

FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS

"You are old, father William," the young man said...

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APRIL'S QUOTE - ALVIN TOFFLER

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS FOR APRIL

It must've been over 35 years ago when I first read Alvin Toffler's quote above, and I remember thinking, "Well, of course! So who doesn't know that?" I was in graduate school as the 70's began, and, even though I was already over 30 (and therefore untrustworthy), I became part of the Boomer generation that was already changing the world. How exhilarating it was to be part of that righteous wave!

Being young and arrogant, I assumed Toffler's wisdom applied to everybody but me and began teaching others how to cope with change. Once again my arrogance has caught up with me, and I know I'm not alone.

As I embark on this Third Age of mine, I'm finding it very difficult to "unlearn" four decades of indoctrination. Second Age made very clear that the point of life is ACHIEVEMENT and the method of accomplishment is DOING. Failure to endlessly achieve or, God forbid, to be eternally active signaled the onset of decline and decrepitude.

As Bill Sadler's research shows, full maturity requires leaving behind the EITHER/OR world of Second Age and moving forward into the BOTH/ AND world of Third Age. In Toffler's words, we have to "unlearn" decades of singular focus on measurable ACHIEVEMENT and DOING so we can relearn the new possibilities of paradox, especially those of intangible FULFILLMENT and BEING. I've found this to be a very difficult transformation, and I get almost no help from the culture around me, particularly those organizations that are supposed to be supporting my development. Think about the ads you've seen specifically directed at Third Agers. Don't almost all show "active people" DOING and ACHIEVING important things? Isn't the message that, with their product's help, you, too, can stay "forever young"? Where are the balancing images of contemplation, solitude, inactivity - and BEING?

To "unlearn" an established pattern of living, we need a powerful new vision to pull us forward into our next stage of life. We had these previously. We wanted to "grow up" because the culture presented enticing and seductive visions of the futures to come. As Third Age begins, we experience just the reverse. Cultural visions now encourage us to "stay young" and "remain active." There is enormous pressure to hold on to what we've been and almost no impetus to move forward into our Elderhood. No wonder so many of us feel stuck.

But I'm finding a delightful way through this desert. With the help of my colleagues at the Center, I've managed to create a powerful vision for my Third Age despite what the culture bombards me with. Yes, it's taken five years, and, yes, I've had to do most of it on my own, and, yes, I've had to filter and screen cultural influences carefully (living in New Zealand and Vermont without TV helps greatly).

Once I got some of the Second Age limitations out of my way, I could experience myself as I am becoming and not as I had been. Solitude and contemplation are much more natural to me now than earlier in life. I love my empty days of reading, musing and working in the yard. I still enjoy DOING and ACHIEVING (like creating this newsletter, my blog and radio shows), but I also delight in the inactivity of BEING and FULFILLMENT. When my days have enough space and solitude, I don't fill them completely with the distractions of my ADD mind, and I occasionally am able to be empty. It is in that emptiness that I become receptive, and the surprises of Third Age come most easily.

My transformation has been a conscious, five year process. Many others, like Jung, have needed similar lengths of time for their own individuation. Of course, I had no idea it would take so long when I began in 2001, and it's clearly far from over. But I'm over some kind of hump and feeling very positive about moving into my eighth and ninth decades (okay, I'm only 67 but that's almost the end of my seventh decade).

Now I recommend this journey highly, but I wasn't always such a believer. When the group that formed the Center did our first retreat together, Jimmy read Browning's poem "Rabbi Ben Ezrs" which begins:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made...

Gil (a tennis player whose knees were going) and I (the eternal youth) weren't buying it. "Maybe 'the last of life' can be good, but 'the best'? No way!"

I'm a believer now and want to share my experience with others caught like I was. My hope is that my musings, blog and radio show excerpts help you on your unique journey of unlearning the EITHER/OR of Second Age

and relearning the BOTH/ AND of Third Age. If I can be of personal help, you can write me at FatherWilliam@ThirdAgeCenter.com.

FW'S Place: www.thirdagecenter.com/FW%20Index.htm

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MARCH'S QUOTE - ELBERT HUBBARD

"Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive."

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR MARCH

The older I get the more sense Elbert Hubbard's advice makes. By Third Age it's gotten very clear, at least to me, none of us are going to get out of this life alive, so having a sense of humor and perspective about it seems like the way to go.

