

One of the first things I discovered was that true elderhood is not reached without effort. The elders that I found, the ones who were living and aging with strength and courage and grace had somehow done the inner work necessary to fully embody what it means to be an elder. It seemed that they had looked back over their life with gratitude and forgiveness and had brought with them the things that still held value and had left behind what no longer served. They had found and claimed the gifts and abilities they now had to give and were willing to freely offer them to others. And they had gained the ability to now look forward without fear or dread but rather with curiosity and openness to what the future still might hold for them. And they had even made peace with death, even the reality of their own death in the now foreseeable future. And somehow through all this they had learned a thing or two that only living can teach and they had gained wisdom.

Elder wisdom is in many ways counter cultural today. Elders do not seek nor claim to have all the right answers but can rather teach us how to ask and to struggle with the right or at least the most helpful questions. They offer no spreadsheets nor formulas nor instruction books but offer only a well-worn path, a way of walking and a call to begin. Elders urge us to travel a bit more slowly so that we can truly see and experience what is all around us and to open ourselves to be touched by it. Elders can teach us how to find the beauty and value in things half noticed till now.

Elders remind us that we live in a world, a whole vast universe, and we are a small yet still significant part of all that exists. They remind us and implore us to remember that we are part of a community and we are connected to every human being and every living creature on earth and that we belong to them and they belong to us.

Elders can teach us much but perhaps the most important things they can teach us is how to embrace and live into our own aging selves for the simple and unavoidable truth is, aging is something we are all doing in every moment. And yet, we also live in a time that is highly focused on youth, a time in which we will do almost anything and spend almost anything to stay or at least seem or appear young.

Growing old today is almost exclusively seen in terms of loss and decline, diminishment and irrelevance. If you have any doubts about that, just try to find an uplifting and affirming birthday card for anyone 40 or older. We rarely refer to people as "elders" these days but only "elderly" and no one wants to be that. It is no wonder that we try to hold onto our youth way past its shelf life, clinging to the carpet as they drag us kicking and screaming from the living room to the back room. But if youth is our primary goal and staying young our dearest desire, then we are inevitably always moving away from what we long for. When we value youth over everything then every day is to some degree a loss. Elders can teach us how to embrace our own aging and live into it without dread, and they can show us how it is gracefully done.

But unfortunately, we as a culture largely ignore the valuable resource of elder wisdom, of what life lived long teaches, and potential elders have nearly lost a significant role and identity that could not only give their own life meaning and purpose but could also provide nurture and guidance and grounding to others. And that is a loss to us all. We are in deep need of elders among us and of the wisdom which they can offer and potential elders are in deep need of regaining their place by the fire.

And so, I invite us all, young and old, (whatever those labels may mean) to re-envision life- to no longer see life as that hill we go over at some point about two thirds into our living and then slide down the other side of into irrelevance, but rather to see life as a journey, a journey up a beautiful mountain and with each step upward we take, when we look back and look around, the view becomes ever more expansive and ever more complete.

I offer a call, to make friends with your own aging and to begin to see it not as an ending and a loss but as a pathway opening before you, a call to somehow find the strength and courage and goodness of heart to begin your own journey from where ever you are, the journey to find and nurture your own elderhood.

I offer a call particularly to those of us who may already be elders to bravely step forward and to discover the elder wisdom you, perhaps unknowingly, possess, for surely life has taught you something in all these years and maybe it has taught you more than you might think and to share the view of what life looks like from where you now stand.

And I invite and urge us all to seek out the elders among us, for none of us possess all the wisdom we need. They are there if we will but look for them and if we listen to their stories and what life has taught them we just may leave a little wiser ourselves.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could learn from the elders and approach our own aging without fear or dread? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could learn from their living and could see getting older as an opportunity to not just grow old but to grow whole? And wouldn't it be wonder full if we could find our own elder wisdom by living our own life wonder filled?