

# AGING HORIZONS BULLETIN

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**Interview:** Spiritual Genealogy Inspires Gratitude

**Study:** Life After Driving

**Audio Novel:** A Grandfather Talks About Fear

**Study:** Self-Compassion Linked to Positive Aging

**Roundup:**

- When I'm 120
- An Insider's View of Alzheimer's Disease
- Poem: There's No Need to Go Outside
- Nonagenarians Show Better Mental Performance Than Predecessors

## Interview: Spiritual Genealogy Inspires Gratitude

*Ancestors have shaped the lives and values of generations of east Asians.*

*The story of his grandfather and other elders fired the imagination of artist and scholar Ronald Y. Nakasone. He wrote about it in a recent issue of the Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging (Vol. 25, No. 1, 2013).*

*Dr. Nakasone is a member of the core doctoral faculty at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and ethnogeriatric specialist at the Stanford University Geriatric Education Center in Stanford, California.*

*AHB reached him in Fremont, California.*

**Ruth Dempsey:** So what is "spiritual genealogy?"

**Ronald Nakasone:** "Spiritual genealogy" refers to ancestors that shaped our lives and values. Some ancestors I inherited, others I have chosen.

I received from my parents, grandparents, other elders and, through them, from more distant ancestors those life-lessons that prepared me to pass through this world.

I learned of their passage through life by growing up alongside them and through family lore.

I marvel, for example, at the courage of my grandfather. At the age of 16, he left the tiny hamlet of Wakugawa in northern Okinawa, Japan, and traveled to Hawaii. He made a new life for himself in a strange and often hostile environment. He spoke neither English nor Japanese. He left believing that he would never see his mother or homeland again.

Spiritual genealogy also refers to patrons of our chosen vocations. Since I chose Buddhist Studies as a career, I trace my lineage through my teachers, luminaries of the past and to the Buddha himself. Their lessons have inspired my studies, teachings and ministry.

My father became a carpenter after he lost his farm because it was situated next to Pearl Harbor. He would mention Hidari Jingorō, the legendary Japanese carpenter and wood carver to whom he looked for inspiration.

**RD: What place does spirituality have in the culture?**

**RN:** In traditional as opposed to modern cultures, an individual's identity is linked to his or her place within the community and among the generations.

My immigrant forebears, like other Japanese who immigrated to Hawaii and elsewhere, seem to be especially conscious of this.

They identified themselves as *issei* or first generation immigrants. My parents thought of themselves as *nisei* or second generation immigrants. My spouse and I am *sansei* or third generation immigrant. My daughter is a *yonsei* or fourth generation immigrant. Each cohort generation is associated with different experiences and is reminded of their debt to previous generations.

I was born and raised in Hawaii to second generation Ryūkyūan (Okinawan) parents. Growing up in such a household I was unknowingly nurtured in a tradition that honoured one's elders and the ancestors. This tradition is crystallized in a Ryūkyūan children's song, *Tinsagu nu hana* (Balsam flower).

Stain the tips of your fingertips  
With the petals of the *tinsagu* blossom,  
Imprint the teachings of your parents  
Onto your heart

You could, if you tried  
Count the stars in the sky,  
But you can never imagine all  
The lessons of your parents

I was aware also of the innumerable ancestral spirits with whom we shared the world.

For example, my mother dutifully attended to three domestic shrines in addition to the ancestral shrine. I would hear her regularly report what

transpired during the day. I did not know the significance of these shrines until I did some research.

I learned that besides the ancestral shrine, the three other shrines were dedicated to: the “kitchen god,” who is the messenger to the great deity who lives in the highest heaven; the most distant clan ancestor; and ancestors of the branch of our family lineage.

A typical household in my mother’s ancestral village has a fifth shrine in the garden that honours the spirits of the land on which the house is situated. The current human occupants are essentially “leasing” the land from the original inhabitants.