In my continuing email dialogue with Elder Ed, I get a lot of support for humor and perspective. He calls it "relaxing into participation."

I'm pretty sure I know what Ed means by "relaxing into participation," but I'm not much good at doing it with consistency yet. We moved house this month, and as my son Scott says, "Remember, Dad, you do not transition well." And I don't. But this was a very easy local move that was complete in two days with all boxes unpacked. Not a big deal. I even played golf on the first of the two days. But son Scott was right - I do not transition well.

When the disorientation and depression hit, I consulted Ed. I hope this part of our exchange might be as helpful to you as it has been to me..

To: Elder Ed
From: Father William
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2006
Subject: "Relaxing Into Participation" - More, Please

No matter how well I think I've done moving, it definitely takes its toll on me. I'm ready to hear more about what you mean by "relaxing into participation"...

To: Father William
From: Elder Ed
Sent: Saturday, February 25, 2006
Subject: RE: "Relaxing Into Participation" - More, Please

Evidently it was a shocker, this move? Did it wipe out a lot of the serendipity that you had previously felt confident in? Anyway, let's get

down to the "relaxing into participation" thing immediately.

First, remembering the relaxation aspect....when you've just experienced a change which roughs you up somewhat, what's the first thing one usually does? Look for a means of sedation, no? A way of withdrawing from the tension you just went through. What do you usually do?

(...I USUALLY HAVE A MARTINI OR THREE...)

Second, finding your bearings. Getting into participation your own way. It'll be different from mine. So let's review first what participation means.....it means finding a "fit" of some sort, maybe some fellow travelers, a synergistic framework in which you can comfortably operate, some place which fits your own bent and companions who at least respect your take on things. How that works out in practice for you will inevitably be different from the way it would be for me because of all the facets in each other's lives which make us into different personalities with special baggage!

(... MY PRIMARY FORM OF "PARTICIPATION" THESE DAYS IS CREATIVE SOLITUDE, LIKE DOING THESE MUSINGS...)

The really important notion here is the relaxing part in which we drop the frameworks of control that we formerly operated under--and I think the latter is the hard part, the hard work, involved in relaxing into participation from being in charge like maybe we once were.....it's a whole different kind of game now. Still a game, but this one allows us to have equals who push back when we try to do the same to them! There are no General MacArthur's in this company - we all smoke corncob pipes. And we can swear at each other with impunity, which we find we must do from time to time.

(... ALONG WITH ED'S HUMILITY, I LOVE HIS HONESTY. I LEARN SO MUCH FROM HIM BECAUSE HE DOES NOT PRETEND TO BE FARTHER ALONG THAN HE IS...)

To: Father William
 From: Elder Ed
 Sent: Monday, February 27, 2006
 Subject: More on "Control"

I had a "funny" experience today: I lost control over something that you would think I'd be glad to lose control! I've been doing my own income taxes for years, and I guess I was rather proud of my ability to do so.....well, now that Marge and I have been married for a year, plus the fact that my daughter is an accountant with income tax experience, I suddenly find that I'm no longer in charge of that. You know what.....I suddenly became very chagrined that I was no longer making the decisions which depended (in previous years) on my own knowledge of the best way to handle things! Talk about a sore loser! Of course after an hour of internal pouting (I didn't tell Marge, of course) I calmed down enough to

accept the inevitable. But this points to the disparity between reality and our own cherished perceptions of things--my god, I never would have thought I'd be capable of such a reaction!

Control's frameworks manage to "frame" us every time, it appears. We take control for granted until we lose it -then we spite ourselves in trying to regain it. What a lesson...

Isn't Ed a model for all of us? "Giving up control" is such a lovely notion, and how hard to do! I've had the concept for at least 35 years in various forms ("Let It Be," "Be Here Now," "Let It Flow," etc.*) I'm grateful to Ed for many things, and one is helping me see that Third Age is for "relaxing into participation" - and that I have until 90 to do it! That's the kind of support I need...

If you'd like to follow our on-going dialogue on "relaxing into participation", you can find us at:

<http://blogs.salon.com/0004489/>

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FEBRUARY'S QUOTE - ALAN KEIGHTLEY

Once in a while it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way they have been told to.

