

## CHAPTER 3

### AGING

Our notions of beauty have remained fairly constant over recorded history. But not our ideas about aging. They are completely culturally dependent. In some cultures age is venerated. In ours it is not. Ours is a culture which, looked back upon from a thousand years in the future, will likely be labeled, “insane about aging.”

Perhaps still bearing the imprint of a “young” nation (at least compared to those in Europe and Asia) our U.S. “Mother Culture” prizes youth. This is not bad by itself, but just as it prizes youth, so too it degrades the old. It says that as we age, we are “over the hill” and no longer a “spring chicken.” And our culture is even harder on women than men. Older women are called “bats,” “biddies,” “hags,” and worse.

How wonderful it would be to age in a culture where the greeting to an elder might be, “And what is your glorious age?” What of the aging Hawaiian woman, who, at 78, could hardly wait until she became 80? Only then could she achieve her life’s dream, for only at 80 could she be initiated into a particular shamanic order of Hawaiian kahunas.

We speak of aging like it’s one single thing. Not so. In fact, the passage of time affects various aspects of our lives very differently. The aging of the body occurs quite differently from, say, the maturing of the emotions, the deepening of the intellect, or the expansion of the spiritual quadrant.

We jumble all aspects of aging together — the number of birthdays we have had, how old we look, how old we feel and the biologic aging of our body. Because we mix it all together, we assume that if a person looks old, he *is* old. But it is not necessarily so.

Even the simple question, “How old are you?” is misleading because the answer we

give is always in terms of the number of years we've lived on the planet. We answer "I'm 49." If we answered in terms of how we look, we might say, "I have graying hair, heavy upper lids and sagging jowls, thank you." In the biologic realm, the answer might be "Post-menopausal, all epiphyses closed, cholesterol of 130 and losing cerebral neurons at a rate of 10,000 per day. But, say — thanks so much for asking."

In the psychological realm, you might answer, "I have come to grips with my self-despising, I realize my husband is not my father, but am not yet totally aware that I am responsible for my own life. But thanks for your question. It reminds me of my progress and that I'm still working on it."

In the spiritual realm, one might say, "I am in touch with the transient nature of my physical life, I am in touch with my spiritual guides, and I think I am close to a direct experience with God bless you for asking, you who are not separate from me."

It's simpler to say, "I'm 49." But like most simple things, this answer conceals more about age and aging than it reveals. It doesn't give us access to what's behind the "49," and we all know the difference between one forty-nine-year-old and another can be enormous.

All the realms are different, yet they are all connected. And, importantly, if you alter one of the realms, you alter the others.

The birthday example is an obvious one. When we increase the number of our birthdays all other realms are affected. Another example — if one is in physical pain or has a poor attitude toward aging, all other realms are affected. On the other side, if you are in touch with your inner youth and enthusiasm, you will likely live longer.

As a cosmetic plastic surgeon, I have spent much of my life making people look younger. It looks to me that neither how fast we age nor how long one lives is inevitable. We have the ability to alter ourselves so we live longer and live better. Even the most

obvious action, such as driving carefully on ice, can affect how long one lives, can't it?

Recent research indicates what we eat — and how much — affects length of life. How we handle stress affects both how fast we age and what diseases we get along the way.

Want a recipe for living well? And for a long time? Sure. Easy.