Thailand and other southeast Asian peoples have similar practices.

The multiplicity of shrines recalls a time when our distant ancestors lived in small family units that were dependent on each other for mutual support. Elders passed on survival and life skills, including what was good and admirable.

Disembodied spirits made less and less sense as I grew older and education introduced other realities.

Nonetheless, after my mother passed away in 1991, I felt it was important to report her passing to her father and mother. It was a way of honouring her. While there are rituals to relate important milestones from afar, it is far better to deliver such news personally. So in the summer of 1992, my 14-year-old daughter and I visited my maternal ancestral tomb in Tomigusuku, Okinawa, Japan.

Tombs are located in remote areas away from villages and farmlands. They are normally visited during the spring equinox and for the July Obon observances (festival honouring the spirits of the deceased).

As we made our way through waist high undergrowth, my daughter asked, “What are we doing here?” I must have shared a similar sentiment when I visited the same tomb with my mother in 1952. I was nine.

### **RD: What about your own spiritual upbringing?**

**RN:** Growing up in an isolated rural Hawaii, I participated in annual and other rituals that punctuated the year. But I did not understand their significance, except that it was a time to see my cousins and friends and to enjoy party food.

New Year's was and still is a most important event. The days before were hectic: bills had to be settled; the house cleaned; new clothes prepared; and shrines readied. The New Year must be greeted, even today, with everything in order. This was an exciting time. As a child, I received money and other gifts, and I was able to drink all of the soda pop I wanted.

Not all events were festive. I remember how bored I was sometimes, especially at funeral and memorial services where I had to behave. I recall many deaths; a younger brother died when I was four, and I lost a cousin shortly after.

Funerals and memorial services, like marriages and births, were community events. Looking back, of course, these experiences were part of my spiritual upbringing. I did not know the meaning of these rituals, but through observation and participation I witnessed and felt grief and loss. I intuitively understood the difficulties of life.

**RD: In 2011, you attended the Uchinānchu Taikai Festival: what was that like?**

**RN:** The first Sekai Uchinānchu Taikai was held in 1990. "Sekai" means "world." "Uchinānchu" is the expression the people of Okinawa and others who live in Ryūkyūs Archipelago use to refer themselves. "Taikai" means "Great Festival." It is held every five or six years.

Attending the festival with my immediate family was a great experience. There were six of us. In addition to me, my wife and daughter, we were joined by my sister, brother and his son. It was the first trip to Okinawa for my brother and his son to see their roots. It was nice to visit a place where everyone in the village is a relative.

More than 5000 Uchinānchu from 24 countries gathered and paraded through Kokusai Dori (International Avenue), the main street of the prefectural capital, Naha. The street was lined with well-wishers, who waved

and shouted “*mensore, mensore*” (welcome, welcome) during the hour long procession.

Many participants dressed in costumes of their countries. Some Uchinānchu women from Brazil paraded and danced in their samba outfits. They were popular. One Uchinānchu from the Las Vegas contingent appeared as Elvis.

We marched as participants from the local Northern California Okinawa Prefectural Club. Our dress was bland; we had yellow t-shirts.

During the weeklong event, many villages held a reception for their kinfolk and neighbours who had returned for the Taikai.

We made a special effort to attend the reception sponsored by Nakijin, the ancestral village of my grandparents. It was a good to be with kinfolk who shared the same geographical roots.

### **RD: You describe participating in rituals at the family tomb . . .**

**RN:** Pilgrimages to the family tomb are simple and joyous solemn affairs. These family rituals are passed on from one generation to the next.

Each family has evolved its own ritual style, but the intent is the same: to remember and honour the ancestors.

After cleaning the grave site, flowers, food, incense and sake are offered as sacrifices. The head of the family identifies those present and asks the ancestors for their blessings. After the service, the family normally enjoys a communal meal at the grave site. It is a time to share memories and reinforce family ties.

