

## **New Chapter! New Life! New Arrangements!**

Retirement is such a two-sided coin you know. It is at once a release from the confines of routine and structure. But, its more evil cousin also appears – who am I now? What will I do with this time? How will I value what has come before? No one really wants to become invisible.

Take out the word retirement and fill in the blank; these comments serve equally well for any of life's big changes. The framework of our life has altered, often irrevocably, and we wonder how we will compose the next chapter. Well meaning supporters will offer the comments related those title phrases. Are these phrases helpful? Or, do they render us immobile while we are trying to discern our identity in an new order?!

Ageing and evolving lifestyles can complicate decisions we might make. However, we are becoming a collective – people who are seekers still, who are remembering dreams of youth with fondness and renewed determination. We continue to want our place in this youth- obsessed frenzy. We too are young in this cycle of life, which offers the promise of wisdom, of humor, of skills that have not evaporated. We do not want to be the recipients of benign neglect. A recent participant in one of the courses I facilitate said: ' I can fill my daytimer with events, but I want my life to have more meaning'. I don't believe she is alone in that desire.

Change offers such an opportunity for contemplation. A

range of emotions accompanies this reflection. Memories flood into the created space and we are assailed by our past as we wonder about our future. And our dreams! Do they match the actuality of our lives to this point? A friend of mine, Naomi Wakan, calls it a rollercoaster ride. These inner conflicts can be isolating as we try to come to grips with our new reality and ponder possibility. My own experience of post-retirement reality was a deep feeling of emptiness that began to dissipate when I began to read about the nature of the second half of life and that what I was experiencing was normal and a necessary part of the change process. Transitions offer 'neutral zones' to use a William Bridges term- a place to dream, to understand the life patterns that have powered you to this place and to consider what is important and what can be let go. James Hollis would call them Swamplands. A welter of emotion, memory and current circumstance lead many to wonder: where to from here?

### **So, we ask: who am I in the midst of this change?**

We have often defined ourselves through the roles we acquired in the first part of life. Identity becomes a crucial piece...reflection or harvesting our experience can provide some clues. We may need to return to childhood experiences for more information. Into the stillness, my creative spirit spoke loudly to me of a deep desire to write about my life and change and to hear my voice through song and other accented voices for animation. My next steps were of permission giving- to

myself to continue down that path and to find opportunities and to explore further. I knew in my heart that I was not alone in considering these questions. I hatched a plan. Why not sit together and consider our lives?

I believe in the power of conversation to make a difference as we consider how we will inventively compose the next chapter of our lives. Indeed, unlocking the creative potential of living well may well begin with shared stories, with the shared wisdom of experience. Of course, each person's journey will have unique negotiations within evolving lifestyles. However, I have learned that, while our circumstances may differ, our desires to live well and to pursue a life of passion and purpose is universal and compelling. We can let go of our limiting stories and plan for a future of our own design. Deferred dreams, longings, legacies, desires: all have a place at the table. Intentional conversations offer us opportunities to focus on issues and ideas: what matters to you? What do you want to care about? We can explore what brings us joy and how we would compose the next chapter of our lives. James Hollis would call that Living a Considered Life. A life of active wisdom offers options rather than narrowing the playing field.

Small groups offer community. Many authors speak about creating an emotional circle for support and creation in the midst of change. It is not necessary to go further alone. Through the New Chapter; New Life Story

series, I have met groups of women who are keenly interested in reflection, pondering possibility and planning. Awareness of commonly felt emotions and concerns despite circumstances grows as we hear others describe their lives and longings. We can more easily speak our heart's desire in that context. We become conscious of our collective yearning for continued contribution in a society that has filtered our presence here. Together we can.

Conscious ageing means that:

- We will not get lost in the classification, in the nirvana, in a package.
- We will be still, listen to our hearts, and plan our paths to suit ourselves.
- We will creatively compose our lives; what will our new stories be?

Our new patterns of living will honor past experience and contain elements of reinvention. Most of all, we will value our strength and courage as we continue to explore and create our place in the world. Living and thriving in the Third Age and beyond!

I am now supporting individuals with a mentoring program.