

# AGING HORIZONS BULLETIN

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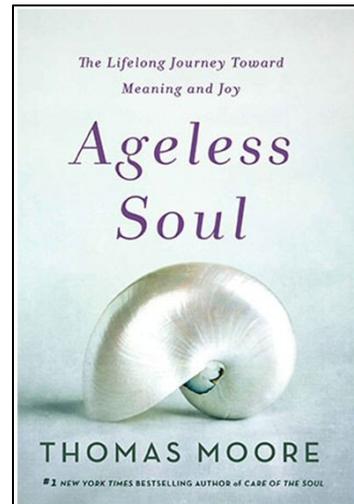
## Book: What is Soulful Aging?

*There is something in you that is not touched by the brush of time.*  
— Thomas Moore, *Ageless Soul*

Thomas Moore's new release, *Ageless Soul: The Lifelong Journey Toward Meaning and Joy*, challenges us to re-imagine aging.

According to the renowned author of *Care of the Soul*, aging means: "You become a real person, someone with individual judgment, a particular outlook on life and a set of values to believe in." At the same time, aging invites us to view the world around us in a more expansive, open-hearted way.

Moore, 77, draws on examples from his life as a psychotherapist, former monk, teacher, musician, husband and father. He says aging is not just about the older years; aging is a lifelong journey, demanding that we ripen at every stage in life.



In 15 deeply engaging chapters, he explores five phases of aging:

1. Feeling immortal
2. First taste of aging
3. Settling into maturity
4. Shifting toward old age, and
5. Letting things take their course.

The subject matter includes sexuality in later life, friendship, community, illness, melancholy, retirement and legacy.

### Legacy

Living a soulful life means reflecting on our life story. "This is a time for alchemy: observing the glass vessel of memory and turning over events again and again, releasing their beauty and sadness and eternal meaning," he writes.

One way Moore mines story is through the idea of legacy. Here, he is not just talking about leaving something of value for future generations, but also appreciating what others have left behind for you.

More at home in the past, than the present, Moore is enthralled by the 15th century: the art, writings, dress and architecture. He recalls how the work left behind by Renaissance scholars, especially the Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino, has influenced his story, shaping his life and work.

In a similar vein, he connects to the future through making provisions for his great-great-great-grandchildren. He muses, "I love them already and want them all to have copies of my books, even if in their time I am forgotten or deemed irrelevant. And so I keep books and papers and souvenirs and vases and Buddhas and mementos." He doesn't assume that they know what he wants to say to them, so he shares his thoughts and affection in old-fashioned letters stored in wax-sealed envelopes.

Moore's father was a retired plumber and plumbing instructor. He was in his late 70s when he wrote a letter outlining his wishes on what to do when he died. It also contained reflections on his life and his hopes for the next generation. Moore treasures passing this precious relic on to his children and grandchildren.

His mother — a housewife and parent — passed on a legacy of love and devotion. She loved the Rose of Sharon tree. So whenever the family moves to a new place, Moore plants a Rose of Sharon at the side of the house in her honour. More recently, he has started carrying his mother's rosary beads with him when he travels. It offers him strength, reminding him of his mother's deep spirituality.

## **Retirement**

For Moore, to age with soul means becoming a whole person: the way certain wines and cheeses "age" well over time.

He views retirement as a time for new discoveries. His advice for those contemplating retirement: "When you make your plan for retirement, consider your deepest self and how you can add significantly to your life now."

More concretely, he suggests:

- If you plan to travel, visit places that have deep meaning for you.
- If you volunteer, invest in something that you're passionate about.
- If you want a new hobby, choose an activity that has substance and will open up a new life chapter for you.

## **Spirituality**

Spirituality is the lifelong effort to keep expanding intellectually and emotionally. "If you're becoming more a part of the greater world and larger life, then your spirituality is alive," he writes.

In one chapter, near the end of the book called *The Angel of Old Age*, the author offers a host of practical ways to foster meaning and peace of mind in the older years. Strategies range from practices rooted in ancient religious and spiritual traditions to ideas for creating a spiritual practice of your own.

This courageous book celebrates maturity, holding out to the end a promise of fullness of life.

### **Program: Culinary Class Serves up Medical Training**

A program that capitalizes on the knowledge of medical students and the culinary skills of older adults is adding a valuable intergenerational component to how future physicians are trained.