My paternal family tomb is located on Yagan’na Island in the Yagaji Inland Sea. Visits must take into account the tides. Low tide exposes a sand bar that links the island to the mainland, so we need to return before the tide returns.

Each visit has been spiritually visceral. An inexplicable feeling of awe arises, knowing the remains of untold generations of my forebears were just beyond the tomb’s entry.

It is also a joyous feeling knowing that I am part of a long generational cycle. It is comforting that I, too, will be an ancestor.

**RD: Traditional Japan has a complex mortuary and memorial cycle. How does it work?**

**RN:** The mortuary and memorial cycle is part of a series of rituals that begin at birth and continues through major milestones in the life cycle.

If one is fortunate enough to become an elder, the Japanese observe a series of late life rituals that commence with one's 60th year. *Kanreki* or 60th birthday celebration, according to the Chinese Zodiac, marks the completion of one life cycle and the beginning of another.

For reasons I have yet to fully uncover, the 70th, 77th, 80th, 88th, 90th and 99th birthdays are also important milestones.

In the past when life expectancy was 50 years, *kanreki* was an occasion for great joy. The elder is adorned in red, a color that represents birth and is often honoured with a gala party.

In addition to offering elders milestones to look forward to, these public celebrations are didactic. They reinforce the reciprocity between young and old.

Obligations are passed on to succeeding generations. A child can only recognize and fulfill his or her responsibilities by caring for, bringing honour to and by reverently observing regular memorial services for his or her parents.

In exchange, it is believed that ancestral spirits will protect and guide their living descendents through times of adversity and rejoice in their successes. There is still a strong belief that the ancestral spirits can and will intervene in times of crisis.

However, I believe that the protection that the ancestral spirits offer are the life-lessons that they have imparted.

**RD: While in your ancestral homeland, you took part in a memorial service for your mother's sister . . .**

**RN:** October 16, the last night of our visit coincided with the 33rd year memorial anniversary of my aunt Ugusuku Kiku and the first year memorial anniversary of my cousin, Ugusuku Hatsu. The day we set aside for the service also fell on the day I lost my brother, Chris Yukimi, 64 years ago.

The 33rd year memorial service is especially significant. In traditional Ryūkyū and some parts of Japan, the 33rd year service is the last service dedicated to the memory of an individual. At the end of this service, the memorial plaque that bears the name of the deceased is placed in the ancestral shrine among other such ancestral plaques. Having completed her transformation from a corporeal being into a fully spiritual being, my aunt is now an honoured ancestor.

With the one year memorial service, my cousin is on her way to maturing into an ancestor. These memorial services are occasions for remembering and affirming family solidarity among the living as well as the deceased. All of us, even the youngest, will become an ancestor.

Except for my elder aunts, I am the only one left who has direct memory of my brother. My other siblings were born after he passed away. Without my memories, he would have really passed from this world.

**RD: The article shows a picture of the family assembled in front of the ancestral shrine. Are shrines common in the home?**

**RN:** In traditional Okinawan homes, the ancestral shrine is in the main room of the house. This is the room where the family eats, sleeps, entertains and relaxes. Ancestors are a ubiquitous presence. These shrines are reminders that we are heirs to a long line of previous generations and that we, too, are part of that lineage.

In addition to memorials and other special rituals, sacrifices are observed on the first and 15th of every month. Even modern homes have an ancestral altar in a prominent place in the home.

**RD: You say longevity offers older adults unparalleled opportunities to mentor. How so?**



**RN:** Generations of east Asians have looked to the accumulated wisdom of their elders — parents, grandparents, and even more distant and mythical ancestors — to pattern their lives and to relate to one another.

Elders and teachers embody cultural values and virtues.

A teacher's dedication to his or her craft models the meaning of growing in wisdom. Certainly, a teacher who tries to become "fully accomplished" transmits such virtues as effort, diligence and patience that are honed through long experience in mastering a craft and living in the world.

