

Human Values in Aging Newsletter – February 1, 2009

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

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FROM THE EDITOR

I'm thinking about the Beatles this month, especially about their song, "When I'm Sixty-Four." The reason is personal: I turn 64 on February 20. (One more year and I'm eligible for Medicare!).

"When I'm Sixty-Four" was written by Paul McCartney and co-credited to John Lennon. The song was released in 1967 (the "Summer of Love") on the Beatles' album "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." At that time those of us of a certain age all knew that it was a song about aging, but, hey, I was only 22 years old, so the prospect of growing old seemed pretty remote. Never in a million years would I have imagined I would end up studying, and teaching, gerontology.

But life is unpredictable. I later learned that Paul McCartney himself had written the song when he was only 16. Today Paul McCartney, now dubbed "Sir Paul," is 66 years old and John Lennon has been dead many years, shot down not far from when I used to live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. But then, life is unpredictable.

A lot has changed in over four decades. For example, in 1967, the median age in the USA was around 29; today it is pushing 37. And the Age Wave moves on: 10,000 Boomers turn 60 every day. Technically, I'm not one of those Boomers, since I was a War Baby, born the day after the U.S. Marines set foot on Iwo Jima, a bloody battle we used to reenact in my elementary school a decade afterward.

But the Age Wave carries all of us forward just the same. For some, that wave is seen as a tsunami, but such an attitude is surely mistaken.

True enough, the lyrics to "When I'm Sixty-Four" evoke fear of abandonment in later life:

*When I get older losing my hair
many years from now*

*will you still be sending me a valentine
birthday greeting, bottle of wine...*

*If I'd been out till quarter to three
would you lock the door*

*Will you still need me
Will you still feed me
When I'm sixty-four*

A couple years ago, the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Aging Frontiers in Social Psychology, Personality, and Adult Developmental Psychology Press issued a study of lifespan development psychology titled "WHEN I'M 64," edited by Laura Carstensen and Christine Hartel (National Academies Press, 2006). It documents just how much has changed in our thinking about human development and human possibilities, mostly opening up a more positive view of aging.

But science is one thing, attitudes are something quite different. "Sixty is the new Forty" goes a trendy slogan. But in my heart I know that's not quite true, at least not when I get the latest reports on chemotherapy from friends of mine.

Still, there is a balance between light and shadow in our lives and in the passing of the years. Neither the "well-derly" nor the "ill-derly" can be a full description of how things are. Maybe we need new songs about the undiscovered country of later life, songs that evoke both light and shadow. Paul McCartney, will you write us a new song like that?

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Lynne Brindley, head of the British Library, writes that "Too many of us suffer from a condition that is going to leave our grandchildren bereft. I call it personal digital disorder..."

Brindley refers to the fact that websites and materials stored on computers quickly disappear, leaving no trace. Even today, it is no longer easily possible to read items stored in computer languages from the 1950s. She cites the Bush White House website and the 2000 Sydney Olympics as examples where historical sites have vanished. She concludes "We have to make sure digital doesn't mean ephemeral. We are in danger of creating a black hole for future historians and writers."

For details, visit: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/jan/25/internet-heritage>
(I hope the article is still there!!!)

MAKING SENSE OF AGEING

Papers and proposals are invited for the "1st Global Conference: Times of our Lives: Making Sense Of Ageing," to be held July 3-5, 2009, at Mansfield College, Oxford, UK.

"Making Sense of Human Ageing" is a continuing project seeking to bring together varied approaches to the study and contemplation of the life-course, the aim being the establishment of a forum for conversations among disciplines and areas of interest.

