

# ELDERHOOD

## Beware Self-fulfilling Prophecy

by Di Percy

Everyone ages, from the time we are first born. There is no growth without ageing, and that's a fact of nature. Unfortunately, in our society ageing is seen as synonymous with the onset of old age. It has associations with decline, frailty, and dependency.

That completely ignores both growth and elderhood, the major life stage that comes after adulthood. This is when we're freed up from parenting, career, the struggle to get ahead, provide financially, and the tedium of routine. But what is the purpose of elderhood?

Elderhood is a newly emerged life-stage between adulthood and old age, starting at about 60 years old and generally spanning 30 years with good health. This is roughly the same time span as adulthood. Why is it that elderhood doesn't have the same significance? And why the belief that we peak in life during adulthood?

Becoming an elder is not the same as old age which comes later. In elderhood, most notice their motivations, interests and needs change. The world has not caught up with this fact yet and is still geared to youth, adults and old age, even though the explosion of numbers now entering elderhood is apparent to all.

Have you noticed that nothing much in regular life is set up for us elders? Cafes are so noisy it's hard to hear what anyone says; movies continue to star youthful actors; and music played in stores and public events is the kind we've never heard of and can't seem to find anything musical in it.

## **Fallacy and Self-fulfilling Prophecy**

The unspoken (and possibly unintended) message is *elders don't matter*. We are inconsequential because we're past our prime. That, my friends, is either a fallacy or a self-fulfilling prophecy (or both), and if you think about it too much you can end up depressed. Or pretty irritated. Meantime as elders we're being sold a world of empty promises like lifestyle, vitamins and purpose-built housing that will bring health and happiness, yet once the initial shine has worn off, after a few years we are back where we started.

The underlying disquiet these experiences create is seldom discussed or acknowledged, even though they are of concern to many people as young as fifty. Instead the messages about elders often sit in the back of the mind where they become the roots of stress and anxieties about what the future holds as we age.

We don't have to go through this elderhood passage alone. It is useful and inspiring to meet others to discuss the aspects of becoming an elder, both the positive and negative experiences. Hearing about the way others manage situations and take the lead in their lives in elderhood can be a tonic and an eye opener to taking the lead in your own life.

During May, Di Percy is presenting her Elderhood Series at The Contemplary, a not-for-profit organisation offering a range of meditation practices, research, and public talks to promote spirituality, <http://thecontemplary.org/events/elderhood-series/>

The Elderhood Series is the first of its kind in Australia, designed and presented by author and leading transition specialist, Di Percy, in the lead up to her forthcoming book, <http://dipercy.com>. The Elderhood Series at the Abbotsford Convent in inner Melbourne, is presented in three parts – Becoming an Elder; Death as a Teacher; and Elders On Purpose.

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