## Mother Culture's Recipe for Living Well

- Be born from a genetic pool of longevity. If your parents lived a long time, and if your grandparents did, then likely you will too.
- Be born into a culture which venerates the aged. Have it be a culture where there are rituals for passage from one stage to another, for men as well as for women.
- Be born of loving parents.
- Into a loving village, neighborhood, or community.
- Do enough psychological work on yourself that you are no longer run by the traumas and demons of childhood fears. Enough inner work so you can deeply appreciate yourself. Enough to love yourself — enough so you don't have to punish yourself for your "faults" by getting ill and dying sooner. Enough work on your relationships with yourself, with others, and with God so that you live in a state of appreciation, and so that your natural states are love, awe and compassion.
- Do enough body work — exercise, eating properly and massage — so you can listen to the forces which traverse your body and hear the bodily voice of intuition and well-being which warns you in those times when you are living wrong — when you are eating too much, drinking too much, angry too much. And achieve that place where you can hear that deep voice of physical well-being. That place which is far more than the simple absence of illness, a place far more than the simple absence of dis-ease, but a place of physical comfort, abundant sexuality, a place where the body tingles with aliveness and excitement. The place of natural wellness.
- Do enough spiritual work — meditation, prayer, vision quests, Shamanic journeying and the like — so that you are grounded in the transpersonal world, the world of your relationship to the

forces of life and God.

If you have indeed done all this, it is highly likely you will not only feel great, but you will also look great. Your face will be alive and young, your body will be firm and poised. And you will look far younger than your age. You will radiate youth and vitality.

Oh, there are a few other things—small, perhaps, but important:

- Avoid war. (Try not to live in places that are likely to have one.)
- Likewise, avoid poverty, malnutrition, and bright sunshine.
- Wear a seat belt.
- Don't get too attached to anyone or any thing.

Great advice? Yes. And totally impractical. It would be impossible (and possibly undesirable) to follow all those well-meaning precepts. And besides, we didn't get born into a village. We live in America in cities like Boston and Detroit, Pittsburgh and Dallas, Tampa and Los Angeles. And, as for perfect parents, forget it. Ours were too young, too frightened, and didn't even have a license for child-raising. They tried, but mostly they were too caught up in growing up themselves to provide the loving and the touching we needed as infants, toddlers and teen-agers.

And psychological work? Which of us has really done enough? Very few. More of us every year, yes, as Baby Boomers age and the quest for self-determination and inner growth quietly spreads. But, mainstream culture doesn't yet fully support such explorations. In this culture, those of us who have spent time in therapy with a psychiatrist or psychologist, participated in The Forum, Lifespring, est, The Hoffman Quadrinity process, Temenos, etc. are in some circles, still considered a little odd.

Further, most of us do not do enough physically. We exercise insufficiently. We eat too

much of the wrong stuff. We rarely get a massage. We didn't get touched enough as children. We don't get touched enough as adults. Many of us (especially men) have touching and sexuality all mixed up.

It looks like we were born at the wrong place at the wrong time, into the wrong culture, into the arms of the wrong parents. Perhaps even our present newborns were born a hundred years too early to have a high quality and high quantity life great and long.

Way it goes, this time around. This is as good as it gets. This is our life and this is our culture, whether we like it or not. In it we live.

So what are our options? As the heroine of *Guys and Dolls* asks, "So what's a girl to do?"

First, we have to get more savvy about aging and all the things aging means. And *doesn't* mean.

## What Aging Is—And Isn't

So the question is, “How can we get old and have aging not be bad news?” More positively, how could we look at aging so it becomes *good* news?

Everyone knows that aging is inevitable and that it is an ongoing process. But — yet — when I see teenagers, I wonder how come I'm not still one myself. I still feel like one down inside. Aging probably plays this dirty trick on everyone. We feel young inside but our number of birthdays and our appearance tells us that we are aging. Maybe this wouldn't be so much of a problem if infirmity and death were not at the end of the process. But they are.

And since we believe that life is better than death, the closer we come to death, the worse off we are. Or think we are. So we've come to believe that young is better than old. Worse, we don't just believe it. We *know* it. Particularly those of us who are oh-so young. These young, these shallow flowers and fragile bushes who hold the aging in silent contempt, are secretly convinced that old age will *never* happen to them.

I remember thinking that too.

For the purpose of trying to get a better handle on this process of aging, this process which affects us every day, it looks to me that there are six ways we can talk about aging:

- Our “**birthday**” age.
- **Culturally**. What “Mother Culture” says about aging.
- **Psychologically** our emotional attitudes and our attitudes of thinking.  
(Some of these are a reflection of what the cultural says.)
- **Biologic aging**.
- **How old we look**, independent of the number of birthdays.

