

Persephone Arbour

Conscious Ageing - the grand adventure?

Turning Pages

A collection of comments on, and conundrums of – a well-lived life

6 Growing into Wisdom

“Our own life is the instrument with which we experiment with the truth.” Thich Nhat Hanh

This quotation inspires the life I have attempted to live – experimenting with the truth. It took me many years to understand that, of course.

This is part six of a small collection of my writings, some old, some new. They contain musings on my life and the world within which I live it.

Growing into Wisdom

As an older woman, with a long and chequered history, any wisdom gathered over the years has been helped by my curiosity about life and a willingness to take risks. Peering into my bathroom mirror in the morning can be a shock! Who is this woman, feeling eighteen, but looking a lot older? Can I be as strong as George Bernard Shaw who said *“Life is no ‘brief candle’ to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”* ? Can I carry that torch? Will Wisdom, that hoped-for companion of the ageing process, become my guide?

As a young woman my life was driven by a constant sense of ‘not enough’, curiosity and an inability to stay in one place. There was no room at all in my impetuous life for Wisdom. In my thirties, my life fell apart. I was faced with the consequences of my own thoughtlessness and for the first time, felt real pain and sorrow. Wisdom was hidden, but smiling.

On reaching forty there was excitement that said “Oooh, this is only half way, let’s get on with it”. This I did – with a vengeance. Experiencing fully whatever presented itself, moving and changing the outward aspects of life with the speed of light – trailing my long suffering family behind me. I learned much, but knew very little. Elusive Wisdom, was waiting to be introduced.

Fifty was traumatic. People began to react differently as my physical appearance slowly altered. My sense of myself as an attractive woman received some severe battering. The gift of this somewhat painful time was being forced to look within, to question beliefs, behaviours and expectations that were not serving me. Somewhere, hovering quietly, Wisdom held out her hand in the forms and hearts of a few people that I met on the way.

My sixtieth birthday included the gift of a surprise birthday party with forty people standing outside my front door bearing gifts, plates of food, smiles and hugs. This was the promise of things to come.

Entering my seventies has given me enough distance from youth to see that age brings a freedom, a relaxation and a sense of delight in things as they are. This newfound freedom, I suspect, touches the skirts of Wisdom.

In April this year I reached my seventy-sixth birthday and understand that only the body ages. My soul, my spirit is ageless, is not affected by outward appearance. The joy in living is not changed by the age of this body. My ability to love and be loved passionately is not affected. Age has helped me to become more open, more receptive.

There can still be self-doubt, pain, confusion and loneliness. They have their place in the scheme of things, in my continued learning. Wisdom understands these things and accepts them as part of the human condition. When I am quiet enough, Wisdom is always there, smiling gently, ready to support me through potentially difficult times.

My life might feel ageless to me, however society in general does not see it as such. According to social statistics I am part of a growing 'problem' – that of the generation that most people prefer to forget. We are a reminder of the inevitability of death. What has been forgotten are the beautiful colours of autumn, the brilliant reds and golds, the soft whites, greys and glistening snowflakes of winter – before spring comes again.

If I can honour these beautiful colours, perhaps they can enhance and strengthen the spring-time for others. Then Wisdom and I can carry the torch together, and more importantly, we can laugh and dance together. It seems to me that the older I get the less I 'know' – the more I have experienced, the more apparent our likeness to each other becomes. Opinions, differences, being 'right' become less important. For me, this is a peaceful way to live a life.

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