In 2016, the faculty at Penn State College of Medicine (Hershey, PA., U.S.A.), introduced a culinary medicine course in their program. The pilot program trains future physicians in nutritional science. And through participation in hands-on cooking lessons, it provides direction on how to help patients of varying socioeconomic backgrounds make healthier choices.

Program organizers, Tomi Dreibelbis and Daniel George, profiled the pilot program in an article in the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* (Vol. 15, No.2, 2017).

#### **Program**

So how does the program work?

The culinary medicine course involves four medical students and four adults from the community, who act as mentors. Classes take place in the kitchen of the local senior centre.

The course consists of eight sessions, extending over two weeks.

Each three-hour session is organized as follows:

Hour 1: Students examine the role of diet in chronic disease through case-based discussions.

Hour 2: Older adults and students prepare recipes related to the days' lesson. Whole-wheat spaghetti with vegetables and lentil sauce, for example. As well, they discuss meal planning, shopping and eating on a budget.

Hour 3: Students and their mentors taste-test the recipes and revisit nutritional concepts from the first hour. For example, they might discuss the advantages of adhering to a Mediterranean diet.

Twice during the course, an executive chef from a nearby hospital provides lessons on food preparation and knife skills.

At the end of the course, the students and their mentors provide written reflections on their experience.

### **Lessons learned**

Participating medical students reported that they:

- gained insight into how eating habits are established over a lifetime, and how they can be difficult to change
- increased their awareness of nutritional challenges faced by lower-income people
- improved their nutritional counseling skills, and
- picked up cooking tips. As one future physician wrote, "[Older adults] had lots to offer as teachers."

Mentors

- increased their knowledge of nutrition. As one older adult wrote, "The course certainly inspired me to focus on nutrition and all the benefits of healthy eating. I will try to increase my fruit and vegetable intake, and it re-motivated me to be aware of my own calorie intake."
- developed strong bonds with students. "Just cooking and preparing food together set the stage for creating a working friendship," one woman wrote. "And interacting with students made everything easy and fun."

### **Looking ahead**

Medical students applauded the program, claiming it helped them integrate theory with everyday medical practice.

In future, they suggest students:

- teach nutrition facts learned in the first hour of the course to their mentors
- offer talks on nutrition to the community through the senior centre, and

- that faculty help students unpack their preconceptions and concerns about working with older adults, prior to the program.

Dreibelbis and George underscore the benefit of similar-type programs for trainees in other health related fields, such as nursing, occupational therapy and social work. Studies have shown that working with older adults in nonclinical settings can improve trainees' attitudes toward this population.

### Interview: Writing New Narratives of Aging

*Stories about old age are often bleak, but they don't have to be. Philosopher Hanne Laceulle argues if we stop looking at aging in terms of loss and dependency, we can capitalize on the potential of later life. This potential includes the tremendous cultural and spiritual opportunities that a long life provides.*

*Laceulle's philosophical work draws from Aristotelian virtue ethics that focuses on how to lead a "good" life, rather than on formulating protocols and rules for action.*

*Laceulle received the 2017 European Network in Aging Studies Award for her PhD thesis on aging, self realization and cultural narratives about later life.*

*To learn more, AHB reached Dr. Laceulle at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, the Netherlands.*



Philosopher Hanne Laceulle received the 2017 European Network in Aging Studies Award for her PhD thesis, *Becoming Who You Are*.

**Ruth Dempsey:** Our notion of oldness changes from time to time and culture to culture. Where did you focus?

**Hanne Laceulle:** In my dissertation, I focus on two main narratives: decline narratives and age-defying narratives.

Decline narratives see old age as a gradual and inescapable process of deterioration.

Age-defying narratives, such as the successful aging paradigm, argue that by staying productive and mentally, physically and socially active, we can have a successful, and by implication a "good" old age.

**RD:** You say both narratives fail older people. How so?

**HL:** To start, decline narratives focus on *loss of potential*, creating a blind spot for the gains people may experience in later life. For example, increasing wisdom, spiritual growth or deepening friendships.

At first sight, age-defying narratives, may appear more positive. But critics have pointed out that these narratives are rooted in youth-related frameworks that value fitness, speed, productivity, activity and so on.

In short, both narratives fail to acknowledge that later life may have merits and potentials *of its own*.

**RD: Pointing to a role for philosophy, you propose a different kind of narrative. Can you give me the main points?**

**HL:** Self-realization is a moral concept with ancient roots. It reaches back to the Socratic ideal of "knowing yourself" and the Aristotelian concept of self-fulfillment. The classical conception of self-realization is found in Aristotelian virtue ethics. Individuals are seen as striving to realize their full potential as human beings, thereby reaching eudaimonia or happiness.