- **Spiritual aging.**

These six are all linked together and we can't really separate them. But we can distinguish them in the same way we can distinguish the front of the hand from the back of the hand. Not separable, but distinguishable.

## **Our “Birthday” Age The Problem With Birthdays**

It's not that aging isn't real. It is. We age qualitatively. And we age quantitatively. The problem is that we only measure the quantity. We want to know how old each other is. As though it really means something. Technically, “How old are you?” means, “How many times have you been on the planet while it circled the sun.?” One circling equals one year, of course. Well, so what? What on earth does that have to do with anything? Nothing, really. But Mother Culture says it does. Mother Culture says quantity is important — but only this particular quantity — the quantity of earth-circlings. Well, eight earth circlings (“eight years old”) means something totally different from 80 circlings. As a quantity. So, asking “How old you are” is a *measure of convenience*. It tells us some worthwhile things about the eight year old which are completely different than about the eighty year old. While it may be a convenient handle to know about someone, its convenience is misguided. This measurement damages us more than it helps. It puts us into categories — at 16 you're old enough to drive, at 21 you can drink, at 65 you retire — and categories stultify growth. It turns us into categorizable *things*. This is not terrible, mind you, but not spacious and open either. Categories by age are one of the downsides of our culture's addiction to measurements.

It's rather convenient to use birthdays in our society as points of celebration, reflection, and eligibility for special rates or discounts. But these don't tell anyone's *true* age. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, “I'm 30” because my body looks like my 30 year-old neighbor's, or “I'm eight,” because the enthusiastic child within me is eight? Or “I'm



35” because I feel 35 inside even if I have had 70 birthdays.

Other aspects — emotional, psychological, physical are enormously important. They contribute to our whole attitude toward life. And attitude, in turn, seems to be the source of quality in our lives.

As a culture addicted to measuring, we feel frustrated that we don’t have ways of quantifying other aspects of aging. We don’t know how to measure physical aging, we don’t know how to count emotional aspects, and we certainly don’t know how to measure attitude. So we have to put them into a the non-measurable category we call *qualitative*. Too bad. I’d love to know what it would take to have a Quality of Life of 100, rather than a QOL of, say, 27.

This raises the question of how much the qualitative aspects affect our life span. Or, simply, will great quality yield more quantity? If we have a terrific life, will it last longer? Would we live longer if we lived within in a different (better?) *cultural* context or if we had a better *personal* attitude toward life, towards others — toward ourselves? We certainly know that looking better can improve our attitude toward ourselves. What I have examined is whether looking better via **cosmetic surgery** shift that attitude also? It is clearly so.

## Psychological Aspects of Aging

Our life expectancy is that we will live into our late seventies. This is a far cry from life expectancy 150 years ago. For example, according to figures released by the House of Commons, in 1845 in Manchester England, life expectancy was 38 and that was for “gentry and professional” classes. For the “operatives” (factory workers) it was only 17! We didn’t keep such statistics in the U.S. then, but it is unlikely it was any better. At the turn of the millennium, we are living much longer than our ancestors. We have great quantity but as for quality? Questionable. We are not a society which handles aging very well. We are no longer a society of farmers, so we have little

contact with the birth, growth and death of plants and animals. We are not grounded in the reality of life as are those who live closer to the land. At a subconscious level most of us act as though milk comes from containers, not cows. We are so insulated from death that death no longer seems like a part of life. It seems like something to be feared, the "...ultimate piece of shit at the end of the road." So, we fear aging as well. With a deep abiding terror.

Many in-depth psychologists believe this terror shapes our feelings, thoughts, and actions more than any other force. We are so *in* the fear that we can not step aside enough to see that it is the very water we live in. It is not just something we have. It is something we *are*. This terror is so deep that we can not confront it. We live in denial. It pops up instead in a myriad of anxieties, concerns and worries — the manifestations of the unfrontable fear of death.