I have recalled elsewhere one of my first lessons in growing into elderhood, but it is worth mentioning again. While living in Kyoto, Japan, I studied the art of *sho* (calligraphy) with Morita Shiryū (1912-1998). I remember quite clearly one of my conversations:

"I look forward to growing old," Morita said. "But, why?" I asked incredulously. "I want to see how my art will mature and change," he replied.

I was 26 at the time; Morita was twice my age. In retrospect, my *sensei* (teacher) who had established an international reputation was intensely exploring his craft as a vehicle to deepen and give form to his *kyōgai* or "spiritual dwelling place."

Ordinarily *kyōgai* refers to one's socioeconomic status, but in Japanese Buddhist culture the expression denotes a spiritual and aesthetic quality that can only come from long years in the world.

For the next 30 years, I observed my teacher exploring and deepening his *kyōgai* through the aesthetic space that issued forth from his brush work.

Most of us are not artists, but we can cultivate our spiritual lives and pass on the joy of these experiences to the next generation of elders.

**RD: What do you see as the benefits of an aging society?**

**RN:** We have never before had so many elders. Our philosophers, theologians and policy makers have no historical precedent from which they can reflect on and respond to the increasing number of older persons.

One thing is certain: this demographic shift will require a reorientation from wars and conflicts to more humane projects that include allocating resources, human and material, to the caring professions.

Educators in all disciplines will need to devise curricula to prepare for this massive shift.

Since the past has little experience to offer in mapping the way forward, perhaps we should turn to the future for guidance.

We have remodeled our home to be elder friendly. This includes more lights, wider doors, handles rather than knobs and lower counters.

My daughter knows that her generation will inherit massive environmental problems, including diminished natural resources. She keeps stressing the need to recycle and not to waste water.

While children and grandchildren have much to learn from their elders, elders in turn must look to the aspirations of their children and grandchildren and the world they are posed to inherit.

The third verse of *Tinsagu nu hana* (Balsam flower) reminds us:

A ship sailing in the night  
Gets its bearings from the North Star,  
My parents who gave me life  
Find their bearings from me.

### **Study: Life After Driving**

Pre-planning is the key to mitigating post-car blues, according to a new study.

U.K. researchers followed 21 older people over a period of 10 months as they gave up driving. The participants, aged 69 to 86 years of age, came from urban, semi-urban and rural locations in England and Wales. Each

participant took part in three interviews and a focus group, and each completed a diary of travel behaviour.

The individuals who planned to give up driving far in advance were able to maintain their quality of life post-car. The researchers emphasized self-determination — making the decision about when to cease driving — is also critical.

Charles Musselwhite and Ian Shergold reported their findings in the *European Journal of Ageing* (Vol.10, No. 2, 2013).

### **Deciding to quit**

For some, the decision to give up the car stemmed from a health issue. "When I had a stroke that got me thinking," one woman said. "What if I had a stroke at the wheel?"

"I got down the town and couldn't park," another participant explained. "I tried it again and again . . . and I thought that's it. That's enough. I can't do this anymore."

A media report pushed one 75-year-old woman to think about quitting:

I saw a documentary and then there was a radio phone-in. It took me a while, then I thought, cor, this is actually about me, now. I suddenly realized I was old and needed to be more careful. It was that that started me thinking.

Finally, an 88-year-old man said: "I asked my son one day and he said, 'Look Dad, you are getting a bit dangerous, yes'. I started planning to retire from driving then."

### **Creative options**

After hanging up their car keys for good, 15 of 21 participants reported no change in their quality of life.

How did they do it?

Simply put, successful participants found alternative ways to continue their current commitments and engagements as best they could.

"So, the first thing I did was check how I can carry on getting to my yoga class," one woman explained. "That was even before I started looking for something that'd get me to the shops."

Another woman, concerned about using the bus, tested it out: "Yes, it's trial and error," she said. "I went once and it was full of kids. So I tried a later one."