So virtue ethics is concerned about how to lead a "good" life rather than formulating protocols and rules for action. In this vein, self-realization is about the search for meaning — our longing to experience life as a coherent "whole."

Second, self-realization is a life-long process. Over the course of our lives, we are constantly becoming another version of ourselves. Ideally, we are growing toward a self that is more reflective of the self that we aspire to be. In other words, becoming more fully ourselves.

Self-realization is about living one's values, not as an isolated individual, but in dialogue with others in the community.

So instead of loss and decline, a self-realization perspective values life experience and stresses opportunities for growth and flourishing.

As significantly, virtue ethics acknowledges that vulnerability and finitude are part of life. It emphasizes the importance of wisdom, including an ability to deal with uncertainty, a capacity for empathy and compassion toward others as well as a desire to contribute to the common good.

**RD: What is society's role?**

**HL:** Society has an important role to play in facilitating a meaningful old age. But our culture is filled with aging anxiety and rejection.

That said, I think it is important to create social settings that encourage and support development in the older years.

Among other things, this means:

- creating valued social roles for older people
- fostering intergenerational contacts in order to overcome prejudice
- supporting moral development and lifelong learning
- fighting ageism, and
- reducing social inequalities.

Change takes time, but when significant numbers of individuals begin to live out the new narratives, they change social norms.

**RD:** Research on aging tends to focus on health-related issues. Human development is seldom top of mind . . .

**HL:** Certainly, health is important, but a meaningful life is about more than health. Also, aging unfolds differently for everyone. I know a number of older people who have serious health issues, but still manage to lead rich and fulfilling lives. Instead of being perplexed by their vulnerabilities, they have somehow found ways to cope.

A better story of old age is possible. It's time for gerontology to look beyond health issues because a good old age encompasses so much more. Meaning in life, sense of purpose and social connectedness, for example.

Philosophy has a long history of dealing with existential questions. Philosophers may be able to provide guidance on some of these issues.

### Guest Column: Boomers Continue to Trail-Blaze

*The number of adults aged 65 and older nearly doubled in Canada's work force between 1995 and 2015, according to Statistics Canada. Most work part of the year or part time, but 30 per cent work full-time.*

*So why are Canadians discarding old work patterns?*

*Drawing on interviews with first wave baby boomers (born 1946 to 1954), Sandra Konrad sheds light on older Canadians' relationship with work in her fascinating new book **Boomers at Work: Re/Working Retirement:***



Sandra Konrad is the author of *Boomers at Work: Re/Working Retirement*.

Eight years ago, when I began writing *Boomers at Work*, I didn't expect to find the commitment to paid work that I did among the 40 Canadian baby boomers I interviewed.

Their stories about career trajectories and their reasons for working beyond 65 revealed work contributes to, or is, "the good life," for many.

This contradicts earlier beliefs about what constitutes fulfillment in our "golden" years.

Until recently, retirement, an invention of the early 20th century, has been the defining action of our 60s, synonymous with the good life and aging gracefully. Not any more. Fewer pensions, increased life expectancy and more personal debt are pushing baby boomers, like me, to examine how suitable retirement is for my generation.

So what do we mean by the good life? Let's look at one definition. According to Martin Seligman, a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, there are three aspects to the good life: the life of pleasure, the life of engagement and the life of meaning. The good life requires a mix of all three.

**The life of pleasure** is about taking time to "smell the roses." This might mean traveling, spending more time in nature or enjoying the arts. Of course, we can experience pleasure at work, and many people do, but what work does well is help us afford pleasurable experiences beyond work. However, some find their retirement income only covers the basics. Some boomers are turning to work to fund simple pleasures.

**The life of engagement** is another aspect of the good life. We all know the feeling: we become absorbed in an activity, maybe gardening, counseling or designing bridges. Later, we wonder: where did the time go? At this level, the good life demands knowing our strengths and then using them. If we are unable to use our unique abilities in the workplace, we may feel depleted at the end of the day, and count down the days to retirement. But for many, retirement means fewer opportunities to hone their strengths. Faced with this situation, some of my interviewees chose to remain on the job; others found ways outside of work to enjoy and employ their strengths.

**The life of meaning** is the third aspect of the good life. Being part of something greater than ourselves, say establishing a family legacy, investing in a profession or a cause, either through work or as a volunteer, lifts us up, boosting our sense of well-being. Unsurprisingly, boomers, who find meaning primarily through work are reluctant to leave the workforce.

