

## Human Values in Aging Newsletter – April 1, 2009

AARP Office of Academic Affairs  
H.R. Moody, Editor

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### GETTING OVER BOREDOM

Years ago I once met Trungpa Rinpoche, the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, when he first came to America. Sitting with Trunpga for a time I finally got up courage to ask him a question that had bothered me for some time: What is the cause of boredom? I wondered. Trungpa didn't answer directly. Instead, he simply reached into his pocket, pulled out a water pistol and shot me with a spray of water. It was the end of the discussion and an answer to my question. My surprise shattered any boredom I might have felt.

Boredom, and related maladies, point to what Soren Kierkegaard called "the sickness unto death." Kierkegaard believed that the human being is intrinsically related to what is Infinite. If we evade that truth, we find ourselves in despair— or in boredom, which is its twin in another guise. Along similar lines, Albert Schweitzer warned about what he called the "sleeping sickness of the soul," which must overcome us if we live without a sense of seriousness in our lives. Schweitzer concluded that "you should realize that your soul suffers if you live superficially."

What does boredom have to teach us about aging? Ram Dass observed that "The whole journey of aging is something designed to lead us from thinking of ourselves as egos to knowing ourselves as souls."

For more on this, see the essay by Ram Dass "Aging Body, Ageless Soul," at: <http://www.beliefnet.com/Health/2005/03/Aging-Body-Ageless-Soul.aspx>

Boredom in old age is also the theme of an opera by Leos Janáček, "The Makropoulos Case," starring a 342-year old heroine who suffers because she cannot die. Philosopher Bernard Williams went on to explore the question of whether indefinite life extension would inevitably lead to boredom. For more on

this, see "Immortality and Boredom" at:

<http://www.depressedmetabolism.com/2008/09/25/immortality-and-boredom/>

For more on the life and work of Trunpqa Rinpoche, visit:

<http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/chogyam-trungpa.php>

For Kierkegaard and THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH, see:

<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2067&C=1863>

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## THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

The following is the dream of a forty-three-year old successful businessman who became depressed in midlife:

"Steering"

My car wouldn't steer and I tried to go through an old brick tunnel over a road and got stuck against the edge because of no steering. Also I couldn't see ahead as I was on top of the hill.

Dream investigator Rosalind Cartwright says that "Dreaming is our own storytelling time—to help us know who we are, where we're going and how we're going to get there."

With respect to the dream "Steering" we may cite James Hollis' idea of the "Middle Passage:"

"The Middle Passage begins when the person is obliged to ask anew the question of meaning which once circumambulated the child's imagination but was effaced over the years. The Middle Passage begins when one is required to face issues which heretofore had been patched over. The question of identity returns and one can no longer evade responsibility for it. Again, the Middle Passage starts when we ask, "Who am I, apart from my history and the roles I have played?"

(From James Hollis, THE MIDDLE PASSAGE: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife (Inner City Books, 1993), available at: <http://www.jameshollis.net/books/middle.htm>)

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## "All the True Vows"

There is only one life  
you can call your own  
and a thousand others  
you can call by any name you want.  
Hold to the truth you make  
every day with your own body,  
don't turn your face away.

Hold to your own truth  
at the center of the image  
you were born with.

-David Whyte

For the complete audio book, "The House of Belonging," visit:

<http://www.soundstrue.com>

For more on David Whyte and his work, visit:

<http://www.davidwhyte.com/biography.html>

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## **REMEMBERING MARTY KNOWLTON**

This past month brought news of the death of Marty Knowlton, founder of Elderhostel, at age 88. I got to know Marty during my years on the Board of Directors of Elderhostel and I learned of his remarkable vision in creating what became the largest education-travel organization in the world, as well as a new model of lifelong learning and personal growth in later life.

In 1974, when Marty and his colleague David Bianco, launched the first program at the University of New Hampshire, the idea of later-life learning was not a popular idea at all. But Marty had seen something Carl Jung had said, namely, "A human being would not live to be 70 or 80 years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species. Surely the afternoon of life must have a significance of its own and not be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning." For Marty, as for Jung, the purpose of longevity must lie in the full development of our human potential. There lay the inspiration for Elderhostel, and it launched a movement that now enrolls 200,000 people each year in 8,000 different programs throughout the USA and in 90 countries.

To the end of his life, Marty Knowlton remained what I always thought of as a "guerilla educator." He cared nothing for money or possessions and had scant interest in management, wisely leaving those tasks to others, as Elderhostel grew over the years. But he remained an inspiration to all who knew him. He will be missed.

For more on Elderhostel, visit: <http://www.elderhostel.org/>

See also Gene Mills' book THE STORY OF ELDERHOSTEL at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Story-Elderhostel-Eugene-S-Mills/dp/0874515998>

For a detailed obituary, visit:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/17/us/17knowlton.html?ref=todayspaper>

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## BOOKS OF INTEREST

VISIONS OF AGING: Images of the Elderly in Film, by Amir Cohen-Shalev (Sussex Academic Press, 2009).