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR FEBRUARY

Last month's musings on the "Joys of Being Ordinary" brought reader feedback that's highlighted another primary paradox of Third Age:

ENGAGEMENT IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD
VS.
DETACHMENT FROM THE PHYSICAL WORLD

One wise woman friend (who also sent in the "Tend & Befriend" info in #3) wrote: "As women, we are hardwired to give and serve and tend to others. It's in our DNA ... it is unconscionable to me that I could be any other way... Besides, if elder years are not about service and serving, what are they about? What else is more important than that?"

Another wise woman friend shared her poem, "The Dwindles" (#2 below). It's a profound reflection on the transformation from engagement in "action/activism/and activity" to the detachment of "nature's garden and the small" in the Third Age of life.

Clearly some of us move toward greater detachment and "the small" in Third Age, and others move toward greater engagement with others. Either can be a form of profound service, but that service can often be harder to see in detachment than engagement. How do we honor these different paths with such opposite outward manifestations?

For me, there are two parts to achieving this mutual regard. The first is to recognize the enormous imbalance toward the masculine that has been made "normal" in western culture. Matthew Fox captured this powerfully in a simple question and answer:

Q: "What do the Enron Corporation, the Catholic Church and the Bush Administration all have in common?"

A: "An excess of patriarchy."

"An excess of patriarchy" means any form of culture - family, school, religion, business, state, nation or association - that is unbalanced toward the Masculine (not the same as male) and thereby short-changes the Feminine (not the same as female).

While male and female refer to whether we're biologically men or women, Masculine and Feminine refer to traits and behaviors historically associated with men and women, but in fact available to us all. (For more on Feminine and Masculine, see link at end).

It's my belief (as well as that of many other thoughtful men and women) that the pendulum has swung too far towards the Masculine for too many centuries, and it's now time to help the Feminine in all of us come to the fore. While "Tend & Befriend" is an important part of this, there are many other ways of expressing our Feminine as well, and not all require the kind of engagement that comes so naturally to my wise woman friend. Being led by the goddess into her mysteries is one. Collecting, organizing and making available the wisdom of the ancestors is another. Fully participating in the waiting for the birth of the new life is still another.

It is expressions like these my natural Feminine leads me toward, and less so engagement with the outer world. I'm grateful there are others whose journeys lead them to active service, and I honor and support their service.

So embracing the paradox of ENGAGEMENT/DETACHMENT requires first that our expressions of both rise from individually healthy, rather than culturally conditioned, balances of Feminine and Masculine. The second requirement is to make the service in detachment clearer to those committed to engagement. If we don't, we can expect our turning away from the world to be seen at best as withdrawal and at worst as selfishness. This is no easy thing, but I'll give it a small try here.

I'm very fortunate to have a colleague and mentor who has 2+ decades more

life experience than I do. Here's part of our recent exchange on the value we find in detachment:

From: Father William
To: Elder Ed

I'm now regularly seeing alternative realities I can choose at any time to replace the one I have thought is so real on this plane. This is important to me because I am so easily influenced by my surroundings. If I put myself in a crazy environment and stay there for any length of time, what was obviously crazy when I entered will become "normal" to me. I saw this clearly when I went through Marine basic training. One of the many great things about my Third Age is being much more detached from the world around me than I was when I was younger...

From: Elder Ed
To: Father William

I think you're right about what's "normal." For me, when a situation or place or set of characters normalizes, I begin to forget the possibilities for alternatives... I'm finding my personality gets in the way, sometimes, of making breakthroughs to a higher level of understanding. Yet that's obviously why we are here, isn't it?

From: Father William
To: Elder Ed

I like very much the way you say "when a situation or place or set of characters normalizes, I begin to forget the possibilities for alternatives." That defines "normal" very deeply for me - a state we believe to be more usual than other states and therefore expect to happen more frequently and (this is the more dangerous part) to be more real. At this moment I feel able to entertain hundreds, thousands, millions of possibilities for realities, none of which is "normal." This is because I've just done a very deep meditation. As I get caught up in the day, those possibilities will recede to the point of invisibility. I am gaining some confidence that I can bring them back by returning to my center, and I'm starting to believe that Third Age, for me, is learning to live in that center most of the time. It is a place of great detachment and very, very different from the life of engagement I've lived previously...