Conference organizers have suggested the following themes for this first conference:

- the meaning of age: biology meets culture
- the nature and meaning of life stages:
childhood, adulthood, old age in historical, literary
and philosophical perspectives
- the life course in history, in art, in the life-sciences
- images of human life: from 'life cycle' to 'life course'
- pathways in the life course: to work, to family formation,
to resignation, to metamorphosis
- sex, gender and the life course
- the 'end of childhood' thesis; does it hold?
- wisdom and old age: fact or fiction?
- collective trauma and 'historical generations'
(e.g. 'The Great Depression')
- going forward, looking back: nostalgia for times gone by
- generations X, Y, Z – and...?
- filial relations through the life course

Papers will be considered on any related theme. 300 word abstracts should be submitted by Feb. 6, 2009. If a paper is accepted for presentation at the conference, an 8 page draft paper will be required by June 5, 2009. Abstracts should be submitted to the Organizing Chairs; abstracts may be in Word, WordPerfect, or RTF formats, following this order: author(s), affiliation, email address, title of abstract, body of abstract.

For more details, visit: <http://www.conferencealerts.com/seeconf.mv?q=ca1xia83>

COMMUNITY EARTH COUNCILS

If you've seen "An Inconvenient Truth" you may find yourself wondering, in moments of despair, if it's not too late to act on behalf of planet Earth. The answer is, it's not too late if we start right now. Both young and old have a part to play.

Inspired by this goal, Eric Utne, founder of the UTNE READER, has launched an intergenerational movement to promote environmental action across age groups. The first "Community Earth Council" convened in Minneapolis last November and similar events are planned for the future. To view activities from the first Earth Council event on YouTube, visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tEMHLPHiXA&feature=related>

For more on Community Earth Councils, visit: <http://www.earthcouncils.org/about.htm>

For more on environmental action, get acquainted with the "Aging Initiative" led by Kathy Sykes at the US Environmental Protection Administration. Visit them at: <http://www.epa.gov/aging/>

WEB SITES TO SEE

CREATIVE AGING. For a bibliography on "Art and Creative Aging" visit: <http://ship.nime.ac.jp/~saga/etexts/biblioartandaging.html>

SPIRITUAL GERONTOLOGY. Each week new lessons on Christian perspectives in aging are available from Rev. Richard P. Johnson, Ph.D., at: <http://www.senioradultministry.com/category.aspx?categoryID=29>

HAPPINESS. Do we get happier as we grow older? For answers, read "Happiness Across the Life Cycle: Exploring Age-Specific Preferences" at: http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=1151

BOOKS OF INTEREST

AGEING SOCIETIES: A Comparative Introduction, by Virpi Timonen (Open University Press, 2008).

THE OLDEST WE HAVE EVER BEEN: Seven True Stories of Midlife Transitions, edited by Maud Lavin (Univ. of Arizona Press, 2008). For details, visit: <http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/BOOKS/bid1941.htm>

FINDING MEANING IN LIFE, AT MIDLIFE AND BEYOND: Wisdom and Spirit from Logotherapy, by David Guttman (Praeger, 2008).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

END-OF-LIFE ART. (through end of Feb., 2009, Greenville, NC). The Greenville Museum of Art, East Carolina University and the End of Life Care Coalition of Eastern North Carolina have sponsored an exhibit of fabric art about end-of-life experience, created by Deidre Scherer. The Museum is located at 420 College Street, Greenville, SC. For details, call (864) 271-7570 or visit: <http://www.reflector.com/news/art-exhibit-programs-to-focus-on-end-of-life-care-aging-380836.html>

HOLISTIC SELF-CARE. "Holistic Self-Care for the Family Caregiver Lecture and Practice Workshop" (Feb. 15, 2009, Concord, CA). Steps to sustain mind, body, and spirit in family caregiving, including health issues and risks of being a long-term caregiver, benefits of mindbody-spirit self-care and holistic alternative to reduce stress and burnout. Activities include Yoga/Stretching, Tai Chi/Qigong/Meditation, Shiatsu/Self-Massage and Aromatherapy. Lecture and workshop from 12:30 to 4:00 P.M., at the Concord Senior Center, 2727 Parkside Circle Concord, CA. For more