Sometimes the trial runs were discouraging, prompting people to hang on to their cars for a while longer.

"It'd be the end of me going to my singing," explained one 70-year-old woman. "I just can't get there on the bus. It doesn't go anywhere near the village hall, you see."

Family and friends offered lifts. In this case, the older adults wanted to give something back. One participant said: "So my daughter takes me to the hospital and on the way back we always stop for a meal or for chips and I pay. It's my treat. And it's a way of saying thank you. . ."

Some participants settled for trade-offs:

"I don't go into the city anymore anyway for shopping," one woman remarked. "I do it all locally. Less hassle, less bustle."

Others, like this 80-year-old man, discovered fewer reasons to travel:

You begin to notice things more close, well in your home. I think it happens with having more time and being around the home more. So I'm in the garden more. I know it's a cliché! But since retiring I love my gardening. I don't see the need to travel. . .

Notably, it took successful participants from one to five years to wean themselves off driving, according to the study.

## **Life without wheels**

On the downside, six male participants reported a dramatic decline in their quality of life.

Here is how one 81-year-participant summed it up: "I suppose that's it now. A general sense of life being over . . . I mean what have I to look forward to, really. It does get me down. Everything I enjoyed is not possible to do anymore."

All the men had been compelled to give up driving by their doctor or their insurance company because of serious health concerns. Two participants had keys taken away by a family member.

The participants were all heavy car users, and none had given serious thought to life beyond the car.

"I suppose that it's something I never really contemplated. I thought I'd always drive," one man remarked. "I couldn't, and maybe I still can't, imagine life well having a life without the car."

### **Gender differences**

The early findings suggest males are more likely to have to be told to give up driving.

Older women view their car in practical terms. They see it as a way to get the groceries and engage in community activities. This practical view may explain why they are more willing to look for alternative means of transport earlier in life in order to keep their tasks and roles going.

Men discussed their cars more in affective terms. The researchers say the car extends masculinity and normalcy for men well into later life, making it harder for males to give up driving.

### **Audio Novel: A Grandfather Talks About Fear**

By Carol Matthews

Over the past 20 years, 64-year-old musician and songwriter Rick Scott has been writing longhand notes in his journal about the importance of fear in our lives.

Performing shows at public schools, Scott had often observed little boys wearing T-shirts with slogans like “No fear,” and “Just do it!”

“It got me thinking about my own experience with fear. Years ago I played the title role in a Canadian tour of the musical *Barnum*, for which I had to walk a tightrope across the 30 foot stage, 12 feet up in the air, singing all the way.”

Scott had never walked a tightrope. He knew that he would not only have to learn the skill but also to deal with his fear. Having no understudy meant if he fell — and he did! — then he just had to climb right back up and do it again.

“I discovered that bravado is not the answer. You have to leave a place for fear, and you have to get to know it.”

Acknowledging and conquering fear is at the heart of *The Great Gazzoon*, Scott’s story of a music-loving boy who has to face the challenge of walking the wire between two mountains in order to safeguard his community. A musical audio novel, it consists of four CDs and a 40-page songbook with 50 original illustrations by Ottawa artist Linda Sanborn.

The characters in this delightful tale are ones with whom we can all engage. The young boy, Gazzoon Wazoo, prefers singing to talking. It is his ancestral task to face the challenge of the tightrope, but instead he’s been playing his musical instrument, a “shnookimer”, and making up songs with his special “ekko” and his poetry-writing friend, Princess Pindoolah. The young princess loves words just as much as Gazzoon loves music, and she convinces her father, the King, to put her in charge of the alphabet so she can give away letters to honour good deeds. She and Gazzoon form an unlikely alliance based on his putting her words to music.