Given this, who would not be afraid of aging? Who would not secretly (or not so secretly) dread reaching 30 or 40 or 70? My father told me that only his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday was hard. "For then I finally had to recognize that I had become an old man," he said. This a cultural fear, not a personal one. When it shows up for you, it feels personal as hell. But it is not. It is not a function of your personality. You were born into this fear, you will have it for your entire life and, though you will die, the fear will still exist. It is not personal. As a member of our western culture, it simply comes with the territory. This does not mean that the fear can't be alleviated. It can. But the work of freeing oneself from cultural bonds is difficult and time-consuming. And few of us are up for it. Other things, the day-to-day of life, are just too pressing.

So, the name of the game, as the essayist, Ashley Montague put it, "Die young as late as possible."

And we do play this game of staying young. Not a bad game at all. A fun game. Means more parties, hanging out with young people, thinking young thoughts. It keeps our bodies in tune, our heart-rate down, our cholesterol low. It keeps our weight down, our skin clear, our attitude good.

And this “working at staying young” seems to be working pretty well. I think it’s really interesting that our life expectancy continues to rise year after year. Scientists tend to attribute it to better Public Health, whatever that means. I think we’re living longer because we, as a culture, intend to. Intention is extraordinarily powerful. I suspect that we as humans were probably intended to live much longer in the first place. And that basic intention may simply be built in to this human species of ours. We’re living longer, and we’re staying younger longer. To check it out, just look at the photos of your mother at your age or your grandmother at your age. *Much* older women. Looked older, acted older were older.

So the trick is to stay psychologically young. I don’t mean childish, but child-like. I don’t mean immature ( not the giddiness and ungroundedness of an adolescent. I mean, rather, psychologically full of life, optimistic, enthusiastic, with full self-expression. A psychological attitude of delight toward change, for change is the only constant in life. The pioneering psychologist Abraham Maslow might call it the perpetual youth of self-actualization.

This will not eliminate the terror. It will not overcome it. But perhaps such attitudes will allow us to live more fully and enthusiastically *in the face of* the terror that aging holds. We’re going to die. We’re afraid. So what. Let the good times roll!

### **Biologic Aging—Survival of the Species**

Now let’s talk about something even tougher than terror. Something brutal, in the sense that nature is brutal. There are two basic tenets of the biologic long view. The first is that the prime goal of any species is to perpetuate itself. The second is that all species compete with other species for survival. To survive and perpetuate itself, the species must compete effectively. Produce better babies. This means that the hardiest members of the species, rather than the weakest, must catapult their genetic material into the future. It

seems hard-wired into each individual member for the male to compete with his fellows so that the hardest gets to successfully mate with as many females as possible. Likewise, the female of the species seeks to attract the hardest male. Again, probably hard-wired in. It came with the body. This seems as true of the human species as it is for clams.

Young post-pubescent females carry with them the implied ability to give birth to more offspring, thus attracting more males. Bear in mind that this will operate subconsciously regardless whether a man or woman has any conscious interest in producing children. Sexual attractiveness (translate that as youth and beauty) allow a woman greater selection than her less attractive or older sisters. More and better babies means more likelihood for the survival of the human species. So our ancient imprinting goes.

From this biologic point of view then, it is to the advantage of the species that the female produce the hardest babies by waiting, discouraging other candidates, so as to become impregnated by the most powerful male. (The Prince might really come.) And likewise, for the male to compete with his fellows for the most attractive females — youthful with well-rounded body and large hips seem to have the most survival value. (My special movie actress might really want me.) The hardest man has the *biologic* job of beating the competition and sending as much of his generative material into the future as possible.