VALUING AGE: Mission and Ministry among Older People, by James Woodward (SPCK New Library of Pastoral Care, 2008).

For details, visit:

<http://rps.gn.apc.org/jww/valuingage.htm>

SPIRITUALITY AND AGING, by Robert Atchley (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). For details see:

<http://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/ecom/MasterServlet/GetItemDetailsHandler?iN=9780801891199&qty=1&source=2&viewMode=3&loggedIN=false&JavaScript=y>

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## WEB SITES TO SEE

GRAY AND GREEN. Today's older generation has unwittingly exploited the earth in the mistaken belief that its resources were infinite. With better knowledge, the National Senior Conservation Corp wants to repair that damage and leave a genuine heritage to our children and grandchildren. For guidance on how to do that visit:

<http://www.grayisgreen.org/>

SAGE-ING. Can we grow wiser as we grow older? For an answer we need to change the paradigm from Aging to Sage-ing:

<http://www.sage-ingguild.org/>

STORIES, MORE STORIES. The Elder Storytelling Place serves as a clearinghouse for stories in later life that help us make sense of our lives. To find out more, visit:

<http://ronnibennett.typepad.com/elderstorytelling/>

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ELDERWISE: "The Joy of Self Discovery" (Apr. 2, 2009, Seattle, WA). The first in a series of 6 workshops are open to anyone interested in their own aging and exploring aging with awareness. Facilitated by Sandy Sabersky, MSPT, Executive Director of Elderwise and a Certified Sage-ing Leader. Held at 1820 E Pine Street, Suite 201 Seattle, WA, from 6 to 8:30 pm. Workshops may be taken individually or as a series. The entire series of 6 workshops is \$120 or \$25 each.

To register call (206) 325-0471 or [info@elderwise.org](mailto:info@elderwise.org)

**INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING: "Linking Three Generations"** workshops (Apr. 3, 2009, East Elmhurst, NY). Intergenerational service learning involves college students working with older people to fulfill a community need. This program includes faculty from Cornell University, Ithaca College, Molloy College, SUNY Brockport and SUNY Stony Brook. Speakers at workshop include Carol Hegeman (Foundation for Long-term Care), Carol Farquhar (Grantmakers in Aging) and others. Crowne Plaza LaGuardia Hotel, 104-04 Ditmars Blvd, East Elmhurst, NY.

For more information, contact Amy Davenport at [adavenport@nyahsa.org](mailto:adavenport@nyahsa.org) or (518) 449-7873, ext. 167

**SAGEING: "Becoming a Sage"** (Apr. 3-5, 2009, Longmont, CO).

A Colorado Sage-ing Guild Intensive at the Longmont Senior Center, led by Maureen Dobson and Judith Helburn. For more information, contact Maureen at (303) 819-2588 or email to:

[maureendobson@comcast.net](mailto:maureendobson@comcast.net)

**WOMEN AND AGING: "The Estrogen Elixir: Women, Hormone Replacement, and the Predicament of Aging"** (Apr. 6, 2009, New York, NY). The Sauter Lecture by Elizabeth Watkins, Ph.D., History of Science and Medicine, University of California, San Francisco. 5:30 to 7 PM at The New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street, New York City.

For details visit: <http://www.nyam.org/histmed> or call (212)822-7313

**AGE-BRANDING.** (Apr. 14, 2009, Asheville, NC). H.R. Moody speaks on "Age Branding: Marketing to Older Consumers" at a day-long conference on "Boomers and Beyond: A Summit on Business and Aging," sponsored by the Mountain Area Health Education Center at the Reuter Center on the University of North Carolina-Asheville campus.

For details visit:

<http://www.mahec.net/news.aspx?id=51>

**"SENIOR COHOUSING: Making It Happen"** (Apr. 20-24, 2009, Boulder, CO). A 5-five day workshop on how to implement the promise of senior cohousing, led by Jim Leach and Annie Russell, both of Silver Sage Cohousing, and Charles Durrett, author of SENIOR COHOUSING: A Contemporary Approach (New Society Publishers, 2009). Experiential learning supported by case studies. For more details, contact [charles.durrett@cohousingco.com](mailto:charles.durrett@cohousingco.com)

For more about the Silver Sage community, visit: <http://silversagevillage.com/>

**POSITIVE AGING AND THE BRAIN: "Positive Aging Across the Lifespan"** is the annual Ruth Stricker Mind-Body Lecture, this year delivered by Peter Whitehouse, M.D. (Apr. 30, 2009, Minneapolis, MN). Center for Spirituality and Healing, University of Minnesota. Dr. Whitehouse, author of THE MYTH OF ALZHEIMER'S, will dispel common myths about Alzheimer's disease and address the importance of prevention and creating healthier intergenerational stories of brain aging. Evidence will be discussed on the important role of nutrition, exercise, environmental exposures, stress, cognitive stimulation, and the power of