Add to that, the loss of social status and camaraderie that may result from retirement. Not to mention, the sense of security afforded by a regular paycheck. For many boomers, these are important elements of the good life.

And, baby boomers have a new mantra: active aging. In addition to being physically active, they want to live lives of active engagement. Today, more and more boomers are working longer to stay active and engaged.

Meanwhile, first wave baby boomers are in the midst of what some experts call "the third age," an emerging life stage made possible by our longer life expectancy. This period starts typically on retirement and runs roughly to 79, giving us unprecedented opportunities to pursue our dreams, or revisit activities neglected earlier in life.

It is true that for some a lengthy retirement filled with leisure is the ultimate goal. But for others, a retirement of 20 or more years is unrealistic.

Forty years after we started our careers, the work landscape has changed, opening up more options. To start, we can gradually scale back our workload, increasing our free time. We can delay retirement to age 70 and beyond. We can retire and then return to work for a second or encore career. We can opt to create our own business. Or, we can banish the thought of retirement and keep working.

### **Pioneers in a new land**

Having grown up in a time of rapid change, first wave boomers want to continue to learn and grow and be challenged. The standard life course (schooling, work, retirement and with it old age) is outdated. Yet the workplace hasn't begun to catch up. Boomers are blazing a trail in their post-retirement years, choosing to work longer, while pursuing lives of engagement, meaning and pleasure.

## **Roundup**

**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO BECOME YOU:** A new study finds that many transgender older persons struggle to suppress their feelings for decades. Faced with social pressure to conform to gender identities, they try to make things work.

The new research, by Vanessa Fabbre, published in the *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences* (Vol. 72, No. 3, 2017), involved 22 male-to-female identified persons, aged 50 to 82.

The study reveals individuals wait to transition until after their children leave home or after the death of their parents. Still others salvage their careers by waiting until they retire.

When one participant finally talked to her therapist, she said, it was like "the dam bursting."

According to Fabbre, an assistant professor at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, those who undergo a gender change later in life opt for authenticity: they choose to live the life they want, even for a short time.

Little is known about the lives of older transgender and gender non-conforming people. To ramp up their visibility and increase understanding about their lives, Fabbre and her partner, photographer Jess T. Dugan have created a website called *To Survive on This Shore*. You can check it [here](#).

**CANADIAN GRANDPARENTS SHARE TIME AND MONEY:** According to Statistics Canada, there are now more than seven million grandparents across the country, a segment that is growing at a significantly faster rate than the general population.

Recently, the Vanier Institute of the Family published a *Snapshot of Grandparents in Canada*. According to the report:

- grandparents had an average 4.2 grandchildren in 2011, down from 4.8 in 2001
- 600,000 grandparents lived in the same household as their grandchildren, up 23 per cent in a decade. More than half, reported having financial responsibilities in the household, and
- grandparents play an important role in child care, but this is shifting as an increasing number of older adults join the paid labour force.

**STUDENTS PROVIDE RESPITE FOR CAREGIVERS:** For three hours on Mondays and Thursdays, undergraduate students care for older adults in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease in the Dementia Care Unit at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. In turn, older adults, many of whom are accomplished professionals, mentor the students, sharing their rich life experiences with them.

The eight-week free program means caregivers get six hours of respite each week, which they use to run errands, attend appointments, relax and catch up with family and friends.

*Timeout @UCLA* has been a resounding success, winning applause from older adults, caregivers and students. You can watch this inspiring program in action at <http://geronet.ucla.edu/timeout>.

Lourdes Guerrero and colleagues profiled the program in an article in the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* (Vol. 15, No.3, 2017).

**POET: WHY WE ALWAYS FEEL YOUNGER THAN WE ARE:** The late Swedish poet and Nobel Laureate [Tomas Tranströmer](#) is celebrated around the globe for his arresting images and lyrical language.

In his 1989 collection, *For the Living and the Dead*, he writes:

We always feel younger than we are. I carry inside myself my earlier faces, as a tree contains its rings. The sum of them is "me." The mirror sees only my latest face while I know all my previous ones.

Finally, we at *Aging Horizons Bulletin* wish you abundant blessings in 2018. We hope that you have enjoyed the interviews, reports, books and columns we have brought you this year. We love to hear from you: send us your thoughts and suggestions.

— Ruth Dempsey.