The biologic view says, in short, that women wait for the best man to father their children. Men, on the other hand try to impregnate as many women as possible. If this were the whole story and obviously it is not it provides a simplistic explanation why men and women relate to each other so differently, at least around sex. Men and women have different biologic coin of the realm to trade. The female trades her child-bearing and rearing capacity. The male trades his physical strength and power, useful for protecting the female during pregnancy and childrearing. Basic biology 101. It also explains why women, as they get older, complain of feeling “invisible.” This observation seems accurate because, as

producers of young, they tend to become irrelevant as they grow older. *But only from the point of view of species perpetuation.*

In Jungian terms, we could say that the aged get dropped by the archetype. Men get dropped as well as women, of course. But this fall is harder on women in our culture. Other archetypes come in as we age, and some bring good news. On the whole, as we age we are less frantic, less hormone-dependent, less demand upon from the biologic point of view. Quieter. Persephone and Hercules are not the only archetypes for women and men. They fit for the late teens and twenties. But there are other role-models, other archetypes for us as we pass beyond the species-perpetuation stage.

### **Biologic Aging - Individual**

Before we get to these, though, let's look at the aging of our bodies. Who can deny the changes? This photo says it all.

**Aging, technically, begins the moment we are born. Even growing from an infant to a “full-grown” adult of 21 is, technically, aging. But mostly we don't call that phase of life, “aging.” We call it “growing.” Mostly by aging we mean the changes that occur after we have reached our prime. For some that means the dreaded “three-oh,” for others “four-oh” or 45. Mostly we mean “the downhill path.” The second half . Aging begins when we first notice the wrinkles.**

*[Insert Photo here—crone and beauty]*

*One patient said: “You're only as old as you feel. You only feel as good as you look. Therefore, you*

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**THE UPLIFTED FACE**

**HARVEY W. AUSTIN, M.D.**

*are only as old as you look.”*

## How We Look — Our Faces Age Three Ways

We droop, we wrinkle, we gaunt. Our lineage determines whether we are in a family line of droopers, wrinklers or gaunters. (We tend to say you get your great-grandmother's skin). Our clan wave also determines when aging begins and how fast it progresses. Smoking, sun and alcohol can speed the aging process. If we live long enough we are likely to develop all three types of aging.

### *Drooping*

Drooping is the most common type of aging and it usually shows up earliest. It is also the type of aging cosmetic surgery corrects best. Think of it this way: At the age of fifteen you had a size five face and size five skin to match. At fifty, you still have a size five face — but now your skin size is seven or eight. It no longer matches. It droops because it has lost its elasticity. As one woman lamented, “My Spandex went and de-spanded.” The smooth planes of the fifteen year-old face become the hills and valleys of time.

Often the first sign of drooping is a little bulge near the corner of the mouth. One of our patients referred to it as “my *puff*.” As our lower cheeks loosen and droop, they carry the underlying fat with them, forming hills we call jowls. In turn, the jowls droop, erasing the jaw line. The neck skin can droop and may show up in the midline as a band, unkindly called the “turkey gobbler.”

The cheeks stretch forward, drooping over the smile lines. Other “droop-over” lines begin at the mouth corners and extend toward the chin. We call these the “marionette” lines. Upper and lower eyelids droop and bulge. The eyebrows droop over their bony ridges and, combined with the aging eyelids, produce a tired, even angry look. The good news is that cosmetic surgery can have dramatically positive results for faces that have aged by drooping

### *Wrinkling*

If your grandparents were wrinklers, you'll probably wrinkle too.

What I mean by wrinkling is the same thing you mean —the deepening lines within the skin you can see when your face is at rest. I don't mean the active expression lines we all have when we smile or frown. Most wrinkles fall between two extremes. *Fine* wrinkles are velvety and show up on the lower eyelids, around the lips ("my lipstick runs") and between the brows. *Coarse* wrinkles are fixed and do not "pull flat" when the skin is stretched, like the fine wrinkles do. You can feel them when you run your fingers lightly over them. They show up where the expression muscles have creased and thinned the skin, particularly in skin which has lost its elasticity. Usually we develop these first in the forehead, then around the mouth and between the brows and, finally, all over the cheeks, especially with advanced age. One woman of 60 said, "My face looks like a prune — just like my mom's."

