are not the same by a long shot.

But there is lots of good help available. If this notion of "punctuating your life by choice" appeals, here are two variations I've found very useful:

Observe Byron Katie's simple and sensible "Work" with others:

<http://www.thework.com/index.asp>

Check out HeartMath's extensive stress management research and tools:

[http://www.heartmath.org/index.html?engine=adwords!8630&keyword=%28heartmath%29&match\\_type=](http://www.heartmath.org/index.html?engine=adwords!8630&keyword=%28heartmath%29&match_type=)

PS: I deeply appreciate the many responses to last month's Musings. Let me emphasize my stroke was as easy as can be imagined. I was not affected physically in any way except for two days of talking funny, and the tests show no heart problems beyond the atrial fibrillation that produced the stroke clot. Now I'm no more at risk than the rest of you (as long as I keep taking my blood thinner - which I will!). So love and thanks for your thoughts and advice...

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 2007**

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. AGING STEREOTYPES ARE HOOEY**
- 3. WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH OURSELVES**
- 4. THE PARADOX OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT & DIOGENES**
- 5. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – DIOGENES**

"You will die in the middle of your journey--everybody dies in the middle of the journey."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

November is a good time for some quiet reflection, and this morning I found myself thinking about going through the process of Third Age Transformation. "Transformation" is much more difficult and demanding than transition. The core difference is that transforming requires releasing an old identity and creating a new one whereas in transition we need only to adapt our existing identity to new circumstances (like when we lose a job and have to go get a new one).

We've all done transformings many times - from childhood to adolescence, from single to partnered, from peer to boss, etc. Transformation is so difficult because we have to surrender the old identity - go into the emptiness of an identity void - before we can see the new possibilities and re-create ourselves in a new image. Letting go of a known and comfortable identity that's worked can be highly anxiety-provoking. We rarely do it with grace or ease.

When we're in new territory and anxious, it helps greatly to know what to do next. In Bill Sadler's book, "The Third Age," he lays out simply and clearly the three major tasks that are necessary to lead us through our transforming into Third Age:

Change Negative Images of Aging;

Redefine Success from Achievement to Fulfillment;

Build a Third Age Identity on Paradox.

The rest of this newsletter offers perspectives that illuminate some of the unusual dimensions contained in each task...

"AGING STEREOTYPES ARE HOOEY" shows how the surrounding culture imprints us with negative images of aging and how we can uproot those destructive stereotypes. This piece is an excerpt from The Center's new publication, "Changing Course: Navigating Life after Fifty," co-authored by Jim Krefft and Bill Sadler. If you like the excerpt, do yourself a favor and get the book - it's a wonderful read!

"WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH OURSELVES," by Bolton Anthony raises profound questions about what "Redefining Success" might actually ask of us in The Third Age:

"But what if later life has its own purpose — its own distinct developmental tasks — and is neither a regression to childhood nor an extension of midlife? What if, rather than maintaining or intensifying our engagement, we are actually called first to the kind of disengagement that allows for deep reflection and soul-searching? Who am I NOW — after the children have left and the first half of work is winding down?"

Old Father William has found his movement from "Achievement to Fulfillment" to be very much in the direction of disengagement and reflection, and I highly recommend Bolton's article and the work he's led in the development of Second Journey's programs and resources.

"THE PARADOX OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT & DIOGENES" is an ancient and simple parable, but it certainly took Father William into an encounter with the complexities involved in "Building a Third Age Identity on Paradox." At the end I add a few thoughts about the slipperiness of paradox.

Enjoy the reflections of November...

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2007**

- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**
- 2. BIRTHING THE CRONE**
- 3. THE SAGE-ING GUILD**
- 4. DECEMBER REFLECTIONS**
- 5. THIS MONTH'S LINKS**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – FATHER WILLIAM**

"A PORTAL is an entrance to a passageway that hurls you forward in your becoming, using a path that is shorter in distance and time than ordinary reality allows."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

You won't find this definition of "portal" in any dictionary, and that's a big part of the problem. Portals are an essential part of reality our modern times have forgotten how to access and use. We need to regain that access so we can recognize and travel our own portals (which are a lot more fun than traveling through other people's portals or not traveling at all).