Obviously this is a huge subject we've opened up, and these musings barely scratch the surface. If you'd like to follow the continuing dialogue with Elder Ed, you can find it at:

<http://blogs.salon.com/0004489/>

For more on Feminine & Masculine including a simple self-assessment tool, see:

[http://www.thirdagecenter.com/
LTF-00%20XS%20of%20Patriarchy%20Intro.pdf](http://www.thirdagecenter.com/LTF-00%20XS%20of%20Patriarchy%20Intro.pdf)

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JANUARY'S QUOTE - MARJORIE WILLIAM'S "THE VELVETEEN RABBIT"

Becoming real "...doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges or who have to be kept carefully. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand..."

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FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS FOR JANUARY

The space between the ending of the old year and beginning of the new is a natural time for reflection, and that's how this I've spent much of the past week. A gift from my daughter, Susan, considerably deepened this process. It's a little book called "The Velveteen Principles" (see LINKS) that uses a beloved children's story to remind us of what's truly important - becoming real. This is especially relevant to this Third Age of ours.

One of my ways of reflecting is keeping a daily journal. I re-read some entries from a month ago, and they were filled with appreciation for the beautiful aspects of this life. That's how I'm feeling in 2005's fading twilight, and, while it may sound strange, I am most grateful for being able to feel such depths of gratitude. I wasn't always able to do this, but Third Age has opened doors that were closed to me earlier. During my recent reflections, a truth I realized years ago (at least intellectually) came back to me:

MY QUALITY OF LIFE AND HOW I FEEL ARE THE SAME.

It doesn't matter what the external circumstances are around me; all that matters is how I feel - my internal experience. From some perspectives, this can sound very selfish and might lead one into the error of hedonism. I confess I made that error for a while in the 70's when I used Janis Joplin's lyrics "Get it while you can" and "You know you've got it if it makes you feel good" as pleasure measurement criteria.

But at 67 I am a bit older and wiser. Those "Get it" and "got it" phrases focused me outward on the physical, sensual world, not on the internal possibilities. While that may be appropriate for Second Age's emphasis on tangible achievements, it's a passing thing (like puberty) we don't want to overdo. Now I understand my quality of life is about learning to choose how I feel - how to create my own world of feeling - no matter what seems to be happening on the physical plane around me.

This, of course, is what the wise ones of all traditions (including Gandalf, Yoda and Dumbledore) have been offering for millennia, and I've known it intellectually for decades. But "talking the talk" and "walking the walk" are two vastly different things

Now I'm able to "walk the walk" with greater and greater frequency and consistency. That's because I've reached an age where the seductive sensuality of the physical (whether in the forms of sex, drugs and rock-and-roll or security, belonging and status) has become largely irrelevant. I recognize that many see the great sin of Third Age as being "inactivity." Not me. As I relax more and more into what I always considered "the ordinary," I find worlds I never knew existed.

What is this "relaxing into the ordinary" all about? What it's not about is SIGNIFICANCE, and that's what I've been addicted to seeking ever since I can remember. Whether it took the form of being fourth-grade class president or football star or the coolest teacher or the most sought-after consultant, etc., the addiction was always to the opinions and measures of the external world. What endless work that was! No matter how far along I got, there was always someone or something more SIGNIFICANT, and I had further to go. Even my attempts at escape from this trap were corrupted. If the attempt was meditation, I wanted to be the BEST meditator. If it was saving the world, I wanted to be the most SIGNIFICANT world-saver. If it was being spiritual, I wanted to be the MOST spiritual.

"Relaxing into the ordinary" simply doesn't care about being BEST, SIGNIFICANT or MOST anything. "Relaxing into the ordinary" means, as clearly as I can see it, knowing I am only a tiny, tiny element of this magnificent and incomprehensible universe - and reveling in the parts I get to touch. One of my images for this comes from The Godfather, Part 1. As the Don, Marlon Brando has been painfully addicted to SIGNIFICANCE for way too long. When he finally escapes, it is as an old man who has withdrawn from the world of power. We see him sitting in his tomato garden watching his grandson delight in running among the plants. There is no other scene in the movie where he is as happy and fulfilled - and, at that moment, he is not at all SIGNIFICANT in Second Age terms.

I hope these musings are of help to you as you find your way in this mysterious Third Age terrain. If you have experiences you'd like to share, please send them to FatherWilliam@ThirdAgeCenter.com.

For additional thoughts of mine on making this shift from outer to inner:

<http://www.thirdagecenter.com/J03%20Outer%20to%20Inner.pdf>

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