Your particular kind of wrinkling is usually inherited. All wrinkles deepen with the passing years and will be speeded by sun, smoking and alcohol.

### *Gaunting*

Gaunting is where our fatty padding thins out and our face develops more valleys as time goes by. Early it shows up as the "sculpted" face. The thin show it more than the heavy. For most faces it shows up late in life — not until our sixties or seventies. "My face used to have baby fat, but now it has no padding at all. It's all angles!" said Mary, 70. She pinched her cheek. "See, nothing but skin and bone"

One woman of fifty was accompanied at her consultation by her daughter and her mother. Her fifteen year old, all chubby-cheeked, was heard to remark in adolescent fashion, "I don't like my face looking all roundy like a bowling ball. But then again," she glanced over at her grandmother, 78, "I don't want it to ever look like the Rocky Mountains, either." Unfortunately she has little



choice. As we look at the gaunted face from top down, gaunting shows up as the “bony” forehead, the depression over the brows and the deepening gullies over the eyes giving the illusion of jutting bony brow — the Neanderthal look.

Hollows develop under the eyes as well, sometimes accentuating the fatty bags. Your temples hollow. So do your cheeks. The corners alongside your nose sink in. If you press in there, your finger goes “thud, thud” against the bone. Back when you were in your teens, it went “squish, squish,” instead. The upper lip gets long, concealing the upper teeth. The lips thin out and turn in. The corners of the mouth turn down with age, creating a sad or bitter look. The chin narrows and droops.

The nose also lengthens and the tip widens and droops.

So when you add the drooping of the nose, the brows and the corners of the mouth, you now have a caricature of an old woman, a caricature that Walt Disney used in *Sleeping Beauty* — but not for the heroine.

If all this were not enough, our skin also changes as we age. It loses its elasticity and develops deep expression lines. It roughens and the pigmentation gets blotchy. Later in life our skin develops moles, cysts, rough spots, red spots and brown spots what one woman called, “my darn barnacles.”

## **Spiritual Aspects Of Aging**

Robert Bly, poet and leader of men’s groups, speaks about the first half of life about going away from God. He says the second half, by contrast, is about the return to God. Some inner work, he says, is too senior for the first half of life and should be postponed.

Philosopher Ernest Becker says the first half of life is time for the “man” half of “*man as God-man*” It is the time to ground oneself “in the world.” It is time to be fully a human being, to educate one’s self, to make one’s way into the world of men and women, to

procreate, raise children, earn a living, accumulate enough material assets to assure being “viable in the world.” It is about being creative, enterprising and industrious. It is about being successful as a “human” being. It is about fulfilling one’s human destiny, about being whole and complete “in the world.”

The second half, by contrast, could be said to be about the return from whence we came, as Wordsworth referred to two hundred years ago:

...Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
 And cometh from afar:  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home.

The second half of life, the gradual setting of our life’s Star, seems designed to be slower and more attuned to the rhythms of life. It is not the frantic outward journey of the first half. It is more soulful, more about getting right with oneself, about returning home. It is about growth, but an inner growth or maturing. It is essentially an individual journey, though it may be in the company of others on the same path. In our culture, this path is not honored. It is deprecated. There are still relatively few who follow it and there are few forms to support it. They are thought of as different or odd. The path is a spiritual path, a path of essence, one which may or may not be part of a formal religion. One who is on a spiritual path usually begins to see that death is not the end of life. Rather it is seen as a part of life, a passage, not out of life, but into another aspect of life. Death loses its terror. Growing old becomes just another part of the journey, a part that has its own excitement and rewards.

Our materialistic society is characterized by the absence of forms and structures to support this path. So, old age, for us, we prideful Westerners, is a time of terror of death and a terror of aging. Mostly in our world, the world of now - at the beginning of the third

millennium - we go through life only attuned to the “man” part of our true self - God-man.