Their magical adventure takes place in the mountain of Jabbi Cragg that clings like moss to the cliffs of Mount Lanadoon. The sidewalks are so narrow that everyone walks sideways. The cliffs are so steep that you can

see ekkos as well as hear them. The story, which unfolds over four hours and 60 chapters, is a gripping one.

It was Valley Hennell, co-writer and producer of Scott's seven award-winning children's CDs, who imagined *The Great Gazzoon* as audio cinema and rewrote Rick's original manuscript and produced the recording.

"Your story can't be told without music," Princess Pindoolah tells Gazzoon, and so said Hennell to Scott. Scott created the music, performed it on dulcimers that are plucked, strummed, hammered and bowed. He also plays trombone, strumstick, shakuhachi, flute, hang, thumb piano, thunder drum and dishwasher.

The performers range from seven to 75 years and include a variety of professional artists, a number of neighbours and three of Scott's grandchildren. Scott played eight of the 22 characters.

"There was an element of chaos present through some of the recording sessions," Hennell laughs. "With the community all coming together, it was a bit like Christmas without the turkey!"

Illustrator Linda Sanborn brought an eclectic expertise to the task of portraying the unusual characters and setting. She holds a doctorate in old and middle English literature from the University of Ottawa and a diploma in editorial illustration from the Ontario College of Art. Sanborn has illustrated for various Canadian publications including *Macleans*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Owl and Chickadee*. Recently retired from a 40 year stint teaching literature, art and art history at Heritage College in Gatineau, Que., Canada, Sanborn now lives in Ottawa where she breeds Swedish Vallhunds.

Turning her hand to *The Great Gazzoon*, Sanborn has created colorful portraits that bring the story's whimsical creatures to life.

"It was a real challenge to draw an ekko, she admits. "The Wind and the shnooks were easy to envision, but we went back to the drawing board lots of times before we could agree on the ekko. It taught me that you just have to keep trying. If you give up, well, you'll never see an ekko!"

Sticking with your dreams and pursuing a goal with courage and devotion, however challenging the journey, is a powerful message in *The Great*

*Gazzoon*, which makes it a story to be enjoyed, not just by children, but by people of all ages. Fear is something we always have to deal with, especially as we age and, like *Gazzoon*, we all need courage and endurance.

It's not the first time Scott's musical work has been inspired by his role as grandfather.

“When my second grandchild was born with Down Syndrome, it caused me to think of music in a different way. I wanted to raise awareness about the needs and joys of children with Down Syndrome, and I also wanted to raise funds for the Down Syndrome Research Foundation.”

But this new work is a little different, he says, noting that as a grandfather of nine children, he finds himself worrying about the frightening world we live in.

“I wanted to talk openly with my grandchildren and with other children about fear — about how we can find ways to live with and learn from it — and about tradition. I hope it will leave children with the message that they came from somewhere and are going somewhere.”

Clearly Rick Scott is a grandfather worth listening to.

THE GREAT GAZZOOK is available for \$35 from [www.gazzoon.com](http://www.gazzoon.com), and stores including Kidsbooks in Vancouver, Kaboodles in Victoria and Books on Beechwood in Ottawa.

*Carol Matthews is a Vancouver-born writer and consultant, and author of five books including The First Three Years of a Grandmother's Life (Sandhill Book Marketing) and Questions For Ariadne: The Labyrinth and the End of Times (Outlaw Editions).*

*Editor's note: This article first appeared in AHB Sept/Oct. 2012.*

### **Study: Self-Compassion Linked to Positive Aging**

Experts commonly stress the importance of exercise and strong social networks to aging well. But, in later life, psychological resources become increasingly important.



Self-compassion has been associated with psychological health in young adults. What about older people?

Australian researchers examined whether self-compassion is associated with psychological well-being in older adults.

Wendy Phillips and Susan Ferguson surveyed 185 individuals aged 65 to 92 years. The researchers recruited the participants from retirement villages and clubs in Sydney, Australia.

The results revealed strong ties between self-compassion and positive aging.

