



THE
BLOSSOMING
of
WOMEN

A Workbook on Growing from Older to Elder

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INTRODUCTION



Who are the women who shine their brightest in their twilight years? Who stand in the vanguard at an age when most have chosen to retreat from society? What motivates these women to seek new paths? What enkindles their sense of purpose? These questions have become increasingly relevant and persistent in my life as I move into my seventh decade.

Late life sometimes presents an identity crisis when there are few compelling societal roles for women who must answer a very personal call, an inner call, to find direction. Some identify this as a spiritual calling or a creative urge; for others it's a desire to seek deeper skills in an established field of work. To be of service is a common refrain.

A sense of loss often surrounds this crisis of identity, a woman's role in the family or workforce fades, and an awareness of mortality looms. Self-help books to aid

the struggling female at this stage are missing from the shelves. She may feel abandoned by her friends and family alike as she enters a dark night of the soul. It is a solitary path. How long will it take? Will she abandon the calling?

I have found the women who excel in their later years, are beyond retirement age, well past the years of childbearing, and thriving in unconventional roles. They carry an inspiration to continue, to perfect previous capacities or to start anew, sometimes on a creative path only dreamed of before. What enables these women to find the energy to choose a more challenging direction rather than accept the identity of an aging woman who simply watches life pass by?

The year 2017 was an exciting time for women in America. The Me Too movement brought a new awareness of female strength and solidarity. In the rest of the world, women were gaining political presence: in Great Britain, Germany, and New Zealand, they held national leadership positions. The second and third waves of feminism in America contributed greater recognition for the talents of younger women in certain socio-economic classes and for Black women for the first time, but many weren't reached. Mothers still waited for childcare while they home-schooled their children during the COVID-19 pandemic and for equal pay across the economic spectrum.

For the most part, appreciation for the contributions made by older women to society still has not occurred. In the United States, we see the older female as one who has lost her physical attractiveness or allure as a *femme fatale*. In my experience, the older woman is generally unseen and resented as being needy and useless. She may remain the

mother until the children leave home, and then she is the warden of an empty nest; her purpose, as designated by cultural expectations, now finished. If she chooses to retire, she must relinquish her achievements in the workforce and her rank as a financial provider. There is no post-retirement role.

In other cultures, indigenous cultures especially, roles are assigned to each age and stage; tribal rituals grant new identities. Respect is given to older individuals as the ones of wisdom, the storytellers, who keep the memories of what happened before. They are considered elders: tribal gifts. In contemporary America, by contrast, older members are often forgotten or placed in retirement homes.

Modern American culture ignores the older female despite the extraordinary abilities she often possesses to assist her fellows. She may have extra powers to understand the depth of another's psychological barriers and gifts, to assist in the release of creative and interpersonal abilities, or to guide in spiritual development. She may be a great soul who brings unity to a broken community or a broken heart, and she may help to heal the split between humankind and nature.

Some women in their sixties and seventies and into their eighties experience an inspiration to start anew. At seventy-three years of age, I am one of these women who wish to choose the more challenging path rather than "turn away" and spend my time watching television or playing bridge. I believe I have a contribution to make at this time that will be more personal and impactful than in my earlier years. I feel steadier, more confident,

and, in a way, more optimistic in how I can serve. I want to give more and allow the lessons I have learned to bring me closer to others while expanding my consciousness.

The mission of this book is to explore the path from older to elder. In the following chapters, I will share attitudes and perspectives, as well as theories and research on aging that may surprise you, and I hope invigorate you to believe there is more ahead. You are at the crossroads of what can be an extraordinary new beginning in your life. I will also share the stories of a select group of women in their later lives who are unique in their capabilities to give to their communities, but their paths were not straight or easy. Once I started seeking older women to interview, I encountered them in different ways, but most came through word-of-mouth. This was a beautiful testament that when we avail ourselves of what is around us, we find the way as if being guided and break into new passions.

The interviewees did not readily share their journeys until I gave them the background of this project and my intention to create a workbook. Only then did they break out of their private shells in the hopes of helping. I believe their stories are not just about growing old and finding one's voice and inner wisdom but also about how to face challenges and life crises at any stage. They all demonstrate incredible resilience and a newfound purpose after facing their times' chaos. On a final note, although I did not interview Jane Goodall, she has written extensively about her work and her life and is a woman and an elder I greatly admire. I believe we can learn from her determination and accomplishments.

Because I have created this to be a workbook to encourage and support you in your own self-discovery, a selection of questions accompanies each chapter. As you tune

inwards, perhaps exploring some of the practices for transformation I describe, take a moment to ask your “voice within” the questions I propose. It is my hope that these questions and my writing can be a resource for older women who sense the excitement of renewed purpose. May the answers that come light your way. I truly believe aging can be so much more than the gradual decline toward death.