### **Longevity—How Does It All Add Up?**

There is a connection between the realms of aging such that if you alter one you alter the others. Increase the number of birthdays and all are affected. A poor psychological stance will age one and a positive attitude toward life keeps one young. All of us know an older person whose joy and enthusiasm for life makes them younger than a 25 year old sadsack who thinks the world owes him a living. Attitude can age and attitude can youthen. Though I am unaware of any formal study, I find it hard to conceive that a depressed, angry, cynical, fifty-year-old will live as long as one who lives in awe and appreciation of this magnificent planet of ours. A number of studies have been done, certainly, which reveal that the married live longer than the single. Particularly, the happily married live longer by several years than the unhappy single. Takes a pretty good attitude toward life to stay happily married.

There's good reason to think that the young-looking ought to live longer than the old-looking. A woman who looks younger than her age is treated as younger by others. Her mirror says she is younger. So she tends to act the way she looks - younger. By contrast, the woman who looks older than her age is treated as older, both by others and by her mirror. So she tends to act that way. Life is not quite so sweet. One might expect that the first might live longer than her older-looking sister.

But, does she, in fact, live longer? Do people who look younger die at a later age than those who look older. No one knows. Until now, no one has asked the question. So no one has done any studies to answer it. But I would bet it's true. (I can conceive of a simple study which might answer it. Take a large group of healthy older women all the same age. Place them in three groups according to whether they look younger, about the same, or older than their age. Then, at five years or ten, see if there is any statistical difference in the

number of each group who are alive and well.)

The question I constantly ask myself is cosmetic surgery for aging will have one live longer.

Feedback from our patients is interesting. When they look younger following cosmetic surgery they say that they feel younger, act younger, and think younger. “But this is no mere metaphor,” a writer told me. “This is fact. I *am* younger.” So, I ask them, “If you are in fact younger, then you ought to live longer. Do you believe this will happen?” Often they look puzzled. Some dismiss the question with, “Oh, I don’t know.” And change the subject. Others really look at it, often answering thoughtfully, “Perhaps.”

This question of how long you live is not a lightweight question. It may be part of a larger question called, “Who is in charge of my life ( me or some set of external events I have no control of?” I take the stand that I am.

For example, I have told all my friends I intend to live to 93. (and also my children, suggesting they ought not to hold their breath for an inheritance) I have said this over and over across the years. And the deepest aspect of my own mind listens, the subconscious part which perhaps lives the bulk of my life, unknown to the conscious part. (When I was younger I thought 80 would be good because that seemed a long way off and incredibly old. As 80 gets closer, I have increased it a couple of times, to my own amusement) Once in a while someone asks me why I don’t just say 120 and be done with it. Well, 120 just seems like way too high a figure. I can’t believe in it. But I believe I will live to 93 *just because I intend it to be so* I firmly believe in the power of intention. I believe in the power of the mind to engage the spirit. So I say I will die at 93 and not before.

I realize that this is merely a belief. And that doesn’t make it true. Ultimately, time will tell, won’t it? But, just as I believe I became a cosmetic surgeon because of a

conversation with my father when I was 19, so too, I throw my intention to live until age 93 out into the future and let it, too, pull me into that reality. As the saying goes, “As a man believeth, so shall it be.”

Perhaps cosmetic surgery for aging works the same way. Perhaps it too, creates an atmosphere of youth that the mind accepts — and then causes to become real. Maybe the person actually does, in fact, become younger. And young people simply live longer as a matter of course.

It’s not a difficult thing to believe in. And, if true, it would be stupid to believe otherwise, particularly if the *belief itself* allowed such longevity to happen. Should it turn out to untrue — well — nothing lost.

### **And Perhaps This**

To be old.

To have lived life fully in the world.

To be honored.

To live the words of Robert Browning, “*Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made*”

To be wise.

To be compassionate and loving.

To be in awe as a child

These are all good things.

And to attract admiring glances at the same time?

This is extra.

And this too is a good thing