What's a portal?

This is a hard one. Portals, like love, truth and beauty, don't lend themselves easily to definition. They take us into highly personal and subjective learning experiences that change us and our perception of reality. They can take any form – people, places, events, fantasies, dreams, achievements, tragedies – whatever causes us to glimpse a little more than we've seen before. We can travel through them alone (losing our partner) or with countless others (as we did during 9/11), but what we learn and the ways we change are uniquely our own. Here are some ways portals have been described...

A portal is...

...a wakeup call    ...a perspective changer    ...a journey to the center of yourself    ...an opening  
 ...a Gillette "Thanks-I-needed-that!" slap in the face...    "A Crack in the Cosmic Egg"    ...an invitation  
 to a miracle    ...a black hole    ...a ray of light    ...the beginning of an end    ...the end of a begin-

ning ...the ecstasy we seek ...the anxiety we fear ...Alice's rabbit hole ...Harry's Track 9¾  
...a Gandalf ... a Miyagi ...a Yoda ...a Lady of the Lake ...a car in "Back to a Future" ...a TV  
set in "Pleasantville" ...a great fish in "The Old Man and the Sea" ...an African child's drawing for  
Schmidt ...a crucifixion for Christ ...a Bodhi Tree for Buddha ...a burning bush for Moses ...a  
cave for Muhammad

These descriptions help give a feeling for what portals are, but they certainly don't give a precise definition. I just don't know how to do that as the portal experience is so specifically individual. Here are the things mine seem to have in common:

1. PORTALS CHANGE ME. When I go through a portal, I find myself in a new reality, one often quite unlike what I've known previously. Most importantly, my life values, rules and strategies have been shaken and significantly altered, and I soon realize I'm unable to return to what worked so comfortably before.

2. PORTALS INTERRUPT MY LIFE. They certainly don't come on any schedule that makes sense to me (they seem to come about equally at convenient or inconvenient times and in surprising places). I'm never anticipating who (or what) is going to open the next one up, and I'm usually amazed at what it's about. Most significantly, they usually interrupt some obsolete pattern or way of being it's time I gave up. These interruptions often involve some sort of shock and the accompanying discomfort.

3. PORTALS ARE NOT ABOUT FEELING GOOD OR BAD. I've felt wonderful, and I've felt terrible. I've prayed to have them over, and I've wished they'd last forever. Of course, I'd much rather have the ones that feel good, but Whoever's-In-Charge seems to prefer a mix, and I have to admit there's been at least as much value (maybe more) in the ones I didn't want as in the ones I did.

4. PORTALS OFFER MORE THAN I CAN TAKE IN AT THE TIME. I remember my portals because they changed my world, and, when I revisit them, I consistently find they offer me a new level of lesson I wouldn't have understood before. They've become a primary teacher for me, and I don't have to go anywhere, pay any tuitions, do any homework or sit at the feet of any gurus. I love learning from myself, in my own environment and on my own schedule! Any of us can do this - but we have to remember our portals and their stories, set-aside priority time to revisit them (not the "when-we-get-to-it" time) and be open to learning new endings to our old stories.

I hope you find the notion of portals and the personal growth they enable as fascinating as I do. This month's newsletter follows up by offering perspectives on three of the various portals available in aging:

- Helen Redmon's "Birthing the Crone" offers a powerful possibility of new birth for women moving into their Third Age;

- "The Sage-ing Guild" invites participation in a unique approach to using Third Age's accumulated experience and wisdom to benefit the world;

-Reb Zalman's "December Reflections" turn our attention to the reality of Fourth Age and the more imminent portal of physical death.

Enjoy!

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