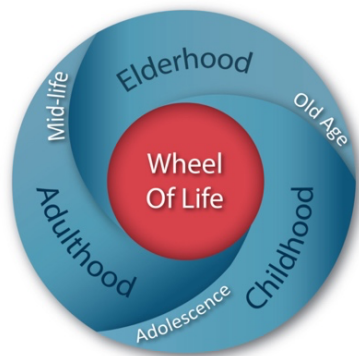


Things About Elderhood

*exploring the 20-to-30-year frontier
after adulthood and before old age*

Di Percy asks each of us each of us to look deeply within ourselves as elders to find dormant capacities that we can use to develop our selves, our work, and our communities. To paraphrase Richard Bach, if you think your work in this life is finished and you're still alive, it isn't.



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We can look at life as though it has three major stages: childhood, adulthood and elderhood, each of comparable psychological importance with adolescence, mid-life, and old age as comparatively short and minor stages, all being well. There's a major developmental meta task for each stage and if completed, by the time we get to elderhood we're ready for our biggest task.

Elderhood and wisdom go together like heaven and earth, or cats and curiosity.

Wisdom is a practice. It's creative.

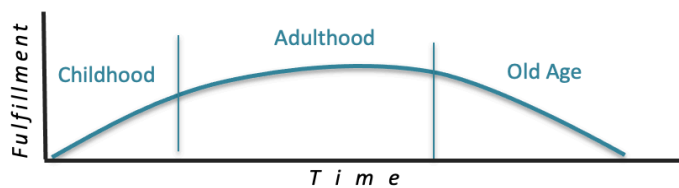
This is about living the whole of life well, and as we go along, gaining in life experience, self-knowledge, and contributing as we develop wisdom. The cycle of learning, enactment and growth is the basis of wellbeing, no matter what cards we are dealt now, in the past, or will be dealt in the future.

Rather than view wisdom as the acquisition of information and knowledge, it can be understood as an ongoing rhythm of enquiry, reflection and application which makes it more of an art, an aspiration, and a practice. That's why I call it *practicing the wisdom arts*.

Life is about to get interesting.

Contrary to popular belief we have much potential waiting for release in the third stage of life. Potential unfolds from within; it is so for everything living and all life depends on this happening. When that potential is *activated*, it transforms. Think about it: a frog has the potential to jump, but unless put into action, its potential remains impotent. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Einstein, the man up the road who grew a beautiful garden or learned to help people, or the woman who built a shed or a house, all had potential they activated and started something without first knowing they could do it, just trusting they could do it. Not that I'm advocating it's all about Doing because in the end fulfillment is more about love and any doing is an expression of it, as Kahill Gibran said so beautifully, "Work is love made visible."

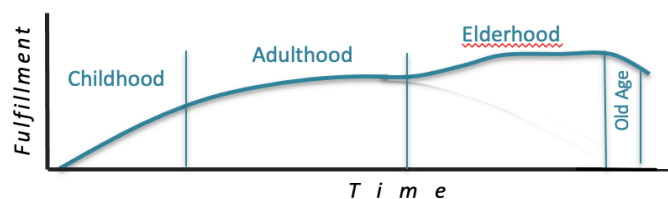
We are witnessing a new social phenomenon unfolding. It's happening in the third stage of life. Adulthood used to be our major life stage when we peaked in life, followed by a decline into old age, shown in the model below:



The Past Cultural Mindset

Adulthood predominated and was the time we peaked in life. This was the pattern for 100s of years but now life has changed (only 100 years ago the average life expectancy was 47 years; today at 47, with good health, we are barely mid-way).

Because our physiology, psychology & preferences change it is not a case of merely extending adulthood, but instead defining a new life stage after the adult years.



The New Reality and Mindset:

Elderhood is the peak time of life featuring fulfilment and better health. Old age is shortened and a quiet time of retreat and grace.

Cultural Mindset and Elderhood © 2016 D.E.Percy

Now with more robust health and longevity, the third age of Elderhood becomes a whole new world. We are perfectly capable of reaching a *different peak in life as elders*, one more fulfilling than adulthood, in fact we can aim for it.

Research shows that having meaning in life increases health, happiness, and flourishing – ideal for up to 30 or so years ahead in Elderhood. As elders we can choose to live as though our place in the world really matters, and the worth of our place should not be underestimated. Place is both literal and metaphorical, a reflection of who we are as well as where we are in life.

What meaning do you bring to life?

We breathe life into meaning and bring it to life by doing so, the breath being associated with the spirit. We can choose positive meaning and infuse it with our spirit.

As elders our place in the world is bestowed or rejected by others and earned by enacting the meaning we bring to life.

What does becoming an elder mean for you?

It can be scary, avoided, denied, fought against, accepted, or all the above . . . plus downright exhilarating and surprisingly the best time of life.

When do we enter elderhood?

According to the World Health Organisation it's at 50 years old; the United Nation claims it's 60. Either way, that is confronting for most of us. (WHO's early elderhood claim may be the due to the tragically short life spans in parts of the world.)

Is elderhood uplifting, something that you welcome?

Or is it depressing, something you want to fight or just not think about? Elderhood can be regarded as negative, or as our most positive and illuminating time of life.

It all depends on what you have in mind.

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