Self-compassion was also linked to aspects of psychological well-being such as ego integrity and meaning in life.

### **Self-compassion**

The researchers found that older adults are likely to experience positive aging if, in response to painful events, they:

- treat themselves with care and understanding
- perceive such experience as part of the human condition, and
- take a balanced view of the situation.

Alternatively, older adults are more likely to experience negative aging, if they:

- engage in harsh self-criticism
- fixate on adverse experiences, and
- feel alone in their suffering.

Highly self-compassionate individuals also exhibited greater emotional coping skills than less self-compassionate individuals.

The findings appeared in the *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Science and Social Sciences* on Oct. 12, 2012.

## Ego-integrity

The study showed that high levels of self-compassion are associated with ego integrity.

Erik Erikson's psychological theory of personality development proposes a stage of "ego integrity" versus "despair" as the last of several stages through which people progress during their lives.

As adults near the end of life, they reflect upon mortality and evaluate the life they have lived. Successful resolution of the stage results in acceptance of past experiences leading to a feeling of integrity and contentment. Unsuccessful resolution may lead to feelings of regret and despair.

The results indicate that an individual who has successfully resolved the ego integrity crisis in older age is likely to review past life experiences from a balanced perspective, feel a sense of connection with others over adverse experiences and give themselves understanding in accepting life's failures.

## Meaning

As well, the study found high levels of self-compassion predicted high levels of meaning in life.

Among older adults, purpose in life has been associated with many positive outcomes including a longer life span.

## ROUNDUP

**WHEN I'M 120:** New research shows 59 per cent of Canadians would want to live to age 120 if science made it possible. Moreover, 47 per cent believe advances in regenerative medicine could increase Canadians' life expectancy to 120 years by 2050.

The results came as a surprise to author Nick Dragojlovic from the University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

"The relative openness of Canadians towards the personal use of life extension technologies contrasts sharply with previous research on this topic," he wrote.

Dragojlovic credits the media with opening people's eyes to the potential of regenerative therapies to treat a wide range of age-related diseases and to not just to extend life.

The new research is based on a national sample of 1231 adults, aged 18 to 89 years, who completed an online questionnaire on stem cell research and regenerative medicine.

The findings appeared online in the *Journal of Aging Studies* (Vol. 27, No. 2, 2013).

**AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE:** When U.S. physician David Hilfiker was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in September 2012, he decided to share the story of his day-to-day life with the illness.

The 68-year-old wanted to use his blog [Watching the Lights Go Out](#) to dispel some of the fear and stigma that surrounds the disease.

"We tend to be scared of Alzheimer's or embarrassed by it," Hilfiker wrote. "We see it as the end of life rather than a phase of life with all its attendant opportunities for growth, learning and relationship."

### **POEM: THERE'S NO NEED TO GO OUTSIDE**

There's no need to go outside.  
Be melting snow.

Wash yourself of yourself.  
A white flower grows in the quietness.

Let your tongue become that flower.  
-Jalal ad-Din Rumi

Translation from Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi*

**NONAGENARIANS SHOW BETTER MENTAL PERFORMANCE THAN PREDECESSORS:** Today's 90-year-olds are surviving into very old age with better mental performance than ever before, according to a Danish study.

Researchers studied nearly 4,000 people in their 90s in terms of cognitive ability and physical functioning. They included people living in the community as well as those in assisted living and institutional care settings.

One group was born in 1905 and assessed at age 93 years. The second group was born in 1915 and assessed at age 95 years.

People born in 1915 scored higher in cognitive tests in their 90s compared with those born a decade earlier, according to a study in *The Lancet* (July 11, 2013).

They also had higher scores for being able to perform daily activities, such as walking to the store and navigating stairs.

Experts say that better living standards and more mental stimulation may be key factors.

"This finding suggests that more people are living to older ages with better overall functioning," said lead author Kaare Christensen from the University of Southern Denmark.